

*Štěchová Markéta:*

## **The Roma minority and integration procedures<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Extended summary**

The publication relates to the study „The Legal Protection of Ethnic Minorities Against Manifestations of Racial Discrimination“.

### **Research focus and objective**

In 2000, the Government of the Czech Republic adopted the Governmental Policy for Members of the Roma Community, intended to help their integration into society. The policy was designed to encourage gradual, unproblematic coexistence between the majority and the Roma community, and to integrate Roma citizens in society according to their own choice, and to actively involve all citizens in the administration of public affairs. Government documents defined integration as the „gradual functional coexistence of the majority and the minority, cultural interaction between the majority and all minorities, the development of minority culture leading to a multicultural society which enriches all of its parts.... Integration is a bilateral process which is dependent upon the voluntary effort to accept individuals who want to integrate, or as far as possible to facilitate their acceptance. The integration of Roma and other persons in society is not a special service for Roma but is above all a service for society as a whole“.

In order to implement the Government policy for the integration of Roma, it was necessary to understand the current situation with regard to Roma in the Czech Republic and to know what sort of problems exist between the majority and the minority and inside minority groups, in what areas racial discrimination occurs etc. In this respect a task was assigned to the Institute for Criminology and Social Prevention which included the performance of an „analysis of procedures designed to eliminate racial discrimination and to integrate Roma and other ethnic minorities in society, including the powers of individual institutions and an assessment of the effectiveness of these institutions’ work“. For an institute focusing on criminology the assignment was too broad, even though it is clear that the degree of integration of ethnic minorities and the level of their criminality are closely related.

### **Defining the solution to the problem**

From our perspective, the crucial element was to define for work purposes the terms integration and ethnic minority so that the assigned task was realisable in terms of research. It was asserted that the term integration of an ethnic minority has no single unambiguous meaning. According to various interpretations it may mean the assimilation of a culturally different entity (which roughly corresponds to the French model of integration), while others use the same term to understand the creation of a multicultural society, where each diversity is

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<sup>1</sup>Štěchová, M., Večerka, K., Novák, K., Danielová, K., Haubertová, D., Veverková, L. Romská minorita a postupy integrace. Praha: IKSP, 2002. 127 stran.

given sufficient space and respect and the majority culture relativizes its monopoly on correct behaviour (close to the British attitude). Between these two poles there are understandably many intermediate approaches, some of which, however, perhaps due to the vagueness inherent in formulating integration policy, act as a brake on actual integration and instead support segregational models of how a society functions. In this respect we may mention as typical the approach attributed to Germany<sup>2</sup>, where, although minorities are granted a right to cultural specificity, this also becomes an obstacle to participating in many activities (and the benefits ensuing there from) which are normal for members of the cultural mainstream.

At a cursory glance, the current situation in the Czech Republic (represented chiefly by the relationship between the Czech majority and the Roma minority) probably most closely resembles the German model. Tolerance to cultural differences is declared, but at the same time these cultural differences are perceived as unwelcome and their „living“ relegates individuals to the position of second-class citizens. On the other hand, however, citizens, members of the minority, who do not fulfil and do not want to fulfil the stereotypical model of cultural diversity are, due to the adjudged ethnicity, essentially compelled to be culturally different because this is expected of them.

Our task was not to formulate integration priorities and strategies but to *describe the state of affairs in this field in the Czech Republic*. We therefore did not assess which of the aforementioned models is the most appropriate, although we did use these models as a framework within which to work. This means that only through our own research did we seek to describe the specific implementation of this term in practice and how successfully it fulfils the task – *finding the way that harmonises the interests of most members of the majority with the interests of most members of the minority*.

We considered it necessary to specify the term integration of an ethnic minority in greater detail; as a result we divided it into the following fields: *cultural, socio-economic and political*. All research activities consequently focused on the description of integration of these three specific fields with the accent on the first two fields.

Although the research assignment referred to the integration of minorities, for us the fundamental phenomenon investigated was the **relationship between the majority and the one – Roma – minority**. Above all, the Roma minority in the Czech Republic is the main potential entity to participate in the process of integration. A number of integration programs are produced in the Czech Republic which focus primarily on the Roma minority and their influence on the development of the perceived reality provided us with sufficient material for the research analysis. Some facts, notably the existence of a stereotype and feeling that co-existence is a problem, make agreement and understanding more difficult, i.e. they do not lead to understanding of the other. We sought to describe these and other facts in several sociological probes whose results we have submitted.

## **Research among Roma advisers I.**

In 2001 the ICSP performed general research among Roma advisers in the district authorities. It was assumed that the Roma advisers would be well-informed on the local Roma community and problems of co-existence with the majority. The research focused on two basic issue areas:

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<sup>2</sup> This distinction is derived from the work of Rex, J. *Ethnic Minorities in the Modern Nation State*. Houndmills: 1996, pp. 51-54 and the book by Barša, P. *Politická teorie multikulturalismu (Political Theory of Multiculturalism)*. Brno: 1999, p. 10.

### **Characteristics of Roma inhabitants in the district with regard to their status and co-existence with the majority population**

- factual status of Roma in the district with regard to possible discrimination, description of tendencies towards change in this status;
- basic characteristics of Roma in the district with regard to integration;
- description of mutual perception of Roma and non-Roma in the district.

### **Factual activity and status of district Roma adviser in the district**

- status of Roma adviser in the district with regard to the status and conditions for performing work;
- what is the factual activity of the district Roma adviser;
- understanding of the district Roma adviser's work remit and what sort of authorisation he/she should have for such activity.

As research respondents we chose the district **Roma advisers** who could rightly be expected to have in-depth knowledge of the Roma issue at a local level. The group of respondents was thus composed of 74 district Roma advisers. Of this number 42 respondents (58.3%) considered themselves to be **ethnic Roma**. The resulting data were thus representative and reflect the opinions of Roma advisers on the monitored issue. A special questionnaire was devised for purposes of the research.

The following areas of problems were monitored: discrimination against Roma, basic Roma characteristics with regard to integration, e.g. problems, activity, qualifications, pride in own ethnicity and mutual perception of Roma and non-Roma (what Roma think of non-Roma and vice versa).

**Research results:** Roma advisers differed somewhat in their views on discrimination in certain areas of Roma life depending on whether they are or are not themselves ethnic Roma, with Roma respondents viewing the subject of discrimination in a rather more pessimistic light.

What are Roma's most common perceptions of non-Roma (Gadžé). Above all, „Gadžé“ – in the opinion of Roma advisers – are predominantly seen as educated, wealthy, intelligent and quiet people. Roma also generally agree that non-Roma are hard-working and clean, that they look after their children well and are law-abiding.

These positive perceptions of character qualities are however accompanied by the following negative judgements: The majority population is mean and disrespectful to their parents. Non-Roma do not sufficiently respect their fellow-citizens, have a tendency to harm Roma, boast and lie.

What, conversely – again in the judgement of the Roma advisers – **does the majority think about Roma?** The stereotypical perception has the following chief positive characteristics: Roma are good dancers and are musically gifted. They care for their parents, are cheerful and know how to enjoy themselves. On the other hand, Roma are negatively perceived as noisy, uneducated and unreliable, as thieves, as undisciplined people who do not abide by the norms of good neighbourly relations, do not abide by the law, lie and are work-shy.

If we compare the mutual stereotypes we find that the greatest differences in the evaluation are markedly to the **detriment of Roma** at the level of education, noisiness,

lower ownership of material assets, and Roma are also perceived in a worse light with regard to their industriousness, discipline, abidance by the law and reliability. **Roma are positively perceived** with regard to caring for parents, agility (dance) and general musicality. Also praised are Roma's greater ability to share things, to enjoy themselves and be happy.

The research set out to determine the factual status of the Roma adviser in the district and the conditions for performing his/her work, as quicker progress in integrating Roma at the district level can to a certain degree be linked to the quality of his/her work. It was found that the status of the Roma adviser at his/her district office is not materially affected by his/her ethnicity. It is worth noticing that, apart from their generally low financial appreciation, Roma advisers – regardless of ethnicity – chiefly complain about the little support their work receives from Roma themselves. Even Roma advisers who are ethnic Roma say they get more support from non-Roma than Roma. It would seem appropriate to consider a way in which the Roma adviser could be „recommended“ and brought closer to Roma. In this regard, however, it's necessary to remember that among the various Roma groups there exist many animosities which are highly counter-productive for the Roma adviser's work.

In this area, the research showed that the Roma adviser currently plays an important role in resolving questions that arise at a local level in Roma communities. The adviser's work is often not only advisory but – and probably detrimentally – also involves field work that should be the responsibility of Roma assistants, who are almost non-existent. The research showed that advisers generally have the situation well mapped in their districts and can identify the various animosities that occur between Roma and the majority society.

### **Research among Roma advisers II:**

Research was also conducted by questionnaire among Roma advisers and assistants focusing primarily on the integrational situation of Roma citizens. The research took place at a district level. Within the districts the situation was also specified in towns with a population over 7 000 (170 towns were mapped in 67 districts).

Problems were divided into several categories and the following information was obtained:

- 1) **Social problems** such as unemployment among the Roma population, poor housing etc. On the one hand, there is high unemployment among Roma, and on the other they are often criticised for receiving social welfare benefits and state social support as the only source of subsistence and for their unwillingness to enter employment.
- 2) **Problems in civil co-existence.** The largest problem in this respect are neighbourly relations. The majority population complains especially of noise in the night hours and mess around residential areas. This problem was registered in 33 of the monitored towns, i.e. 40 % of towns, in which according to the Roma advisers problems exist in co-existence between the Roma population and the majority. Poor neighbourly relations are especially marked in north Bohemia (one-third of towns), in west Bohemia (one-third of towns), in east Bohemia (one-fifth of towns) and in north Moravia (one-fifth of towns).
- 3) **Roma criminality.** Roma criminality was stated as a problem in 19 towns distributed relatively equally over the Czech Republic. It is quite alarming that in many cases criminal activity of children is also involved. For example, Břeclav registers crime perpetrated by

both adults and minors, and physical attacks on and blackmail of children from the majority perpetrated by Roma children. Šumperk records crime perpetrated by Roma with a racial sub-text, and Vsetín also encounters criminal activity by Roma who attack non-Roma citizens.

- 4) **Roma problems with drugs, alcohol and prostitution** exist in 11 of the monitored towns. They are most highly concentrated in north, west and east Bohemia.
- 5) **Problems in communication between the Roma minority and the majority and problems in dealing with the authorities.** These problems derive primarily from a failure to understand the specific nature of Roma ethnicity and from the view that Roma must subordinate themselves to the majority culture and assimilate. Roma feel a lack of understanding on the part of the authorities, which results in conflictual situations. They often accuse institutions of a lack of real will to resolve the so-called Roma issue. When dealing with the authorities Roma have to come into contact with an unprofessional approach, inflexibility, impatience and an inadequate evaluation of their situation. In all, dealings with the authorities are problematic in 10 towns, all of which are in Bohemia, chiefly in the north and south.
- 6) **Racism and prejudices towards the Roma population.** National intolerance was found to be a problem in 23 towns, mostly in south and north Bohemia, where they were recorded in 29 and 21 percent of towns respectively. Intolerance may be manifested for example in the non-acceptance of new Roma tenants who move into a house, the writing of petitions against the allocation of flats to Roma families in close proximity, suspicion of Roma in shops and their more careful inspection, the „lumping of all Roma in one bag“, their appraisal as being unable to integrate into society, low tolerance of their cultural differences, the generalisation and belittling of problems, mutual distrust, suspicion and abuse of Roma ignorance etc.

Physical attacks on Roma by members of the skinhead movement is another manifestation of racism and tension in relations between the majority and the minority. Roma advisers noted this as a problem in Nový Bor, Most, Litvínov, Moravská Třebová and Břeclav.

- 7) **Discrimination against Roma in services.** It often happens that Roma are not allowed into restaurants or discotheques or entertainment centres, or are not served in these places. Although this problem was recorded by only three towns (České Budějovice, Ostrava and Šumperk), it would seem that the problem is far more widespread and as yet not properly mapped.

It was stated that at present there exist many problems hampering the full integration of the Roma population in society. Most of these are of a systemic character and reflect the long-term policy towards the Roma community. Although it is possible to see, as our research showed, activities designed to change the situation of the Roma population, for example the creation of zero classes, the setting up of Roma and pro-Roma organisations, this is just the beginning of the long process that must be pursued for the successful integration of Roma. In our opinion, the most problematic of our findings is the social situation of the Roma population. The high level of unemployment, housing problems and the high percentage of Roma children in special schools are all inter-related and exacerbating factors.

Another significant problem is the majority society's approach to the Roma community. The generally intolerant environment and discrimination in many areas do not help Roma's attempts at integration. In the following field research in selected towns we attempted to examine all the afore-mentioned problems in greater depth.

### **Field research in selected towns**

The following facts were the chief findings from the field research in specific towns:

Above all it is important to state that certain discrepancies were found between the central policy of the state, which seeks the effective integration of the Roma minority, and the situation's development in the relevant towns. We will further document this statement.

On the basis of the information obtained in this research, as far as integration issues are concerned, we can say that Roma very often *request integration into the majority society*. On the one hand this legitimates integration efforts, although the problem is that the majority environment produces a whole range of hidden segregation mechanisms. The opinion of many inhabitants and at times also officials is succinctly expressed by an unnamed citizen: „*I don't want to say that they (Roma) should directly assimilate; it's enough if they adapt and live like us, we don't want anything more from them.*“

The configuration of relations and the inter-connection of the functions of individual institutions that influence the life of the Roma community together with the justified reservations of towns concerning centrally managed pro-Roma projects and towards local pro-Roma activities also *support the assimilation trend*. The ideal of such assimilation is social concord. In this spirit the co-existence of Roma and the non-Roma majority is reduced to a social level, which is manifested in the practical application of the criterion of the ability or willingness to adapt: those who want to adapt have the possibility to do so. Those who do not accept „civic obligations“ are thereby excluded from the community of „normal“ citizens and descend to the level of asocial elements. The consequences of this are borne by entire families, including children. A well-known problem is the fact that the assimilation tendency of part of the Roma community is nevertheless *directed towards the lowest, and by the majority itself for many reasons negatively perceived level* of the majority. This trend completes the deepening isolation of the Roma community and the community of majority asocial people in localions inhabited predominantly by Roma. The segregation of socially inadaptible families and their increasing numbers significantly precludes the likelihood of establishing social concord. On the other hand, Roma elites are distancing from the Roma community and often reject their Roma identity.

On the basis of the information obtained we sought to identify individual factors according to the role they play in the integration process of Roma and in the majority society.

### **Factors restricting the implementation of central integration policies :**

- practical impossibility of precisely defining the Roma target group from the position of the authorities (it is forbidden to establish records according to nationality or membership of an ethnic group);
- inadequate information on the part of the relevant authorities on central projects designed for the Roma community; projects are therefore not sufficiently put into practice;

- inability and lack of interest in improving the collective consciousness concerning Roma at a local level;
- reduction of the problem of co-existence of Roma and non-Roma in a social dimension;
- reserved attitude on the part of the relevant municipal representatives with regard to Roma and pro-Roma activities, resulting from generalised „bad experiences“;
- the illegitimate nature (e.g. the failure to discuss planned intervention with Roma) of previous external interventions in the social network on the part of the town and their subsequent failure;
- the negative attitude of municipal administrations in cooperating with the district in addressing the local Roma situation of communities and reliance on self-sufficiency in this matter.

### **Factors hindering integration :**

- high level of unemployment in the Roma community;
- prejudices and stereotypes on the part of the majority society towards Roma integration;
- they often imagine integration to mean full assimilation (that Roma cease to be Roma);
- the majority society does not feel itself to be culturally or otherwise enriched by the different culture and the existence of Roma (and other minorities);
- the majority society's negative attitude towards communal living with Roma and everyday contacts with them;
- the non-functioning of the civic sector, low-level ability and interest in improving collective consciousness concerning Roma at a local level;
- Roma's low consciousness of their own ethnic identity;
- non-existence of organised self-representation of Roma at a local level, the scattered nature of the Roma community;
- hidden segregation mechanisms on the part of the majority;
- the approach of certain Roma (as well as non-Roma) to social benefits as a natural thing to which they are entitled, and not as a temporary form of assistance in a difficult situation;
- municipal housing policy creating segregated communities of Roma and socially inadapted people, causing Roma to lose contact with life in the town and leading towards the creation of ghettos;
- discrimination against Roma occurring most frequently with regard to their employment, a factor exacerbated by a hidden and open segregation approach to Roma on the part of fellow citizens.

### **Factors supporting integration :**

- immediate addressing of situations where Roma have found themselves in material distress with parallel support to ensure their independence in the future (existence and functioning of the social network affecting the life of the Roma community);
- high-quality community work by a variety of local organisations (social, charity, church...);
- an incipient Roma intellectual elite with the possibility of its integration in social work in the town locality – tendency of many educated Roma not to distance themselves from the Roma community as used frequently to be the case in the past;
- the effort on the part of many Roma to integrate in the majority society, which legitimises the state's integration efforts;
- absence of acute racial inter-ethnic conflicts;
- application of specialised projects intended to encourage the employment of local Roma;

- the penetration of non-governmental and non-profit organisations in the existing state social network;
- targeted projects deriving from specific information on existing Roma cultural activities (deeper knowledge required of the internal structure of the Roma community);
- existence of a social network affecting the life of the Roma community;
- Romas' approach to education (Roma advisers almost unanimously agree that Roma are in no way discriminated against in their access to education as one of the most important integration factors).

The research also included an analysis of the state grant policy for Roma projects in 2000/2001. It was stated that in the Czech Republic the grant from the state budget may only be provided by central bodies of state administration, the Academy of Sciences and the Grant Agency (others specified by separate act are in practice generally not used). Grants may be provided to non-governmental non-profit organisations (NGO): civic associations, generally beneficial societies, relevant church facilities, or other legal entities founded or set up to provide health, cultural, educational and social services and to provide social and legal protection for children, if the central authority so decides, and to other legal entities and natural persons for publicly beneficial projects where stipulated by a separate act. Grants are provided to implement projects that help realise state policy goals and which conform to some of the main areas of state grant policy regarding NGOs. Grant funds are distributed via the Ministries and other state bodies.

Ministry of the Interior: one of the priorities of the crime prevention department is the integration of the Roma community and the aim is to support socially deprived Roma communities, prevent inter-ethnic conflicts and support the development of positive neighbourly relations within mixed communities.

Since 1993, the Ministry of Culture has announced an annual competition of tenders for the support of cultural activities of members of national minorities living in the Czech Republic; this chiefly concerns a variety of cultural events, festivals, magazine publications etc.

Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs – the social services department announced the „Social Services Development“ program. This includes tenders for the provision of a grant from the state budget to non-governmental non-profit organisations (civic associations, church humanitarian organisations, generally beneficial societies and natural persons) providing services to citizens in social distress (the homeless, the aged and also Roma...).

Ministry of Education, Youth and Physical Education – every year the department for youth announces a tender for the support of civic associations for children and youth and civic associations working with children and youth. Applications are also submitted by Roma and pro-Roma associations working with children.

Other funds are distributed via the Inter-Departmental Commission for Roma Community Affairs, the Government Council for Nationalities, the Government Human rights Council, the Grant Agency of the Academy of Sciences and the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic.

In conclusion we can say that, according to our findings, the Roma minority is currently best characterised by its dispersed nature, disunity of individual families (clans), high



unemployment, poor social circumstances and a different system of shared values compared to the majority population. On the other hand, there is a clear process of assimilation of some families. We can say that a large number of Roma are fully assimilated (not integrated), and that many of them live in inter-ethnic unions. A problem for the continuing integration process of the whole ethnic group is the fact that these people generally do not consider themselves to be Roma.

We may consider a positive development to be the formation of a Roma intellectual elite with the possibility and desire to get involved in towns' social work; the tendency has been detected on the part of many educated Roma not to distance themselves from the Roma community as used to be the case in the past. A variety of social, charitable and church organisations offer higher quality work at a local level. Many Roma are seeking to integrate in the majority society, which legitimises the state's integration efforts.