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LIBERTE, EGALITE, PERSECUTEE

**PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS ON THE SITUATION OF THE
ROMA FROM ROMANIA REPATRIATED FROM FRANCE**

I. THE REPATRIATION TO ROMANIA

On August 19, 2010, 61 Romanian citizens of Roma origin were repatriated. They came by plane to Bucharest, on **Baneasa and Otopeni airports**. It was the first group of repatriated Romanian citizens after the announcement of the French authorities in July that they would initiate a campaign aiming at dismantling the Roma camps (approximately 300) and expelling them to their countries of origin, namely Romania and Bulgaria. Romani CRISS and TRUST association were present, at both airports and discussed with the repatriated Roma people.

The Roma came back to Romania through the “voluntary repatriation” program of the OFII – Office Francais de l’immigration et de l’integration (former ANAEM). Therefore, each adult received 300 Euros and each minor 100 Euros, as humanitarian aid.

The Roma were expelled from Grenoble-Lyon region, in the South of France. According to information in media, 61 people were repatriated, out of 79 planned (18 of them didn't come, after all)¹. The repatriated persons come from various areas of the country, especially Central and Southern Romania, both from rural and urban environment. In the same time, adults and families with minors were repatriated. The discussions with the repatriated persons revealed that they chose to come back to Romania because they had not managed to find a place to work in France and to earn money or didn't have money to come back in the country. Thus, the financial aid provided by the French state was the reason for the Roma to come back to Romania.

A repatriated person said that, in the area she used to live in, only tree camps are still standing. The Roma from the dismantled camps moved to other camps. The people also said that the French copied their identity papers, that they had to sign certain documents written in French language and that they heard that approximately 700-800 people from all over France were to be expelled. Several Roma mentioned that the French authorities informed them, verbally, that their right to come back to France had been banned. A person also mentioned that he was told that "the President of France doesn't want Roma people anymore and he is dismantling the camps". Some of the Roma showed their intention to go back to France as they did not have the means to earn a living in Romania.

According to “Thumende” Association (Hunedoara county), late in the evening, on August 19, 2010, approximately 20 Roma people arrived at the train station in **Petrosani**. They were repatriated from Grenoble-Lyon. Most of them seemed scared. *“The French special police acted as if we were criminals; they destroyed*

¹ Adevarul, S-au intors Eurotiganii [The EuroGypsies Came Back], available at http://www.adevarul.ro/actualitate/eveniment/S-au_intors_eurotiganii_0_319768635.html, last visited September 27, 2010.

our trailers, cleared the place where we were living as if we were not even there”, stated a Roma man, accompanied by his wife and two children.

Many of them declared they did not know how they will live as they have no homes, they live at relatives or friends, they cannot get medical services and in the region it is difficult to get a job. According to the county Labor Force Office, the unemployment is more than 11% among general population.

V.V., a Roma man declared he could have got free medical treatment for his teeth condition and a surgery as he suffered a labor-accident a year before. “Who will offer this to me without bribe?” he asks. A carpenter by profession, he received a higher salary whilst in France.

They want to go back to France. The major employment source in that region of Romania was the mining sector. After the massive dismissals, both Roma and non-Roma left abroad for a chance for a better life. N.N. stated: *“We want to feed our children and to be able to send them to school, like we could do in France”*.

During a meeting asked by the “Thumende” Association, the Mayor of the Petrosani locality proposed the emergency assistance for the families repatriated from France. Social investigations will be conducted to identify the concrete needs they have and based on that the Mayoralty committed to “do everything possible” to support them. Further, the Mayor stated that the European structural funds and the professional training projects are solutions that the local public administration and the nongovernmental organizations will put into practice.

On August 26, 2010, Romani CRISS documented the repatriation of some 30 Roma persons at the **Baneasa** airport. The first Roma group was expelled from Lyon and they lived in camp of about 200 persons. The great majority of them were fingerprinted. They received 300 Euros per adult and 100 Euros per child. They are from various parts of central and Western Romania.

They complained about the manner in which they were treated by Romanian police. They were locked in a room and treated as if they were inmates.

The second Roma group (some 100 persons) was expelled from Paris and they were from various parts of Romania. Many of them were accompanied by their children.

When the Roma arrived in the airport, a Roma woman wearing traditional Roma clothes went out to leave some of the luggage. She tried to go back to get the other luggage and her two-month old child who was in the “Mother and child” room. The airport guardians screamed at her and did not allow her to go back, asking her to wait until all other passengers left. At some point, one police officer addressed her by her first name and told her *“if you don’t shut up, I will put you in the van and take you home myself!”* She replied: *“Did you catch me with my hand in someone’s pocket? I didn’t steal anything!”* The child’s father showed up and threaten he would go inside to get his child. Finally, the

guardians allowed the parent to go inside and take the child and the rest of the luggage.

Some persons stated some Romanian police officers came to them in Paris and told them they needed to fill in the repatriation papers because the program paying them a sum as humanitarian aid will end in October. As a consequence they decided to sign the papers. They also testified they were working in the construction sector in Paris.

Other Roma persons declared their camp had been demolished and they received no help whatsoever from the Red Cross, even though they did ask for it. They further testified the French police treated them badly, as if they were under arrest, and even though they did have money, they were not allowed by the police to go and buy themselves food and drinks. Many of them did not speak French and they signed the repatriation papers without translation in a language they understood. Another Roma man asked if he could return to France as he was sent back to Romania.

Some Roma stated to the press they will go back to France as they have no possibilities to make a living in Romania, they have no jobs. The Roma declared that in France they were selling newspapers, recycling materials, they were singing in the metro and some said they were also begging because they could not speak French and they could not get a job. Some of them had left Romania only a few weeks before, others for a year and they were living in Paris in camps, in parks or in the streets.

After they left the airport, they were assaulted by journalists who insisted to take photos and make interviews. In the case of one family who had two children minor of age, journalist took photos of the children even though the parents and the minors themselves prohibited them from doing so. Generally, the people were upset with the attention they got from the media and some of them covered their faces.

At the entrance gate in the airport, before the baggage claim, there was a police officer on whose T-shirt there was written "Forensics Police". He was taking photos of the persons who were arriving.

II. THE CASE OF R.R.

Date of departure to France: May 1, 2007

Date of return in Romania: May 3, 2010

For this three-year period, only the husband came to Romania for one week, when his father had passed away. The rest of the family lived in France permanently for three years.

The reason for the emigration was to provide their children a better life. The family is made up of the husband, the wife, a 9 year-old and a 12 year-old sons. In Romania, the family used to live with their extended family – namely, 16 persons in 3 rooms (3 brothers with their wives and children). The only income the family had been 2 scholar allowances. *“If they don’t have clothes, money, the children might start stealing, hanging out in dangerous groups, what will finally come up of them?”*

Living conditions in France

They got to a small locality in Northern France, where they went in a camp. Many Roma families used to live here. An association provided them with tents and mattresses. They lived in the tents until the end of the summer, for a 2-3 months period. In August-September 2007, they were moved in another camp, where the association provided them with caravans. The Roma from the camp were helped by the association with food, gas recipients, which were being filled on free.

The police and the city hall issued the association legal papers for the land, in order to assure that the 30 Roma families could live there. The Roma families used to put the waste in plastic bags, which were being picked up by the local service in charge of this.

Income in France

They got some help from the association: food; the children’s school canteen was covered by the association; the mass transportation pass of the children was paid by the association also.

Sometimes, they were begging, which assured they could afford buying food, paying the heating and the electricity.

The wife used to go to the Red Cross, starting with the end of 2009. She started to take classes to learn how to read and write in French. The Red Cross helped her get a residence card and to find a job, after she would finish the classes. It was easy for her to learn, but she didn’t get the opportunity to finish the classes as she was expelled.

She was about to fill in all the necessary papers which enabled her older son to be granted scholarship – one of them was 700 euro / month and the other 2000 euro / year. She stated: *“If we succeeded to make the application, I would have stopped begging, I wouldn’t sell my face anymore; I would have saved the children’s scholarship, for their future”*.

Generally, the women in their camp used to work for people they knew, French ladies, in housekeeping.

Education

Both children were enrolled to the same school starting with 2008. They weren't enrolled in school for a year, because they had to learn French first and the first year was quite rough. The older son used to attend a school where French students also went. It was not a school for migrants. In September 2010, the younger son was supposed to enroll for secondary school, while the older one in high school. They didn't have any scholar allowances in this period. An important reason for which the association helped them was that children were enrolled and attending school.

Generally, in their camp the children spoke more Romani and French and very little Romanian. When they return to Romania, they cannot integrate easily to the school and kindergarten, especially the ones who were born in France.

Health

They did not have to pay for their medical services. The wife had a medical insurance because she needed one when filling in the papers for the scholarship.

Expulsion, demolishing

For three years there was no discussion about demolishing the camp and deportation to Romania. The third- fourth day around Easter (Middle April), around 4.00-5.00 in the morning, some 200-300 police representatives from Calais came in many vans, accompanied by a few translators. They carried large bags, where Roma people were asked to put their papers. Nobody ran, because they were not afraid and didn't feel guilty.

Filters were set up and neither the local police nor the association which supported them was allowed to enter the camp. The first day, men were taken to the Calais police headquarters and they were arrested for 24 hours. They were issued the expulsion orders, they were taken photos and they were interrogated. The Roma men weren't given back their documents, except for the expulsion orders.

The next day, around 07.00-08.00 in the morning, the Roma women were taken to the police. Those who had little babies weren't taken to the police, but left in the camp. R.R. wasn't taken to police. The same procedure applied to the Roma men the day before at the Calais police station was repeated in the camp with the women left behind. R.R. didn't agree to sign the expulsion order, but she was told that it doesn't matter that she would sign it or not and that she would have to leave anyway.

The police representatives asked the Roma how long they have been in France, their address and number. The police didn't ask anything about the income, their family situation, education, health state, jobs etc.

After they received the expulsion orders, the Roma organized a street protest, attended by some 300 French people and 100 Roma. French citizens living in locality, city hall and police representatives supported them. A human rights organization also supported them and contracted three lawyers. The expulsion decision was appealed.

There was no violence against Roma people during the expulsion procedure. Starting with 2007, organizations managing voluntary repatriations have been visiting the camps. They used to leave their contacts to the Roma people, mentioning that if the Roma wanted to leave France by plane, they will also receive 300 euro. The Roma contacted this organization (OFII) once they found out they would be expelled, in order to receive plane tickets and money.

Around May 1, a few families left the camp with their own cars. The rest of them were put in buses on May 3, 2010 and taken to the Lille airport. In the buses, they were given their documents and the plane ticket. The camp was demolished. The caravans were taken away from there. The family left behind most of their belongings: wardrobe, TV set, gas recipients, blankets, etc.