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OF MINORITY RIGHTS AND INTERETHNIC TOLERANCE**

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ROMA - MOST ENDANGERED MINORITY

Preoccupation with inter-ethnic tensions and conflict in which some national minorities has a crucial role and were often also the biggest victims led to, in a certain way inadequate profiling of minority politics. The tone of minority politics was dictated by "victim minorities" - it is they who dominate minority issue and reduce or suppress from public and political view all other minority problems. One of such problems is, undoubtedly, Roma which is today becoming no.1 minority issue in Europe. As minority problems in general, this one is especially difficult in transition countries where there is still the need to create basic conditions for breaking out of prejudice against Roma, change their social position and resolve their problems. It is certainly a long term and complicated process, but there are many indications that the process is especially rendered difficult due to lack of true political will. Therefore, Roma problems are often locked in a never-ending cycle.

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I BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

1. Roma people in Republika Srpska

THE FIRST AMONG THE UNEQUAL

By Katarina Panic

Captured between prejudices and the truth, Roma – the members of the largest, even though still not counted up national minority in BiH, are making minor advances in the realisation of basic human rights in Republika Srpska.

2. Roma people in BiH Federation

DISCORD AMONG ROMA ASSOCIATIONS AND DISREGARD BY THE AUTHORITIES

By Namir Ibrahimovic

The fact that they have no personal documents (birth certificates, IDs, place of residence records) adds to the exclusion of Roma from the society. This deficiency has the strongest impact on their health care coverage and the right to vote in the elections. The Roma are practically disabled from expressing their political positions, they cannot vote.

3. Interview: Jeff Ford, OESCE Mission in BiH

DISRESPECT BOOSTS NEGATIVE STEREOTYPES

By Katarina Panic

In the 19th Century, we regarded native Canadians as savages that have to change, integrate and socialise. Here, I see that the same terms are being used for Roma, and this patriarchal approach can be dangerous. Now in Canada, we call native Canadians original nation, they have the unique culture of their own. Their rights are the same, but they remain unique, and their right to self-determination is respected. Therefore, I believe that Roma also should not be changed, integrated and socialised in terms of losing their own identity. What should happen is the change of perception, both in local people and in Roma, in order to rise above strong patriarchal bastions.

II CROATIA

1. THERE IS NO POLITICAL WILL FOR ROMA ISSUES

By Halil Berisa, vice-president of Croatian Roma Union

According to official census of 2001, there are only slightly over 10,000 Roma in Croatia. Experts claim their number is between 35-40 thousand, and Roma themselves estimate it to be as much as 100 to 150 thousand. However, while there may be differences between their exact number, almost everyone agrees that Roma are in a poor social position. Vice-president of Croatian Roma Union Halil Berisa thinks that education is the basis of all other Roma troubles. He emphasizes that adopted National program for Roma possesses some quality, but adds that there is no political will to fully implement it and that politicians mostly manipulate Roma problems, using them just before the elections to score political points.

2. RESOLUTION OF ROMA PROBLEMS OPENS CROATIA EUROPEAN DOORS

Interview with Nikola Mak, representative of 12 national minorities, including Roma, in Croatian parliament

By Ivana Kukic

National program for Roma passed over a year ago is an extremely good programmatic document, says Nikola Mak, parliamentary representative of national minorities. He says Croatia lacks no will and means to resolve Roma issues and that the biggest obstacle to successful activities is chaos among state institutions responsible for implementation of the National program. Mak claims Croatia is ahead of some new EU member states in resolving Roma issues. By 2007 Croatia will have to fulfill its obligation and present to the EU clear examples of a successful policy

towards Roma. It will also be a significant contribution to Croatian accession into the EU, says Mak.

3. FIGHT AGAINST FORGETTING

By Bojan Munjin

Recent opening of Roma theatre in Rijeka, which has already proven extreme success, is treated as a sensation. However, that truly extraordinary cultural fact should be a motive to speak out about total marginalization of Roma population that has been cut off from many basic human right, including the right to conserve and develop own culture and tradition. Responsibility for such situation lies primarily among majority environment which supports and maintains a whole system of prejudice against Roma culture and Roma in general.

III SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO

1. ROMA CHILDREN IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM OR OUTSIDE OF EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

By Rozaria Ilic

The situation of members of Roma nationality in Serbia has been really bad since the year 1991. Statistics tell us that 78% of Roma are without primary education, only 4,1% of them has secondary school education, and 0,2% has higher education or university degree. Because of discrimination in the society of Roma children, we have as a consequence these children outside the educational system.

Only in Vojvodina, thanks to the regional secretariat, an institutional system of learning Roma language e.g. mother tongue for Roma children, has begun, as well as training of personnel for realization of units in primary schools.

In the school system of Serbia, all related laws which should have been are obviously not functioning, as well as all other factors that were responsible for carrying out children rights and all of the responsible educational bodies in our system and leading personnel. It is necessary to insist on responsibilities of these bodies, individuals and official institutions in the future.

2. AT THE CROSSROADS- ROMA WOMEN IN SERBIA

By Tatjana Perić

In the context of broader society, Roma women are seen as members of a marginalized and often hated group. They are often victims of family violence, especially from the part of their husbands and fathers, and if they would dare to bring criminal charges against them to the police, officers make fun of them and teach them how they should rather be "better and smarter" and avoid such situations. Society, and especially the state, for the time being have not put enough effort to systematically stop their national and racial discrimination.

During the last few years, Roma activists have had a lot of initiatives worth mentioning. However, activism of Roma also brings its own inner problems: Roma female elite is in the process of creation, but is not numerable yet, therefore many of the trained activists are too busy with large number of activities and covering wide geographical areas. Despite these any many other problems Roma female activist do not give up.

3. MEDIA IN SERVICE OF ROMA EMANCIPATION

Interview with Petar Novica Nikolic, editor in chief of program in Roma language of Radio-Television Novi Sad

By Ivan Dimitrijevic

»There are four crucial areas regarding emancipation of Roma. In the first place, and always in the first place, is education. Afterwards, comes self-employment, as it is not possible to educate if the important economical and material support are missing. The third, health education, as it is a known fact that, according to data of international organizations and associations above all of UNESCO and UNICEF, biggest mortality of children and shortest life is precisely of Roma.

At last, we had to work on what is called the culture of living, in other words ecology, relation towards environment in which we live in.

Therefore, these segments are consisted in our programs all the time also since '92. We have been developing precisely these topics, as today we have around 50 hours of TV program and about 60 hours of radio program«, says Petar Novica Nikolić, edditor in chief of program in Roma language of Radio-Television Novi Sad, summing up to date work of that editorial office.