



The revival of high-level extremist discourse, in European Romania

Bucharest, 25.02.2010

The Center for Legal Resources warns against the racist discourse which has overwhelmed Romanian high-level political speech.

The Center for Legal Resources has firmly condemned the statements made on February 11th, 2010, by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Teodor Baconschi who associated ethnicity with crime followed by explanations for such an association connected to physiology and nature. CLR has asked for the resignation of the Minister or for his dismissal. Instead of resigning or being dismissed, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs came with a reply which makes us think of institutionalized racism.

Soon after¹, Romania's President, Traian Basescu also came to confirm this idea and to justify Minister Baconschi. In an original theory of human rights, later on also exposed by Minister Baconschi, the president has asked the Roma minority to assume both the responsibility for the state of poverty in which they live, and **collective responsibility for the potential individual crimes**, which supposedly create a problem for Romania in what regards its perception by others. From the President's speech, it can also be inferred that the Roma represent a backward ethnicity, refusing to progress and to send children to school. What is more, the President warns on the positive birth rate of the Roma which, according to the President, leads to a housing crisis in Romania. In return, no mention is made of the role of the state in what regards social inclusion, a concept which has never gone beyond theory, a theory also badly understood.

Finally, the Center for Legal Resources considers that such statements are of a nature to confirm stereotypes with regards to the Roma, to deepen rejection feelings towards this community and finally to lead to inter-ethnic conflicts. Furthermore, in a Romania which is seriously affected by the economic crisis, the Roma seem to be the ethnicity most likely to become the scapegoat.

As national focal point for the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), the Center for Legal Resources has been documenting in the past four years the situation of racism and xenophobia in Romania. In the past three years, starting with the events in Italy and the Mailat case, we have witnessed an increase in the number of racist statements at the highest level, starting with Romania's President, Prime Minister Tariceanu, Minister Cioroianu, continuing and increasing in seriousness with the same President Basescu, and a new Minister of Foreign Affairs, Teodor Baconschi. None of these statements was followed by a resignation, none was sanctioned at the level of public and political speech. The Romanian political class, in complete disrespect for those who died in the inter-war period in the concentration camps of criminal regimes spread all over Europe, seems to embrace attitudes similar to those which have led to the horrors of the Holocaust. Such tolerated statements range from the Nazi uniform, or the insight that the Roma, although physiological criminals, are not imbeciles.² All these dignitaries are seriously infringing upon the criminal or civil anti-discrimination legislation both Romanian and European. Despite all this, they remained in office following such statements.

Meanwhile, most of the Roma communities, the first ones to be affected by the economic crisis, caught not only in the vicious circle of poverty but also in the vicious circle of discrimination, are confronted with racial attacks like those from Sanmartin and Sancraieni, apparently rendered legitimate through "Protocols" outside the rule of law which reframe the Romanian constitutional order. At the same while, communities excluded both socially and spatially, are often times confronted with forced evictions done without following the legal requirements and securing a decent alternative. The most eloquent case, the case of Miercurea Ciuc, documented and represented before the court by Romani CRISS, but which has also drawn international attention on Romania through Amnesty International, remains an unsolved case since 2004. In lack of a better alternative, the Roma

¹ *Discursul Președintelui României Traian Bănescu, la conferința de lansare a raportului asupra Strategiei Naționale de îmbunătățire a situației romilor "Vocea comunităților" [The Discourse of the Romanian President, Traian Bănescu at the conference for the launching of the report on the National Strategy for the Improvement of the Situation of the Roma "The voice of communities"]*, Bucharest, 22.02.2010 at: http://www.presidency.ro/?_RID=det&tb=date&id=11883&_PRID=lazi

² *Mediafax, Baconschi despre romi: Poți să spui despre ei ce vrei, dar n u că sunt imbecili, [Baconschi on the Roma: You can say anything you want about the except that they are imbeciles]* 23.02.2010, <http://www.mediafax.ro/social/baconschi-despre-romi-poti-sa-spui-despre-ei-ce-vrei-dar-nu-ca-sunt-imbecili-5600512>

continue to live in containers, next to a water treatment plant without access to utilities, in an area where dwelling is forbidden for reasons of public health and where two small children have already died.³

CLR considers that such extreme cases, unfortunately not isolated, but also the kind of discrimination which the Roma are confronted with every day, at work, in school, in the hospital, discrimination which has been confirmed and re-confirmed by all opinion polls, are being justified by the high level racist discourses which remain unsanctioned.

CLR supports the protest of the Roma asking for their right to dignity, and considers that the right to dignity of all Romanians, regardless of ethnicity, calls for the resignation of Minister Baconschi, and for a serious condemnation of any discourse which takes Romania back to a dark past of its history.

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³ Romani CRISS, *Annual Report 2008*, p. 8, available at: <http://www.romanicriss.org/annual%20report%202008.pdf>