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12th Meeting
of the Council of Europe Dialogue with Roma and Traveller¹ civil society

“Teaching the history of Roma and Travellers”

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Report

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1. Introduction

The 12th meeting of the Council of Europe Dialogue with Roma and Traveller civil society focused on teaching the history and Holocaust of Roma and Travellers and on discussing with both civil society and member state representatives the importance of including these issues into educational curricula. Secondly, the meeting aimed at identifying opportunities to reform national curricula and school textbooks and the challenges which have been or may be encountered in producing such changes.

2. Thematic and Situation

Debates during the 12th Dialogue meeting were lively and dynamic. The meeting facilitated discussions between non-Roma and Roma scholars and civil society representatives. The meeting increased their common knowledge base on the current situation regarding past and on-going reforms and research regarding the subjects and identified many shortcomings and gaps in the current teaching materials and curricula. It also functioned as a networking platform offering both NGO activists and intercultural educators, researchers, curricula specialists, history book evaluators, exhibition and event organisers and memorial place activist's new opportunities to connect with other specialists in the field. The meeting emphasised the current need to create a proper framework for developing national curricula, school books and other learning elements that should feature all marginalised Roma and Traveller voices and also ensure

¹ The term “Roma and Travellers” is used at the Council of Europe to encompass the wide diversity of the groups covered by the work of the Council of Europe in this field: on the one hand a) Roma, Sinti/Manush, Calé, Kaale, Romanichals, Boyash/Rudari; b) Balkan Egyptians (Egyptians and Ashkali); c) Eastern groups (Dom, Lom and Abdal); and, on the other hand, groups such as Travellers, Yenish, and the populations designated under the administrative term “Gens du voyage”, as well as persons who identify themselves as Gypsies. The present is an explanatory footnote, not a definition of Roma and/or Travellers.

the inclusion of other existing minorities within larger ethnic groups of Roma and Travellers.

The introductory presentation by Jeroen Schokkenbroek, Director of Anti-Discrimination, Directorate General of Democracy, Council of Europe, emphasized that the Council of Europe had adopted several policy recommendations and other texts in relation to history teaching setting out the goals of history teaching in a democratic and pluralist Europe. The landmark Recommendation (2001)¹⁵ on “History teaching in 21st century Europe” offers guidance regarding the general aims of history teaching, including the European dimension, and underlines the importance of avoiding the misuse of history (such as history distortion or Holocaust denial). The recommendation is unconditional in its condemnation of the instrumentalisation of history for political gain, e.g. through the abuse of historical records.

Mr Schokkenbroek also mentioned that already in the 2010 Strasbourg Declaration on Roma Council of Europe member States agreed to take measures to foster knowledge of the culture, history, and languages of the Roma community and understanding of their culture and history.

Over the past decade, the Committee of Ministers has recognised on several occasions the longstanding historical presence of Roma and Travellers in Europe, which is still not adequately acknowledged in European educational systems. Their contribution to the common European cultural heritage is therefore underestimated by the public. To address this, the Council of Europe complemented in 2020 its earlier recommendations with a more specific text on the inclusion of the history of Roma and/or Travellers in school curricula and teaching materials.

In her opening speech, the Chair of the Council of Europe Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues (ADI-ROM), Ms Tatjana Andelic, pointed out that this meeting is in correlation with the previous Dialogue meetings held on the topics of combating antigypsyism and hate speech because the best way to fight against discrimination, hate speech and antigypsyism is to learn about the language, culture, tradition and history of another person or group. She emphasised that the ADI-ROM would continue to include these themes in its work trying to create synergies and co-operation with all relevant stakeholders on these issues.

To sum up, teaching the history of Roma and Travelers is still under debate due to the lack of political will in different countries and because some countries do not recognise Roma and Travellers as a minority. Therefore, in some countries it is necessary to work on the recognition of Roma and Travellers as minorities and add the history of Roma and Travellers to school textbooks and other relevant teaching and learning resources presenting Roma and Traveller history and cultural heritage as a natural part of the general collections of national history, such as in the relevant physical and online collections of national museums and archives.

In the past three decades, an enormous amount of work has been carried out at European level by the representatives of civil society and international bodies towards the recognition of the systematic oppression and societal exclusion of Roma and Travellers and violations of their human rights, racism, discrimination and consequences of unreversible damage caused to Roma individuals and communities such as the ones caused by forced sterilisation. One of the main achievements in this field has in many countries been the full recognition of Roma and Travellers as citizens of their countries and respect as rights holders.

Other significant steps forward include adoption of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in 1998 (<https://www.coe.int/en/web/minorities/at-a-glance>),

the adoption of the Declaration of the Committee of Ministers on the rise of antigypsyism and racist violence against Roma in 2012, and the European Parliament's Resolution on fighting antigypsyism in 2017 (<https://rm.coe.int/16800c0adc>).

However, in many countries, Roma and Travellers still continue to be subject to racism, different kinds of attacks, such as hate crimes and violence, stemming from prejudice that people have against them, not knowing their history and their everyday struggle. Furthermore, there are not enough positive examples showcasing active and exemplary Roma citizens in media which would reduce the level of prejudice towards them.

This is not new, as these problems have been prevalent already for centuries and have not yet been addressed sufficiently in many countries. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated once again that engagement and political will at all political and administrative levels are crucial for life improvements of the Roma minority. As national contexts differ, so do discourses and priorities.

Different reports show that the focus on teaching the history of Roma and Travellers is stronger in countries with robust social inclusion approaches compared to those countries that still struggle with fulfilling their citizens' basic needs (such as the provision of proper housing or halting sites and access to health care and other basic services), and that civil society organisations (CSOs) often provide necessary humanitarian and other kinds of support in the absence of any state action or where there is limited scope.

3. Voices of civil society

Civil society consultation, participation and co-operation are essential components of all member states' sustainable development and action in developing a framework that addresses the issue of teaching Roma and Travellers' history. Based on their activists' identities, experiences and advocacy work, civil society develops initiatives and tools that help drawing attention to the teaching of the history of Roma and Travellers in schools.

In order to remedy the current situation, it is very important to make conscious investments into the educational systems which often lack the budget and training necessary for teachers regarding learning about Romani history themselves in order to be able to provide quality teaching and teaching materials on the topic to their students.

4. Examples of good practices

Many changes have been achieved through the years when the Roma were a higher priority on the public agenda. Today, thanks to progressive EU and CoE policies different countries have included in their national action plans the teaching of Roma history and there are good practices such as teaching the Romani language at the University Aleksander Xhuvani in Elbasan in Albania and at the University of Helsinki in Finland.

There are other opportunities that already exist regarding the teaching of Roma and Traveller history and Holocaust and examples of good practice mentioned or presented during the 12th Dialogue meeting included the "Dikh He Na Bister" organised by TernYpe - International Roma Youth Network - through non-formal education or the work of the European Roma Institute for Art and Culture (ERIAC) through lectures, conferences, contemporary arts exhibitions, theatre

etc. which teach Roma and Traveller history, Holocaust and everyday realities around Europe. Furthermore, awareness of Roma and Traveller history is raised through the ERIAC Barvalipe Roma Online University, an online educational platform where Roma and non-Roma can access knowledge about Roma identity, history, arts and culture.

Support for teaching Roma history and Holocaust is also provided by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) in different ways, such as through a teacher's book on commemorating the Roma and Sinti Genocide and mapping the existing practices and identifying areas for improvement.

In 2019, OSCE/ODIHR has organised a study to learn from the experience of Austria in developing teaching and other educational materials about the Roma Genocide and including those resources in their educational curriculum. As a result, Roma and Traveller history and Holocaust remembrance are now being taught in some schools. Findings of a recent research concerning Roma Holocaust representation in European textbooks carried out by research consultant Marko Pecak points out that from the total of 41 references to Roma appearing in 23 (out of 88) Albanian textbooks exactly one sentence mentions the physical elimination of Roma by Nazi Germany.

In contrast, four out of 24 Belgian textbooks mention Roma and all four of these are history textbooks that refer to the Romani Holocaust. Similarly, in eight out of 35 French textbooks there are 71 passages and images referring to Roma, all except for one refers to the atrocities committed during the Second World War, and half of the German textbooks (41 out of 82) source the atrocities committed against Roma.

5. Findings

Different civil society organisations noted that Roma are not well represented in media and textbooks. The information, which currently exists is often very limited and unfortunately based on stereotypes, which sometimes means just noting crimes, poverty, etc. Participating civil society organisations pointed out that there is also a clear need to address this phenomenon and to promote positive role models from Roma and Traveller communities.

There is a need to teach the history of Roma and Travellers through the history of antigypsyism. As antigypsyism is found throughout Europe in different forms, it is recommended to educate all students on this type of European racism in all member states, adapting the content to the national context.

NGOs and minority associations also play a key role in the monitoring protocols. Do not touch the memorials! For example, do not try to move them after they have been established and also teach society and the young generation not to harm the memorials or behave in an incorrect or disrespectful way when visiting the memorial sites. Understanding Roma history is part of European history and should not be ignored. There is also a need to invest in educational systems as they lack funding, and to train teachers about Romani history.

6. History of Roma - Curricula and teaching materials

Education on Roma history is based on a gradual increase in scope and complexity, starting with personal history to the level where students are expected to understand the complex processes

of the historical development of the Roma people.

Challenges in the curriculum include the lack of continuous chronological teaching of Roma history in correlation with the history of Europe and that of the world.

7. Education materials, education of teachers

Teaching Romani history and Holocaust is very important in influencing the political will to implement positive actions. Roma history is part of European history and should not be ignored. Member States should develop teaching material on Roma and Traveller history and Holocaust by involving Roma historians, and where this is not possible co-operate with non-Roma scholars and utilise as a basis Roma and Traveller's personal stories and history as expertise. Some materials on Roma and Traveller history already exist but unfortunately not enough including insufficient age-appropriate teaching materials, documentaries and literature. It is absolutely necessary that member states include in their National Action Plans this well described and measurable action for developing and using these kinds of educational materials.

There should be more research regarding Roma history and Holocaust, such as identifying local survivors and documenting evidence and continuously updating the data that already exists. Teachers as well as trainers need to be qualified to deliver materials on cultural and history education. It is very important that schools do not use pictures and videos out of context and based on a stereotypical approach. Young people are using the Roma archive online to also provide online teaching. Coordination of this planning should be made a priority and operationalised by the Council of Europe.

At the moment the existing educational resources are typically used by professionals or teachers but could also be opened to a wider population such as the general public and family members of Holocaust survivors.

The participants of the Dialogue meeting raised a lot of questions regarding Roma and Travellers history and Holocaust teaching and many participants reflected on how much interest there is at national governments level and other national memory organisations and institutions to implement the proposed measures. They reflected on whether there are enough teaching materials, and on how important it is to push national museums to use these materials, and emphasised the strong need for far greater visibility of Roma history and Holocaust with the support of committed non-Roma activists. Also the importance of clearly practicing Roma responsive national budgeting for producing new up-to-date materials in different formats for wider media use and opening the gates to non-formal education was discussed.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

The one-and-a-half-day Dialogue meeting proved that it is very important to teach and include the history of Roma and Travellers and the Roma Holocaust in the canon of national history teaching since Roma and Travellers are part of different countries and their history, as Roma are contributors and part of the national history and the culture of each country.

When it comes to the use of relevant Council of Europe instruments and tools to support the teaching and learning of Roma and Traveller history and Holocaust it was recommended to generate more political and financial support for this reform process: the Council of Europe's "Strategic Action Plan for Roma and Traveler Inclusion (2020-2025)" approved by the Committee

of Ministers on 22 January 2020 also includes actions for promoting the teaching of Roma and Travellers history and culture, and to support the “Dikh He Na Bister” initiative as an international and informal education provided for young people. National processes should be coordinated and operationalised by the Council of Europe.

Council of Europe member states should:

1. Analyse and revise current comprehensive school and other relevant curricula, textbooks and other teaching or learning materials to eliminate stereotyping related to Roma and/or Travellers, promote diversity, and show the full complexity of history;
2. Teach the Roma Holocaust perpetrated by the Nazi regime and its allies as well as other discriminatory and racist acts committed against Roma and Travellers across Europe;
3. Regularly commemorate Roma Holocaust Remembrance (e.g. 2 August or another date);
4. Teach empowering and positive narratives about Roma and/or Travellers’ history, their contribution to the common local, national and European cultural heritage, economic history, their active role in anti-Fascist resistance movements; and ensure that member State measures in this field cover both formal and non-formal education;
5. Raise general awareness among citizens belonging to different age groups;
6. Arrange trainings, lectures and workshops on these topics especially in teacher trainings and among professionals working in basic services;
7. Edit the existing schoolbooks to train teachers on how to work with different segregated, scattered or fully integrated communities;
8. Combat school segregation and improve connection between Roma and children belonging to other ethnicities;
9. Include positive role models and real-life stories of Roma and Travellers in textbooks to overcome negative stereotypes;
10. Teach the history of Roma and Travellers through the history of antigypsyism. As antigypsyism is prevalent throughout Europe in different forms, teaching the history and current expressions and effects of this type of European racism to all students in all member States, also adapting the content to the national context. Students should also learn the history of Roma and Traveller from migration in medieval times to the present day.
11. Develop materials on Roma History as there insufficient Roma history and expertise based on personal stories and narrative;
12. Include in their National Action Plans actions concerning the development and use of these kinds of materials. Materials on Roma history exist but there are not enough
13. Recognize Roma and Travellers Holocaust and other historical persecutions and intervene in situations which includes attempts to practice Holocaust denial or distortion.

Civil Society Organisations should:

1. Analyse and revise current school curricula, textbooks and other teaching or learning materials to eliminate stereotyping related to Roma and/or Travellers, promote diversity, and showcase the full complexity of history;
2. Commemorate Roma Holocaust Remembrance (e.g. 2 August or another date);
3. Teach positive narratives about Roma and/or Travellers' history, their contribution to the common local, national and European cultural heritage, economic history, their active role in anti-Fascist resistance movements;
4. Cover formal and non-formal education;
5. Promote positive role models from the Roma community;
6. Raise awareness of state governments and the majority population about the importance of teaching Roma and Travellers history;
7. Train teachers on how to teach Roma and Travellers History;
8. Edit existing schoolbooks to train teachers on how to work with different segregated communities;
9. Produce good examples to overcome the negative stereotypes;
10. Promote textbooks and other materials such as documentaries which reflect positive on Roma and Traveller role models and stories;
11. Submit shadow reports to complement/contradict state reports;
12. Establish Roma and Traveller Youth leadership in planning and implementing commemorations at local, national, and international level;
13. Implement and strengthen youth-led development of new digital tools for Holocaust education and documentation of historical sites of persecution;
14. Develop new tools and methods for teaching history, using digital tools and digital memories;
15. Young people (who use the Roma archive online) should also do online teaching.

Generally speaking, there should be more research regarding Roma history, such as identifying survivors and updating the data that already exists. Teachers and trainers need to be trained to deliver those materials for cultural and historical education. It is very important not to use the Roma archive such as pictures and videos out of context or based on a stereotypical approach.