



The Roma: from criminals out of “physiological” causes to “traditionally” criminals - racist statements continue at the highest level in Romania

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The Center for Legal Resources firmly condemns the latest declarations, offensive to the Roma, of the president Traian Băsescu during an official state visit and draws attention on the danger of racist statements at high level which perpetuate prejudice against the Roma.

According to Mediafax news agency,¹ on the occasion of the official visit in the Republic of Slovenia, from 03.11.2010, president Traian Băsescu, declared, in reference to the Roma, the following: “I must tell you an essential thing – very many important politicians are making a confusion connected to the Roma. We cannot speak of all the Roma. Those we see going around Europe are nomadic Roma who come from Romania and other EU countries. Their cultural objective is to circulate from one place to another. Romania has over one million integrated Roma, they are part of the Romanian society. What we have not achieved is connected to the integration of nomadic Roma. (...) We have one more problem which must be stated 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.** If we will not honestly recognize also the problems which this ethnicity itself has, and the problems we have in getting to know the ethnicity, we will not find the solution to the problem”. Referring to his own initiatives, as mayor of Bucharest, to offer jobs to the Roma who had settled at the outskirts of the city, the president stated: “They did not like it and they went elsewhere. Of course, it was a kind of work in conformity with their qualifications – in waste collection services. Therefore, the problem needs to be seen in its entirety and if we only limit ourselves to saying what we must do, but not also to **what they must do**, we will not solve the problem”.

The statements of the president offend the dignity of the Roma and are profoundly discriminatory. Associating ethnicity with crime is unacceptable in a democratic state. In history, associating ethnicity with criminality led to the Roma holocaust, including in Romania. Another thinking mechanism which led to the horrors of the holocaust had been to allocate collective guilt and responsibilities to an ethnicity or another, in the same way as the president does when he speaks of “what **they** must do” that is, the Roma, who, isn't it so, should on top of that also perpetually accept to be employed in waste collection services, in that process called “ethnicizing jobs” and which, otherwise, points to a society where discrimination fully manifests itself. In the rule of law, the only obligations one has are to obey the laws and to pay taxes, while sanctions for not respecting these obligations are imposed on an individual basis, as responsibility before the law can only be individual.

If Minister of Foreign Affairs Teodor Baconschi associates ethnicity with crime based on an explanation having to do with the “natural, physiological”,² the president uses an explanation having to do with “tradition”. Such statements and such philosophies at high level, left unsanctioned, not only explain but also legitimate discrimination of the Roma by the majority. According to the last opinion poll conducted at the request of the National Council for Combating Discrimination, 72.4% of Romania's inhabitants agree with the assertion: “Most Roma break the laws”.³

Last but not least, we would like to highlight the fact that the Roma who travel to the countries of the European Union in search of a better life in societies where discrimination against them perhaps manifests itself less, represent by no means what is called “nomadic Roma”. They are, simply, Romanian and European citizens of Roma ethnicity who exercise their right to the freedom of movement attached to European citizenship. The idea to put them in the category “nomadic” who must be “integrated” respecting “their cultural objective to circulate from one place to another”, and not to speak of the real causes of their moving, is again offensive to the Roma from

¹ Mediafax.ro, *Băsescu: mulți dintre romii nomazi, “în mod tradițional, trăiesc din ceea ce fură”/ “Băsescu: many of the nomadic Roma 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/> (accessed at 04.11.2010)

² See declarations of the Minister Baconschi from 11.02.2010 on the margin of a meeting with the French State Secretary, Pierre Lellouche. For further details, see: <http://www.crj.ro/EN/Diplomatic-speech-with-racist-content-Antidiscrimination-organizations-ask-the-minister-Baconschi-to-resign-/> (accessed at 03.11.2010)

³ Insomar, *Fenomenul discriminării în România - percepții și atitudini*, Cercetare realizată la cererea Consiliului Național pentru Combaterea Discriminării/ *The discrimination phenomenon in Romania – perceptions and attitudes*, Research conducted at the request of the National Council for Combating Discrimination, 2009, p. 17, available at: <http://www.cncd.org.ro/noutati/Comunicate-de-presa/Sondajul-de-opinie-Fenomenul-discriminarii-in-Romania-perceptii-si-atitudini-in-anul-2009-69/> (accessed at 03.11.2010)

Romania who emigrate because of structural discrimination, social exclusion, lack of opportunity and poverty, some of these causes being the reason for which many Romanian citizens of Romanian ethnicity also leave.

Nomadic Roma from Romania have been forcefully settled during the communist period, to the extent that, at this point, one cannot speak of the nomadic Roma phenomenon in Romania. It is hard to believe that this social reality known to all who live in Romania has escaped the president. However, having in view that the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, mister Teodor Baconschi has only had a conversation with a Roma person "in the flesh" at the age of maturity as presidential advisor, when he realized that of the Roma "you can say whatever you want, except that they are imbeciles",⁴ nothing coming from our highest representatives would still surprise us. Ignorance, nevertheless, at this level, is just as offensive and discriminatory.

If the president has not made the statements quoted above, as reported on by the media, we are waiting for an official refutation.

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⁴ Mediafax.ro, *Baconschi despre romi "poți să spui despre ei ce vrei, dar n u că sunt imbecili"/ Baconschi on the Roma "you can say whatever you want of them, except that they are imbeciles"*, 23.02.2010, available at: <http://www.mediafax.ro/social/baconschi-despre-romi-poti-sa-spui-despre-ei-ce-vrei-dar-nu-ca-sunt-imbecili-5600512> (accessed at: 03.11.2010)