



## Racism in Romania – from statements to state action

Bucharest, 06.06.2012

The Center for Legal Resources strongly condemns the recent relocation of Roma from the Baia Mare Craica informal settlement next to the former site of CUPROM industrial factory, by local authorities.

As media<sup>1</sup> and NGOs report<sup>2</sup>, during their first night there several Roma, mostly children, had to be urgently taken to hospital. They started feeling dizzy, vomiting, loosing consciousness. Recipients with toxic substances, from the former factory, had been left at the premises, in the building where the Roma had been relocated. Such action would have determined nation wide protests in any country with at least some respect for the human condition, with at least some understanding of the teachings of the Holocaust.

Instead, the incumbent mayor is over 90% in polls<sup>3</sup>, newspaper articles on the topic gather the most heinous hate speech in the overwhelming number of the hundreds of comments posted<sup>4</sup>, there is no reaction at central level, no party would dare risk losing votes by defending the “gypsies”, no law enforcement body seems to realize that such actions fall under the criminal code, and all is well in Romania.

This action comes after concerns over the relocation process were expressed by national and local Roma NGOs<sup>5</sup>, by Amnesty International<sup>6</sup> and by the US Embassy to Romania<sup>7</sup>. Amnesty International

<sup>1</sup> Andrei Trif, *Intoxicație în masă printre locatarii blocului social amenajat la Cuprom Baia Mare (Mass intoxication among the inhabitants of the social block of flats arranged at Cuprom baia Mare)*, in eMaramureș, 02.06.2012, available at: <http://www.emaramures.ro/Stiri/67195/ULTIMA-ORA-Intoxicatie-in-masa-printre-locatarii-blocului-social-Cuprom-Baia-Mare> (accessed at: 05.06.2012), Bogdan Eduard, *Exclusiv EVZ: Auschwitz-ul de la Baia Mare. 2000 de romi mutați în Uzina Morții de primarul Cherecheș (Exclusive EVZ: the Auschwitz from Baia Mare. 2,000 Roma moved from the Death Plant by mayor Chereches, the “Chemical”)* in Evenimentul Zilei, 04.06.2012, available at: <http://www.evz.ro/detalii/stiri/exclusiv-evz-auschwitz-ul-de-la-baia-mare-2000-de-romi-mutati-in-uzina-mortii-de-primar-984719/pagina-comentarii/toate-comentariile.html#comentarii> (last accessed: 05.06.2012)

<sup>2</sup> Romani CRISS, Șanse Egale and Asociația Umanitară Împreună, *Scrisoare Deschisă (Open Letter)*, Bucharest, 03.06.2012, available at: [http://www.romanicriss.org/PDF/Scrisoare%20deschisa%20Baia%20Mare%20evacuari%20si%20incident%20substante\\_2012.pdf](http://www.romanicriss.org/PDF/Scrisoare%20deschisa%20Baia%20Mare%20evacuari%20si%20incident%20substante_2012.pdf) (accessed at: 05.05.2012)

<sup>3</sup> Bogdan Eduard, *Exclusiv EVZ: Auschwitz-ul de la Baia Mare. 2000 de romi mutați în Uzina Morții de primarul Cherecheș (Exclusive EVZ: the Auschwitz from Baia Mare. 2,000 Roma moved from the Death Plant by mayor Chereches, the “Chemical”)* in Evenimentul Zilei, 04.06.2012, available at: <http://www.evz.ro/detalii/stiri/exclusiv-evz-auschwitz-ul-de-la-baia-mare-2000-de-romi-mutati-in-uzina-mortii-de-primar-984719/pagina-comentarii/toate-comentariile.html#comentarii> (last accessed: 05.06.2012)

<sup>4</sup> Bogdan Eduard, *Exclusiv EVZ: Auschwitz-ul de la Baia Mare. 2000 de romi mutați în Uzina Morții de primarul Cherecheș (Exclusive EVZ: the Auschwitz from Baia Mare. 2,000 Roma moved from the Death Plant by mayor Chereches, the “Chemical”)* in Evenimentul Zilei, 04.06.2012, available at: <http://www.evz.ro/detalii/stiri/exclusiv-evz-auschwitz-ul-de-la-baia-mare-2000-de-romi-mutati-in-uzina-mortii-de-primar-984719/pagina-comentarii/toate-comentariile.html#comentarii>

<sup>5</sup> Romani CRISS, Amnesty International, Asociația “Șanse Egale”, *Scrisoare deschisă. Stop acțiunilor primăriei din Baia Mare de ghettoizare a romilor (Open Letter. Stop to the actions of the Baia Mare Mayor’s Office of ghettoizing the Roma)* Bucharest, 29.06.2011, available at: [http://www.romanicriss.org/Scrisoare\\_deschisa\\_de\\_protest\\_zid\\_Baia\\_Mare.pdf](http://www.romanicriss.org/Scrisoare_deschisa_de_protest_zid_Baia_Mare.pdf) (accessed at: 05.06.2012)



and Romani CRISS, as early as last month, expressed concern that the process was done under harassment and intimidation, without proper consultation allowing all those affected to genuinely participate<sup>8</sup>. Yet, in presenting his programme for the ongoing electoral campaign, incumbent Mayor Cherecheș, as reported on by the local media, lays out a clear plan to demolish various Roma informal settlements which he qualifies as: illegal “bags of poverty and dirt”, “colonies which dare break the rules”, and which should have been “eliminated from the moment the first illegal shack was established”<sup>9</sup>.

**Background information:** according to the last census figures, Romania has over 600,000 Roma. Acknowledging that Roma tend not to declare their ethnicity, various international bodies estimate their number as up to around 2 million.<sup>10</sup> The Roma have been discriminated against for centuries, they have a history of slavery in Romania, and continue to face strong discriminatory feelings and exclusion<sup>11</sup>, affecting them in all areas of life: from poor educational attainment, to unemployment, lower life expectancy than the majority by 10 years, poor housing conditions, etc. Roma have been forcefully settled during communism. Since they do not have a history of property owning, but also because their majority live in poverty, Roma families are more likely to be in situations of tenure insecurity. Roma informal settlements such as those in Craica, which mainly have the outlook of slums and which have formed and grown in time all over the country, some having been created by local authorities through the relocation of Roma from state owned social buildings in central areas to the outskirts, are nothing but a consequence of discrimination. Such settlements have been tolerated by local authorities over the years, authorities which have not bothered to find suitable alternatives for their constituents of Roma origin<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Amnesty International, *Romania: Hundreds of Roma in Baia Mare, Romania are at imminent risk of forced eviction by local authorities*, 19.04.2012, available at: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR39/004/2012/en> (accessed at: 05.06.2012); Amnesty International, *Press statement. Hundreds of Roma People in Baia Mare, Romania, are at risk of being rendered homeless*, 26.08.2011, available at: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/EUR39/008/2011/en/0074fc7a-63ab-4479-83ff-1a43720b354c/eur390082011en.html> (accessed at: 05.06.2012)

<sup>7</sup> US Embassy, *Press Release. US Embassy Expresses Concern Over Planned Evictions in Baia Mare*, 31.08.2011, available at: <http://romania.usembassy.gov/policy/media/pr-08312011.html> (accessed at: 05.06.2012)

<sup>8</sup> Amnesty International, *Romania: Roma in Baia Mare face threat of forced eviction and harassment*, 10.05.2012, available at: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR39/007/2012/en> (05.06.2012)

<sup>9</sup> Advertorial, *Planul primarului Cătălin Cherecheș pentru Baia Mare în următorii 4 ani (The plan of Mazar Cherecheș for the following 4 years)*, in eMaramureș, 23.05.2012, <http://www.emaramures.ro/stiri/66695/ADVERTORIAL-Planul-primarului-Catalin-Chereches-pentru-Baia-Mare-in-urmatorii-4-ani-Municipiului> (accessed at: 05.06.2012)

<sup>10</sup> See for example, World Bank statistics on Roma, available at: <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/EXTROMA/0,,menuPK:615993~pagePK:64168427~piPK:64168435~d:y-theSitePK:615987,00.html#datastat> (accessed at: 05.06.2012)

<sup>11</sup> According to the last nation wide poll commissioned by the equality body, 46% of respondents would feel little and very little comfortable around a Roma person. See TNS CSOP, *Raport de cercetare. Percepții și atitudini privind discriminarea în România (Research report. Perceptions and attitudes regarding discrimination in Romania)*, Bucharest, 2011, p. 58, available at: [http://www.cncd.org.ro/files/file/Raport%20de%20cercetare%20CNCD\\_Discriminare.pdf](http://www.cncd.org.ro/files/file/Raport%20de%20cercetare%20CNCD_Discriminare.pdf) (accessed at: 06.06.2012)

<sup>12</sup> Amnesty International, *Mind the legal gap: Roma and the right to housing in Romania*. 23.06.2011, available at: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/EUR39/002/2012/en/cdd21a79-59b9-4e55-9e14-5f4c28e1bb0a/eur390022012en.pdf> (accessed at: 05.06.2012); Center for Legal Resources, Delia-Luiza Niță, *Thematic study. Housing Conditions of Roma and Travellers, Romania*, March, 2009, available at: [http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/attachments/RAXEN-Roma%20Housing-Romania\\_en.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/attachments/RAXEN-Roma%20Housing-Romania_en.pdf); G. Fleck, C. Rughiniș (eds.)



**Furthermore**, representatives of some authorities, such as Mayor Chereches, decided to openly use discriminatory sentiments of the majority population against the Roma for political gains, blaming, once again, the victims, posing in the good administrator who has the “guts” to take the “bull by the horns” and remove the “unpleasant” community from site. In 2011, he had a wall built to separate Roma inhabited and severely impoverished blocks of flats from the rest of the community. The initiative made headlines around the globe, but did not outrage Romanians, let alone central level politicians, who remained then, as they continue to remain now, in deafening silence. The wall got him a sanction from the Romanian equality body, which he contested in court. The court of law, agreeing with the mayor, quashed the equality body decision<sup>13</sup>.

As mentioned, mayor Chereches is not the only one to have such initiatives<sup>14</sup>. Local authorities of Cluj-Napoca relocated, during the winter of 2010, and according to largely the same *modus operandi*, more Roma next to the city garbage dump area, where a large informal Roma settlement had already existed<sup>15</sup>. In 2004, authorities in Miercurea Ciuc relocated Roma next to a sewage treatment plant at the periphery of the town, in metal cabins – they are still there<sup>16</sup>. And more examples can follow.

What is perhaps striking about mayor Cherecheș is his self-righteous attitude, his openness about his intentions, and, inevitably, about his racism. What is unbelievable and extremely dangerous is that he is, as he stands, one of the most popular mayors in Romania.

However, mayor Chereches has not appeared out of thin air. He comes in a context where Romanian officials at highest level have constantly, and with an unfathomable serenity, made discriminatory statements with regards to the Roma, turning them into preferred scapegoats. Here’s a brief reminder:

In May 2007, the Romanian President Basescu, in the context of going shopping and being followed by journalists, snatched the phone of a woman journalist. While driving away in his car, not realizing the phone was still recording, he told his wife “how aggressive this filthy gypsy was”.

The phone was returned, the recording retrieved and the statement made public<sup>17</sup>.

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*Come closer. Inclusion and exclusion of Roma in present day Romanian society.* Bucharest, Human Dynamics, 2008, available at: [http://www.anr.gov.ro/docs/Publicatii/Come\\_closer.pdf](http://www.anr.gov.ro/docs/Publicatii/Come_closer.pdf) (available at: 05.06.2012)

<sup>13</sup> Cosmin Carp, “Chereches has been absolved by the Cluj Court of Appeal”, in *Adevarul*, 26.02.2012, available at: [http://www.adevarul.ro/locale/baia\\_mare/Chereches\\_a\\_fost\\_absolvit\\_de\\_catre\\_Curtea\\_de\\_Apel\\_Cluj\\_0\\_653334797.html](http://www.adevarul.ro/locale/baia_mare/Chereches_a_fost_absolvit_de_catre_Curtea_de_Apel_Cluj_0_653334797.html) (accessed at 05.06.2012)

<sup>14</sup> Amnesty International, *Mind the legal gap: Roma and the right to housing in Romania*. 23.06.2011, available at: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR39/002/2012/en> (accessed at: 05.06.2012)

<sup>15</sup> Amnesty International, *Romania: Roma families forcibly evicted in Cluj-Napoca still waiting for justice and adequate housing a year on*, 16.12.2012, available at: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR39/013/2011/en> (accessed at: 05.06.2012)

<sup>16</sup> Amnesty International, *Romania: Miercurea Ciuc authorities undermine obligations to protect the right to adequate housing*, 27.04.2012, available at: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR39/003/2011/en> (accessed at: 05.06.2012)

<sup>17</sup> See recording of the incident at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pNqfqi53COA> (06.06.2012) as well as Alina Neagu, *Verdictul ICCJ in cazul “Țigancaă împuțită”: gestul lui Traian Băsescu este discriminatoriu, darn u reprezintă o contravenție (The verdict of the High Court of Cassation and Justice in the case ‘filthy gypsy’: Traian Basescu’s gesture is discriminatory, but does not represent a contravention)*, in *Hotnews*, 15.05.2008, available at: <http://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-3017895-video-verdictul-iccj-cazul-tiganca-impunita-gestul-lui-traian-basescu-este-discriminatoriu-dar-nu-reprezinta-contravenție.htm?cfym> (Date of access: 06.06.2012)



Also, in February 2010, at a conference for the launch of an evaluation of the Romanian Roma Strategy, President Basescu declared with regards to the Roma: "Equally, I know how much reluctance there is in very many Roma families to send their children to school. (...) Let us be honest: we have a big image problem. Go to Paris, go to Oslo, go to Rome, go to Milan, the Roma minority is present at every corner, in front of every museum, and not to enter the museum. So, we either admit a double responsibility, of the state and of the minority, for a positive evolution of the minority, I assure you that all governmental and European projects are doomed to failure (...) I can tell you that another big problem is becoming evident, more serious. Due to the positive birth rate which exists in the Roma community, the problem of housing is getting more serious. More and more live at the outskirts of cities, in improvised shelters and illegal on top of it. We will not be able to continue endlessly with the idea that the state will have to, in the end, build houses for this category. (...) The big problem is in the lack of engagement of the whole community in progressing and in their lack of conviction that school is the key to future prosperity"<sup>18</sup>.

In November 2010, President Basescu declared, in an official visit to Slovenia that: "We have another problem which must be said and which makes the integration of nomadic Roma difficult – very few of them want to work. Many of them, traditionally, live off what they steal."<sup>19</sup>.

Three ministers of foreign affairs have made discriminatory statements in the past years:

On November 2nd, 2007, against the background of the situation of Romanian Roma in Italy, who were being the target of a media campaign, starting from the presumed rape and murder of an Italian woman by a Romanian man of Roma ethnicity (which also ignited fierce debates in Romania), the Conservative Party in Romania proposed that people who commit such crimes should not be allowed to leave the country<sup>20</sup>. Asked what he thought of the Conservative's proposal, targeting those who commit the most serious crimes, not the Roma, but against a background where national debates were mainly going around the Roma ethnicity component, Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, Adrian Cioroianu, declared: "Please believe me. I have also been thinking for days what the situation could be. I tell you openly that this does not seem to be the best solution to me, to not allow them to leave (...). This should be, how should I put it, the easiest punishment. These people who, (...) commit such crimes, these people must not be sent to a prison cell regime, with a TV, and with (...) they should be put to the harshest labour and formed probably those disciplinary battalions (...) I was thinking that

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<sup>18</sup> Presidency.ro, Transcript of the *Discursul președintelui României, Traian Băsescu, la conferința de lansare a Raportului asupra Strategiei Naționale de îmbunătățire a situației romilor: "Vocea comunităților"* (Speech of the Romanian President, Traian Basescu, at the launching conference of the report on the National Strategy for the improvement of the situation of the Roma: "Voice of the communities", 22.02.2010, available at:

[http://www.presidency.ro/?\\_RID=det&tb=date&id=11883&\\_PRID=ag](http://www.presidency.ro/?_RID=det&tb=date&id=11883&_PRID=ag) (Date of access: 06.06.2012)

<sup>19</sup> Mediafax.ro, Băsescu: *Mulți dintre romii nomazi, "în mod tradițional trăiesc din ce fură"* (Basescu: many of the nomadic Roma "traditionally live off what they steal"), 03.11.2010, available at: <http://www.mediafax.ro/social/basescu-multi-dintre-romii-nomazi-in-mod-traditional-traiesc-din-ce-fura-7689349/> (Date of access: 06.06.2012)

<sup>20</sup> Conservative Party Website, *Interdicție pentru infractori de a ieși din țară. Propunerea PC ar putea fi discutată în procedură de urgență în Parlament* (Interdictions for criminals to leave the country. The Proposal of the Conservative party might be discussed under an emergency procedure in the Parliament), 10.11.2007, available at: <http://www.partidulconservator.ro/2007/11/interdicție-pentru-infractori-de-a-iesi-din-tara-propunerea-pc-ar-putea-fi-discutata-in-procedura-de-urgenta-in-parlament/> (Date of access: 06.06.2012)



maybe we could buy some land in that Egyptian desert, to put there those who....such people make a fool of us"<sup>21</sup>.

In February 2010, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Teodor Baconschi, speaking about Romanian citizens in France declared: "We have some physiological, natural problems of criminality amongst some Romanian communities, especially among the communities of Roma ethnic Romanian citizens"<sup>22</sup>.

In May 2012, Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Andrei Marga, declared during a TV talk show, when asked how he is going to solve the issue of the "scandal with the beggars in London": "We have this problem. (...) In London there was a pretty embarrassing situation. There were recorded, at least by the British press, many Roma buying vodka, enjoying themselves and sitting on the clean streets of London for the passersby to see them. (...) It is understood that the London Olympics is now attracting, and many people, not only from Romania, from this level of the society, is heading towards London. Let us hope that we will be able to keep under control. Certainly, our concern is, if you like, very intense in this direction. Why? An accident, an incident in this area would endanger our effort, more persistent than ever, to close the Schengen file, to get access to other facilities, such as the American visas, etc., etc."<sup>23</sup>.

**Against this background**, not only are local authorities unconcerned with dealing with Roma exclusion and its consequences, but many local authorities are moving what are probably the most vulnerable among the Roma communities around like objects, in areas which put their health and life at risk, denying them not just their rights as citizens, but their very humanity. And, instead of being severely sanctioned for such actions, impunity is the rule, and their poll scores rise.

Thus, absent any dissuasive state reaction, moving people of a certain ethnicity to or next to former polluting factories, garbage dumps, sewage plants, segregating them to areas remote from any services or facilities, putting them in dwellings unfit for living, where their health and life and that of their children are at risk, has become something to be acclaimed for, something local authorities now feel they can speak freely about, maintaining they are doing good public administration.

If Romania is to stand a chance at facing history, impunity for racism must end! Immediate action must be taken against mayor Cherecheș and all those authorities who treat Roma like disposable objects. Silence can no longer be kept! Romanian authorities must take, or must be pushed to take in the so-called area of freedom and rights, immediate and appropriate measures.

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<sup>21</sup> 'Stirea zilei' Talk Show - moderator Gabriela Vranceanu Firea, on Antena3, 02.11.2007, phone intervention of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Adrian Cioroianu, and also: MailOnline, *Romanian foreign minister criticized for saying citizens who commit crimes abroad should be sent to labour camps in the desert*, 05.11.2007, available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-491886/Romanian-foreign-minister-criticised-saying-citizens-commit-crimes-abroad-sent-labour-camps-desert.html> (Date of access: 06.06.2012)

<sup>22</sup> Mediafax.ro, *Baconschi: Cuvântul "fiziologică" sublinia că rata criminalității este similară altor comunități (Baconschi: The word physiological was underlining the fact that the criminality rate is similar to other communities)*, 23.02.2010, available at: <http://www.mediafax.ro/social/baconschi-cuvantul-fiziologica-sublinia-ca-rata-infractionalitatii-e-similara-altor-comunitati-5600317> (Date of access: 06.06.2012)

<sup>23</sup> The recording of the show *Realitatea la Raport (Reality under review)*, moderated by Andreea Cretulescu and Adrian Cioroianu, from 17.05.2012, is available at: <http://www.realitatea.net/realitatealaraport.html#emisiune17Mai2012-2130> (accessed at: 06.06.2012) and Center for Legal Resources and Romani CRISS Press Statement, 21.05.2012, available at: <http://www.crj.ro/EN/News/The-Center-for-Legal-Resources-and-Romani-CRIS-condemn-the-racist-statements-of-MoFA-Andrei-Marga/> (accessed at: 06.06.2012)



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