



# Living together in Diverse Societies

A Youth Approach to the Dialogue of Cultures  
with the Roma Minority



## EDS Seminar and Council Meeting Living Together in Diverse Societies: A Youth Approach to the Intercultural Dialogue with the Roma Minority

Trnava, December 4-9, 2012

### Tuesday, December 4, 2012 in the Holiday Inn

- until 15.00 Arrival of participants, Registration at the hotel
- 15.30 Opening session: "History of the Roma minority in Europe"  
*Speaker: Michael Augustín, Chairman ODM Nitra*
- 16.30 Group session facilitated by Tatiana Cárová  
Group 1: "What do we know of the Roma minority – prejudices vs. facts?"  
Group 2: "Why do the affairs of the Roma minority concern all of us?"
- 19.00 Dinner and welcome address  
*Juraj Antal Chairman of European Democrat Students*  
*Ján Bučkuliak Chairman of ODM Slovakia*
- 0.30 Participants get to know each other, Ice-breaking activities (1st floor, Holiday Inn)

### Wednesday, December 5, 2012

- 08.00 Breakfast at the hotel
- 09.00 Reception at Trnava University's Chancellery  
Hosted by the Rector: prof. doc. JUDr. Marek Šmid, PhD.
- 09.30 Introduction to the work of Council of Europe
- 10.30 Practical workshops: Living conditions of the Roma mi-

nority in Slovakia

Group 1: What if I was born in the minority?

Group 2: Majority meets minority

Groups exchange places so that everybody participates to both groups.

13.00 Lunch in Impiq Hotel

14.00 Panel discussion: "Roma situation in Slovakia"

*Foreword: Ing. Vladimír Butko, Mayor of Trnava*

*Mgr. Peter Pollák, Government Envoy to the Roma Community (TBC)*

*MUDr. Péter Hunčík, psychiatrist, professional in nation cohabitation, former advisor of President Havel*

16.00 Facilitated panel discussion follow-up

What are the motives behind the each group represented in the panel?

How does it affect their point of view?

17.00 Return to the hotel

18.00 Dinner

19:30 Departure to social evening

### Thursday, December 6, 2012

08.00 Breakfast at the hotel

09.00 Departure from the hotel

09.30 Four thematic squares – interactive workshops dealing with different aspects - education, adaptation, xenophobia, delinquency, demography and prejudices

12.00 Lunch

14.00 Roma Community Centre's Work

Introductions by the Community Centre staff

What does the Community Centre do?

Where does the Community Centre get its funding?

How do the Roma people near the Community Centre live?

17.30 Group discussions

How did the meeting match expectations? What new thoughts did the visit inspire?

18:00 Political Campaign Management Workshop (by EDS)  
led by VC Gintarė Narkevičiūtė  
20:00 Dinner

#### Friday, December 7, 2012

08.00 Breakfast at the hotel  
09.30 2-3 video presentations of success stories of Roma  
"From Slums to Mainstream Society – A Success story"  
10.00 Workshops' and Thematic Squares' follow-up joining  
ideas for Conference resolution  
A second debate – new ideas - summarising ideas to  
concrete proposals for the Conference Resolution  
12.00 Lunch  
13.00 EDS Policy Working Groups, Session I  
Working Group for Higher Education and Research  
Working Group for Human Rights  
Working Group for Policies for Europe  
Groups discuss topical motions prepared by group chair-  
men & other motions submitted by members.  
Simultaneously the responsible group leaders from  
"Thematic squares" groups merge proposals from differ-  
ent groups into one single paper.  
16.00 EDS Policy Working Groups, Session II  
20.00 Dinner

#### Saturday, December 8, 2012

08.00 Breakfast at the hotel  
09.30 Final debate on the Conference Resolution in large  
group  
11.00 Council of Europe Panel on other minority issues in  
broader Europe  
What other minorities we should know about besides  
the Roma?  
What is the difference between "homeless" minorities  
and minorities belonging culturally to a neighbouring  
country?  
13.00 Lunch  
14.00 Formal session of the Council of EDS; Interventions by  
H.E. Eduard Kukan, MEP  
18.00 Return to the hotel & free time  
20.00 Farewell dinner at the Hotel Restaurant

#### Sunday, December 9, 2012

08.00 Breakfast at the hotel  
10.00 Departure of participants, optional visit to City of Trnava  
12.00 Latest check-out from the hotel

## Dear readers and supporters of EDS, Dear friends,

It has come now to some regularity that EDS is able to cooperate with the Council of Europe's European Youth Foundation. We are grateful for this third cooperation in the last 1,5 years and look forward to do some more. The latest event sponsored by the European Youth Foundation was entitled "*Living Together in Diverse Societies: A Youth Approach to the Intercultural Dialogue with the Roma Minority*" and was held in Trnava, Slovakia from 4 - 9 December 2012. The European Democrat Students have started debates on the Roma issue and had several permanent working group discussions about the topic in the past, but never before did it

devote a 4 working day meeting to this problematic. We are proud that we achieved with the programme that awaited the participants those outputs that you shall read in this reader, online and hear from the word of mouth of your colleagues back home.

Let me stress once more my sincere gratitude to the hosting Slovaks, the speakers, the Rector of Trnava University, the Mayor of Trnava and all the volunteers who contributed their free time to make this a true cultural and two way learning experience.



*Juraj Antal, Chairman*

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Juraj Antal'. The signature is stylized with long, sweeping strokes.



# Intro



Since the eastward enlargement of the European Union in 2004 and 2007, Europe has had to face a new challenge to its goal of unification. A different kind of emphasis was given to minority rights, since the enlargement have brought between five and six million people of Roma origin into the European Union, which is trying hard to introduce different frameworks and strategies on how to integrate the Roma population into society. Despite the encouragement of the EU there is still strong anti-Roma discrimination in Europe and the Roma are still experiencing human rights violations. How does discrimination and prejudices preclude us from an objective view of reality?

How do young people perceive this issue? These are the question European democrat students (EDS) decided to set during the 2012/2013 working year.

In recent years, citizens of some member states could see progress towards solving this issue. Election campaigns of political parties and organizations have chosen the Roma issue as their number one topic. However, in many cases these entities abused this issue to gain popularity by populist steps. Inaccurately set social system along with the disability of the governments to make an agreement created a huge bubble filled with fear, disappointment

and hatred. Inclusion of the Roma into mainstream society is essential for preserving peace, progress and stability on the continent. Without inclusion, racism, chauvinism and xenophobia take root.

There is a need to realize (especially in member states where this issue is not yet widespread) that this problem exists and is relatively extensive. Central and Eastern European countries, unfortunately, proved to be unable to help Roma in escaping the poverty trap. The Roma issue is a problem for all of us and if current elites cannot provide viable solutions, it will fall to our generation to do so.

# View of EDS

**The** European Democrat Students perceive the problem and in December 2012 participated the second seminar and council meeting in Trnava called "Living together in Diverse Societies- A Youth Approach to the Dialogue of Cultures with the Roma Minority". Over the days and at the end of the seminar, EDS activists were much more informed and learned about the peculiarities of this Europe wide phenomenon and how to deal with it.

The seminar in Trnava was not the first event where EDS member organizations discussed about this topic. On previous events they had a chance to participate permanent working groups dealing with human rights, giving arguments on motions. But complexity of solving this issue still remains a problem. We needed to realize that the gap between cultures prevented the motions to be adopted on many occasions. These gaps are caused by different cultural backgrounds, lack of empirical resources and problems that may occur while interpreting the term "minority". It was important to abolish the barriers and introduce a whole different way on how to approach this issue- by intercultural dialogue. EDS activists could get familiar with opposite and objective opinions, they had a chance to get rid of cultural and interpersonal barriers during interactive workshops and to present their own ideas. EDS believes that all individuals are equal before the law, irrespective of differences in gender,

colour, race, nationality, religion, political conviction, sexual orientation social standing and regardless of disabilities. The state is the ultimate upholder and protector of individual freedoms and civil liberties. Its primary tasks are to protect the life and property of its citizens and uphold the rule of law. EDS believes that creation of objective and transparent criteria is needed in order to improve the results of integration. Furthermore we strongly believe that one of the most successful approaches to integration is education. This means proposing systematization of education- to make it more accessible, improve its quality and enforce cooperation with parents.

EDS also appreciates the work and progress that has been succeeded by nonprofit organizations or institutes who are dealing with this problem and we support these organization. We suggest bigger support from state to functional and efficient organizations dealing with this issue. We consider it

important to continue in current trends in form of changes that would tend to a greater improvement in the situation which in relation with the Roma problem exists in Europe.

### Speakers' remarks

EDS has been very pleased to welcome speakers of different backgrounds and professions to share their opinions and give a greater insight into this issue. Thanks to the hospitality of Mr. Vladimír Butko, European Democrat Students had a chance to visit the town's hall, where speeches and presentations took place. Mr. Vladimír Butko as the mayor of Trnava familiarized the activists with the Roma situation in Trnava, its history and steps he has done towards the inclusion of the Roma so far. It was a great example on how various steps are being implemented on local

levels. In the next block, Mr. Peter Hunčík, a sociologist, gave a great lecture about the relationship between the mainstream society and the Roma minority. The so-called Roma issue has different dimensions in politics, but it often lacks the human dimension. The human dimension is given to this so-called Roma issue by a lecture of this kind.

The list of speakers was closed by the visit of the former minister of foreign affairs, Mr. Eduard Kukan, who was very glad to answer all the questions of participants. He gave us a rather different insight into this matter- a Europe- centered one. According to his own view, the integration of Roma is a two-way process which requires a change of mindsets of the majority of the people as well as of members of the Roma communities.



## Conclusion

EDS was successful in adopting the resolution, which was a result of a week- long hard work of participants, who amended great ideas to the resolution- this means the participants have fully understood the issue. The seminar is considered to be successful mainly because young people – the members of EDS who will be policy makers in few years were given the opportunity to have an insight into the context of the so called Roma issue, which is often perceived in very distorted way under the influence of common stereotypes and prejudices. Similar meetings have a paramount importance and I believe that by their continuation can profit the Roma as well as society as a whole.

# Roma Issues in Europe

*By Krisztina Csillag*

**Since** the eastward enlargement of the European Union in 2004 and 2007, Europe has had to face a new challenge to its goal of unification. A different kind of emphasis was given to minority rights, since the enlargements have brought between five and six million people of Roma origin into the European community.

All of the acceding countries had to adopt special commitments in order to combat rising political, economic and social inequality. In 1993 the Copenhagen criteria were accepted and it was a promising year for minorities, as its main idea was to ensure “stability of institutions consisting of democracy, rule of law, human rights, and respect for and protection of minorities”.

However, the path the European Union dictated was not adequate. The image of integration held by acceding national states was far from the ideals adopted by the Union. Moreover, there had been a lack of pressure from EU policymakers which made it more difficult to implement the changes on a regional level.

The situation today has changed and the EU is trying hard to introduce different frameworks and strategies on how to integrate the Roma population into society. However, it is the national states' primary responsibility to make

tangible differences in the lives of minorities. Despite the encouragement of the EU, and taking into account different starting points for different national states, there is still strong anti-Roma discrimination in Europe, and the Roma are still experiencing human rights violations.

According to the European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (MIDIS), which took place from May to July 2008, every second Roma respondent was discriminated against at least once in the preceding 12 months and, on average, 69% of Roma respondents consider that discrimination on the basis of somebody's ethnic or migration background is widespread in their country. Member states with the highest Roma population rates (Czechia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Romania and Poland) are struggling with day-to-day problems concerning the integration of the Roma population. Despite the diversity of problems these national states



face, there are some commonalities they share, particularly in the fields of housing, employment, education and healthcare.

## Housing

Housing is recognised as a fundamental right across Europe, yet many Roma families are denied access to proper housing. In many cases they live under the normal standard in houses not suitable for long-term living. Countries like the Czech Republic have recognised the need to support access to social housing for low-income Roma families and introduced a new housing with an accompanying social programme, which developed a “three-stage bilaterally accessible housing system”. In Hungary, the Ministry for Regional Development has been developing a ‘Concept for Social Housing’ for some time.

Moreover, Roma are affected by special isolation, which means they are faced to live in the suburbs and outskirts, which affects

both urban and rural areas. Roma families living on the outskirts of cities lack the connexion to public water supplies, and rural areas often have under-developed sewer systems. This issue mostly affects Czechia, Poland and Bulgaria. Kladno, a middle-sized town near Prague, and Malopolska in Poland are good examples of Roma being forced out of ethnically mixed communities. Due to their spatial isolation they often experience problems with infrastructure and transportation, but more disturbing still is the denial of education and employment opportunities to their young people.

A different consequence of isolation is the lack of legal awareness, which makes many Roma vulnerable to unlawful treatment by state organisations. According to MIDIS, even if the Roma are aware of discrimination in the field of housing, on average 83 per cent of all respondents could not name any organisation that would be willing to assist them.

## Education

Primary school attendance is compulsory in all member states. Despite this fundamental right, member states are not always successful in ensuring good education to children with multiple disadvantages. Many children often enter primary schools with no knowledge of hygiene, language and socialisation.

Lately, the Czech Republic and Slovakia had to face a carping criticism from Amnesty International, which accused the Czechs of denying proper education and practising exclusion of children from mainstream education. These countries often considered separate classes as the most appropriate solution for inclusion.

Unfortunately, this solution led only to further dis-socialisation due to the lack of mutual contact and exchange with children from majority families. This is why some member states established a special pre-school system to com-

bat language and other barriers before enrolment in the elementary school.

Despite the low attendance of Roma children in public primary schools there is an extreme over-representation amongst them of children with multiple disadvantages. Today, Poland struggles with the over-representation of Roma schoolchildren in special schools. It is important to mention that these children hold a special certificate testifying to a mild degree of disability. According to a report by the Programme for the Roma community in Poland, parents often exploit their children’s ‘status’ to obtain “support provided by the social care system and it is the primary reason why Roma parents prefer to enrol their children to special schools.”

## Employment

A long-term priority is the inclusion of the Roma in education to make them economically independent in the future. Many

national states have recognised the economic potential of the Roma population. According to research carried out by the World Bank, “full Roma integration into the labour market could bring economic benefits estimated at €0.5 billion annually for some countries”.

One of the main reasons that member states are struggling with high unemployment rates amongst the Roma population is historical. After the transition from communism in 1989, Roma people started to work in the so-called “grey market” as a cheap labour force. A massive uneducated and government-dependent population is the legacy of the majority of member states after the 1980s.

The second reason is that the majority of the Roma only complete primary education, making it difficult to adapt to changes in the labour market. Member states are trying hard to introduce life-long learning systems and adult and vocational training to create a

population which would be more flexible and responsive to shifts in the labour market. However, making them more flexible does not entirely ensure admission to employment, because there is still a gap between the working population and unemployed Roma people. The first task is to combat discrimination in the labour market through encouraging a sense of social responsibility amongst employers.

### Healthcare

According to the document An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020, “life expectancy at birth in the EU is 76 for men and 82 for women. For Roma, it is estimated to be ten years less.” This difference is the result of several factors.

First, there are their poor living conditions. As many Roma families have neither access to clean drinking water nor a connection to the sewer system, they are exposed to serious health problems like infectious diseases, parasites

and gastrointestinal diseases. The spread of infectious diseases is also aided by many people sharing small apartments without bathroom facilities.

Second, they have limited access to health services. According to a MIDIS ‘Data in Focus’ report, “there is a cultural barrier in the doctor-patient relationship (different traditions, customs and habits, lifestyle and relationships to illness itself). This often results in an unwillingness of health workers to help.

Finally, there is a lack of information. A significant majority of Roma people are unaware of the risks of an unhealthy lifestyle. Also, teenage pregnancy is a widespread problem in member states. There is a lack of health awareness promotion targeted at the Roma. On the other hand, improving awareness of health workers is also needed to diminish prejudices in order to positively affect the rates of diagnosis for illness.

These are only a few common issues shared by those member states with the highest Roma population rates. Despite this fact, the solutions to these problems differ in every country.

The main obstacles that are inhibiting the effective implementation of such solutions are the lack of Roma civil rights movements, contradictions of integration policy on the local and regional level, problems with the definition of the term “minority”, lack of empirical resources about Roma people, and prejudice. Only by addressing these key factors can member states change the persistent status quo in Europe. If we do not recognise these problems in time, we may soon witness a rise in xenophobia, chauvinism and extremist groups.

# History of the Roma

*By Michael Augustín*

**There** are many perspectives from which we can explore contemporary issues. One is the historical aspect, which this article will discuss. We can't deal with a problem we have little knowledge of. Prejudices we have about other ethnic groups are frequently the product of our lack of knowledge about them.

If we study the oldest history of the Roma, we encounter the problem that the legends have been better preserved than the facts. This is because their language is unwritten, and thus we have no relevant written sources. Therefore scholars must rely on the results of comparative philology (the study of written historical sources).

After researching the different dialects of the Roma language, scientists have situated it in the wider group of Indo-European languages. For the origins of the language it is necessary to look at Sanskrit, and on the basis of this linguistic analysis we can determine the homeland of the Roma as Rajasthan, the largest state in northwest India.

In India, the Roma belonged to the lowest social classes. In etymological terms the name, "Roma", is connected to one of those inferior social groups, the Dom. These, also called "Domba", were especially servants, musicians

or animal trainers. This group represents a similar or identical ethnicity to the Roma.

As for the migration of the Roma from India to Europe, it probably occurred around 1000 AD, again we can identify this from the Romani language. At the beginning of the 11th Century only two genders were used in most Indian languages: masculine and feminine, but five hundred years ago Indian nouns had acquired three genders whilst the Romani language still had only two. There are several proposed explanations for this exodus: some say they were escaping the spread of Islam, others that they were taken as slaves by the Seljuks alongside those Rajput who served in the Seljuk army.

The Roma wandered next through Persia, Asia Minor and Armenia, although not for more than fifty years or so. They arrived in Anatolia in the territory of the Byzantine Empire, where they

settled for about 250 years. Here the Romani language and grammar absorbed Greek influences and their contemporary language was formed. As the Byzantine world and the Balkans gradually fell to Muslim occupation the Roma began to move west towards central Europe, often forming part of the Ottoman army.

When the Romani people came to Europe, they presented themselves as Egyptians. It created the impression (later debunked) that the Roma arrived from Egypt. At a later time, in the 12th and 13th centuries, the Romani lived in a territory called “Aegyptus Minor” (Little Egypt) near the village of Methoni in Greece. From this name “Aigyptoi”, in Greek pronunciation “egypti” or “gypti”, gradually came the word “gypsy” in English.

From the 14th Century the Roma started spreading to countries of Western Europe – except the Nordic countries – in several waves.

Between the years 1407 and 1416 we find different mentions in the chronicles about gypsies in



Germany. In 1417 (regarded as a key point in the Roma’s history) groups of Roma passed through the whole of Central Europe, the Hanseatic League, Saxony, Bavaria and along the Swiss border. They simultaneously came from the north and south into Italy,

whilst similar groups of nomads visited the Netherlands and Belgium.

Spanish and Portuguese annals also mention the presence of Roma there. The Romani people appeared in the northern parts of Europe in the 16th Century: Denmark in 1505; England in 1514; Norway in 1540 and Finland in 1584. The French assumed that

the Roma came from the Czech lands, and thus termed them “Bohémies”. A significant part of the Roma did settle in Hungary (including the territory of modern Slovakia) and in the territory of the modern Czech state, and live there today in different and numerous subgroups. Europe greeted the Roma with amazement, apprehension and misunderstanding. These people were impossible to group into any particular social class and their origin and ethnicity was understood incorrectly. If to be “European” means to have a sense of common identity and values, and it is not necessary to come from any particular part of Europe or possess a state, then the Roma are authentic Europeans who have lived here for more than 500 years. Consequently, we should treat the issues that face the Roma minority in our countries as the problems of fellow Europeans, and not as those of an alien, outside group who do not belong here.



# Developments in the Roma Question in Western Europe

By Dominic Hatiar

*"Do you have problems with peoples from Central or Eastern Europe? Have you recently lost a job to a Pole, Romanian, Bulgarian or other Eastern European? We want to know."* This is a quote from the website of the Dutch Freedom Party. At the same time, 68 percent of the entire Italian population would like to have the Roma expelled. More tellingly still, Nicolas Sarkozy aimed to prevent Roma immigration by using the inhumane policy of forcing Roma to prove DNA blood ties to French nationals.

The "radicalisation of anti-Roma politics" is becoming an increasingly pressing challenge for the EU whilst all eyes are focused on her economic problems. In paradox, the expansion of the EU and its accompanying integration and rising living standards is being accompanied by new forms of racism and social exclusion. It is therefore necessary to scrutinise the way that France and Italy aimed to "solve" their "Roma issues", analyse the stance of the EU towards such decisions, and most importantly ask "where do we go from here?".

France has provided an excellent example of discrimination against an ethnic group. The first domino fell when "gens du voyage", so-called "travelling people", violently assailed a police station in response to a member of their community who was involved in a burglary being shot. As a consequence of this skirmish, the French president made a fundamental mistake as he coupled his

"declaration of war" on gangsters, delinquents and criminals with the failures of immigration policy.

Because he didn't want to "welcome all the misery of the world" (meaning Roma immigration), radical steps followed, and some 539 illegal Roma camps were to be cleared. Sarkozy's administration aimed to legitimise the deportation of Roma under the term "securitisation", as Roma were accused of constituting "threats to the integrity of the French state and France's way of life". The deportations were presented to the world as "humanitarian returns" where the returnee would be granted 300 euro. On rare occasions the French government coupled the deportations with the promotion of local small businesses in the home country of the returnee. This was to be done by giving grants of thousands of euro to returnees who were able to provide a trustworthy business plan. However, very few Roma have accepted such grants as they would

have put themselves at risk of not having a chance of returning to France. It must be said that France has pursued this Roma strategy of deportation for several years in combination with policies which prevented or hindered the integration of Roma into wider society. Nevertheless, many Roma have been deported purely on the basis of their ethnicity, a chilling but not unique consequence of the growing “anti-gypsyism” in Europe.

It can be said that anti-Roma sentiments are even more deeply

rooted in Italy, but the government hasn’t done much to change these feelings. Conversely, “government policies to the Roma problem have further inflamed anti-Roman sentiments, encouraging violence and racism”. Segregation of Roma from the rest of society has culminated in the Roma being moved to special camps on the outskirts of cities by the government. Silvio Berlusconi signed a decree calling “a state of emergency in relation to settlements of communities of nomads”. Such legislation is only usually used in the event of natural disasters, as it enabled officials

to begin a massive collection of the fingerprints of Roma living in the camps. The Interior Ministry justified this action by finding Roma to be numerously involved in high-profile murders and rapes.

The response of the European Parliament came within five weeks, and wholly condemned Berlusconi’s decree as being racist and discriminatory. Fundamental rights commissioner Viviane Reding criticised the policies of Italy and France since they “touched upon the fundamental values on which Europe has been built since World War Two: respect for the individual and non-discrimination against racial, ethnic or national groups”.

European Court of Human Rights stated that “no difference in treatment which is based exclusively or to a decisive extent on a person’s ethnic origin is capable of being objectively justified in a contemporary democratic society built on the principles of pluralism and

respect for different cultures”. In the end, the EU has successfully forced France to “desecuritize” the Roma issue, it has become an issue of normal juridical politics and hence, expulsion can occur only on an individual, rather than group, basis.

Unfortunately, I have to point out that although the EU emerged out of this situation with respect as it was able to tackle these large members, the Roma expulsion is only a small part of a larger problem whose solution hasn’t yet been found. The Roma problems which are already occurring in Western Europe demonstrate the need for a Europe-wide solution. Central and Eastern European countries proved to be unable to help Roma in escaping the “poverty trap” but this article shows that the West isn’t doing much better. We should realise that the Roma issue is a problem for all of us and if current elites cannot provide viable solutions, it will fall to our generation to do so.



# The Way to Roma Inclusion

*Interview by Miroslav Jurčišin*

**Miroslav Jurčišin:** If you were to describe the problem of marginalized Roma communities in Slovakia, what would you say?

Stanislav Daniel: Imagine yourself as a child in Roma settlement somewhere in an underdeveloped region of Slovakia. Your parents lost jobs in the transformation after 1989 and since then they are on welfare with only some seasonal short-term jobs. Your mother was recently told that she couldn't be accepted for a cleaning job, because the company can't employ Roma.

Before enrolment into primary school you were sent for testing, where you didn't understand, so they diagnosed you with mental disability and sent to special school. So you're at special school with vast majority of other Roma children, diagnosed with mental disability, you can only go to a two-year high school that would qualify you for some helping profession.

At the same time the local mayor is threatening your family that you'll be evicted because your house is illegal. The non-Roma citizens are



Stanislav Daniel grew up in Skalica, Slovakia. Far from the picture of Roma settlements you could see in the media. For many years at the secondary business school and later, he never thought he would be devoting his professional career to Roma. But here he is, after getting a degree in social work with a focus on excluded Roma communities, working in a Roma settlement. He has further professional experience in civil society organisations in Slovakia, in the European Roma Rights Centre in Budapest, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights in Warsaw. He currently works for the Budapest-based Roma Education Fund.



demonstrating against you and your family for abusing social welfare. And, by the way, you and the whole community have only one source of water in the middle of the settlement.

So it is really difficult to say what the biggest problem is. The biggest problem is probably the combination of issues, which are concentrated in the excluded Roma communities.

**MJ: What do you think was the biggest mistake of previous governments in Slovakia with respect to improving this situation?**

SD: One frequent misperception among general public is that too much has been invested in the cause and too much money is spent on the Roma. The facts however show the contrary. For example in education, the civil society and independent education experts have been proposing the same measures for number of years, but little has been implemented. On the other hand we learn about new pilot projects and experiments.

Organisations like the Roma Education Fund have long been proposing systematization of pre-school education to make it more accessible, improve its quality and



enforce cooperation with parents. Now we are happy to see that some governments, including the Slovak government, are discussing these measures and piloting them at local level.

**MJ: What would a perfect government do?**

SD: A perfect government would evaluate its steps and follow the results of evaluation. Some time ago the Slovak government approved a document listing projects which

were reportedly targeting the needs of Roma communities. After some concerns by civil society the media were reporting about some of the cases, including a village which installed public lights and reported it as a project addressing needs of Roma, even though there were no Roma living in the village. The

question remains how many of the approximately 600 million EUR were really addressing problems of Roma.

A perfect government needs to know how their funding is spent and how the action could be improved. This can be only done by proper evaluation and introducing the evaluation results into the system.

**MJ: Is education the only thing that would improve the situation?**

SD: Even if we focused only on the children, we need to understand that the children don't live in vacuum. They live in certain environments, where their parents often cannot fully support them, where they live in houses with limited access to water, etc.

Education is not a magic wand, but on the other hand, we cannot talk about full inclusion without inclusive education.

**MJ: And what about the boarding schools for children from excluded communities?**



SD: Some of the best schools in the world are boarding schools and they definitely have their place in the education system. On the other hand we shouldn't accept them as a systemic measure to address problems in education of Roma.

If we have a problem with Roma housing resulting in the fact that children cannot well prepare at home, we need to address the problem of housing and don't need to cut the family ties necessarily.

Sometimes parents cannot support their children in education because they themselves lack education. This is something we in the Roma Education Fund are addressing by our work with parents and after-school programmes which also include the parents.

There have been proposals for boarding schools for Roma and their advocates spoke about the free choice of the parents, but the fact remains that the choice wouldn't be free if there is literally only one option. A full-day education system is currently being piloted and I believe it is a very good alternative.

**MJ: Do you think the changes in social system would help?**

SD: I believe that the condition of family benefits being paid only in case of proper school attendance may sound good to the general public, but we need to look a bit further and answer the question who is really suffering if the family's social welfare is cut.

There should be measures to positively motivate parents to send their children to school and cooperate with school. And in general, our target is not to discuss how big or small the social welfare should be. Let's aim at getting the people to work.

**MJ: Do you think there is a need to change the policies of the government or the current policies are good only they need more time?**

SD: One of the biggest challenges the programmes addressing the so-called Roma issues are facing, are the political changes. Maybe this is something that we need the governments to understand. They basically need to design the long-

term strategies in a way that they would be acceptable also for a new government from a different political spectre.

But in general I would like to say that I do not believe that we're facing some kind of crisis as many people say. Some critics say that the number of Roma dependent on social welfare is growing. Fortunately, the number of Roma university students is growing too, some of them from families dependent on social welfare.

There are steps that can be taken right now; there are steps that need longer preparation. We only need to make sure that we keep in the right direction.

**MJ: How do you keep yourself positively motivated?**

SD: My grandparents experienced the times in which they were not allowed to use public transport, go to the cinema or public swimming pool, because they were Roma. They thought people have to give up their Romani ethnicity to live a decent life. Today I am being

interviewed for the magazine of the European Democrat Students. Future leaders are reading my words. And I didn't have to give up my ethnicity. So there is obviously progress.

# CONFERENCE RESOLUTION

**on United in Diversity – A Youth Contribution to the  
Policy of Integration of the Roma Minority**

For the Council Meeting in Trnava on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2012  
*Presented by the Bureau Executive*

**United** in diversity. Those three words contain one of the main ideologies of Council of Europe member states. A decade of Roma integration into society at a European level clearly shows that there is a place for everyone in this union, and every minority is actually part of the precious heritage of the European community. Ethnic equality is crucial for the stable, peaceful and balanced development of the whole continent. Therefore, every European citizen has equal rights regardless of ethnicity. History shows that ethnic imbalance has negative social, economic and political consequences.

**Education is an important key to encouraging integration and more equal access of minorities to the common labour market.**

The Council of Europe (CoE) and its member states hold discussions on how to integrate minorities and are constantly searching for best practices for developing and implementing measures for fighting ethnic discrimination.

We, the European Democrat Students (EDS), the official student organisation of the European People's Party (EPP),

Recalling the purposes and principles of the European Convention of Human Rights, the Universal Declaration of Human rights, and applicable International human rights treaties;

Considering that the creation of objective and transparent criteria is needed in order to evaluate the results of the efforts made to improve integration. The strategies on that topic should have long-term perspectives and should provide sustainable outcome;





Recognising that the integration of Roma is important for the European community;

Believing that one of the successful approaches to Roma integration is through education;

Encouraging the involvement of the Roma minority in all policy spheres at national and European level;

Recognising that the attitudes of the majority population some-



times will add to the problem;

Firmly supporting the development of strategies for Roma integration at national and European levels;

Realising that further actions are needed in order to boost social integration of Roma minorities, especially on a youth level and in all educational institutions

**Call on the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to**



Develop a long-term vision and mission of integration policy along with a system for resource allocation, including setting specific integration targets;

Provide conditions for the education of members of minority groups, and to monitor the implementation of integration strategies;

Provide conditions for the dissemination of information on Roma minority among the popu-

lation and conditions to facilitate amicable co-existence between ethnic groups;

Further develop effective approaches for Roma integration and equal access to education and the labour market;

Encourage member states to develop national policies in favour of ethnic tolerance and intercultural mutual respect between minorities and majority populations.





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