



Romani CRISS
Centrul Romilor pentru Interventie Sociala si Studii

Str. Raspantiilor nr11, sector 2
Bucuresti, cod postal 020547
Telefon: 021 3107070
021 3107060
Fax: 0318157623
office@romanicriss.org
www.romanicriss.org

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Roma - From victims of the society to makers of society

Te aven bahtale saore, thai lacho dives.

I want to give a special thanks to Magda Matache, a truly brilliant mind and character. You make us all proud. I also want to thanks the FXB Center of the Harvard University and their team for hosting the event and for taking up the Roma issue, which is often perceived as a “hot potato”. Not least, I want to thanks Andrzej Mirga, for a lifelong commitment to Roma integration.

My name is Marian Mandache and I am an Ursari Roma. I am the executive director of Romani CRISS, a Roma NGO in Romania. I work on Roma issues for 15 years. Progress is painfully slow.

Poverty and socio-economic inclusion

China and India uplifted a few hundred million people out of poverty. The EU is struggling with 10 million Roma, though it is richer than both. Why is that?

Could it be because there is too little energy put into concrete action that actually has an impact on Roma communities (the focus is on reporting, meetings and experience exchange)?

Could it be because many national governments still rely on EU funding and not on state budget to implement Roma policies?

Could it be that the involvement of the Roma themselves in the design, implementation and evaluation of the Roma policies is plain propaganda (e.g. the adoption of the Romanian government’s strategy on improving the situation of the Roma in 2011)?

Could it be because key instruments such as micro-financing remain “a far away dream” for the vast majority of the Roma, inter alia, because of cruelly unnecessary bureaucracy (620 signatures to notify the change of the project coordinator for an ESF funded project in Romania) and huge self-contributions (up to 50% on economic project)? Is it realistic to expect people who live in (extreme) poverty to come up with half of the total value of the project?

Could it be because the EU funding is designed to solve the problems of people who are not the dire situation in which Roma are?

Could it be because many of the local authorities work against the Roma, rather than for the Roma, by pushing them out of the villages and voluntary “failing” to make public investments in Roma communities?

Could it be that local authorities can and do implement anti-Roma policies without any form of “distress”, whilst national governments pose as prima-donnas of Roma integration?

I do not know, I am just saying ...

Discrimination and violence

Roma are arguably the most discriminated against group in Europe. By everyone. From regular citizens to companies, banks, schools, local authorities, Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Prime-Ministers, heads of state, they all did it and they all got away with it. The “distress” was minimal. It is increasingly acceptable to speak and act as a racist in Europe and a lot more so when your target are the Roma.

Rule of law and democracy-building are a continuous struggle. Episodes like the summer of 2012 in Romania or the current situation in Hungary prove this. As we speak, in Romania the electoral law in respect of national minorities is clearly antidemocratic (see OSCE report on Romanian parliamentary elections). Racist violence and killings, police abuse, school segregation, discrimination in access to health, forced evictions, illegal limitations of the freedom of movement are just a few of the patterns of abuse and discrimination Roma face.

Current legislation and policy, at EU and national levels prove rather inefficient in properly fighting this. Why is that?

Could it be ...