



ROMA AND LUXEMBOURGERS

There are people who love and people who hate Europe. I happen to be a fan. The European Union ended wars, queuing up for the customs and it gave a voice to even the smallest member-states, like Luxemburg with 500.000 residents. Yet millions of other EU citizens have no say in the matter, no Commissioner of their own and no MEPs in Brussels, for the mere reason that they are an ethnic minority, like Roma and Sinti, Europe's largest minority.

Why double standards? Is it because Luxembourgers are all white and Roma all dark? They are not. Thousand years ago, Roma left India and went to Russia, Persia, Turkey and Europe. Some intermarried with Jews and other non-Roma, or they lost their tan in Scandinavian countries. Even the Nazis noticed that racial purity is a difficult thing. They decided that 12.5 % of Roma or Jewish blood was enough to be deported.

Gadje, non-Roma, also have mixed blood. New archeological findings reveal that only 10 up to 20 % of Europeans descend from the original tribes, the others have DNA from the Middle East or Asia.

The major difference between Luxembourgers and Roma does not stem from ethnicity but from something that used to be very important in Europe: borders. Luxembourgers have them, Roma don't. The political relevance of the term "ethnic minority" is rather dubious. It means counting people in, not seldom to count them out. The reunification of Europe has deprived a whole nation from fundamental rights and this mainly happened because the 12 million Roma, present in larger numbers than Belgians, Swedes, Finns, Bulgarians, Czechs, Greeks, Danish, or Luxembourgers, did not live together in their own nation-state. The EU project is clearly in two minds. It looks like turning private gardens into a public park, where only former gardeners decide the zoning plan.

During communism everybody was forced to be communist, but in free Europe not everybody was allowed to become citizen. Václav Havel stated in 1993 that the fate of Roma would become the Litmus Test of Europe's democracy. Today, 10 years later, Roma are top scapegoats! Neo-Nazis organize marches in Czech Republic, France is expelling ten thousands of them, the Swedish police has kept a secret registry, Hungarian Roma flee from Jobbik... The situation is scary, but only few politicians dare to stick their neck out. Roma don't bring votes. They are a political issue, but no political factor. Passively or actively many administrations allow violations of rights. Thus the center shifts to the right, the right to the far-right and the far-right to the crime zone.

The failing inclusion of Roma is a tragic blunder! Available funds from Brussels vanish in corruption or remain unused, because populists don't spend money on scapegoats. It would harm their popularity and might turn poor and illiterate people into valuable members of the society. Patriots even. Populists are driven by emotions rather than by reason.

After nine years of researching in Eastern Europe, publishing books and articles, I found myself in the European Parliament, that I criticized so often that I was invited to do a better job. My team was well-equipped. The 3 assistants had a Bulgarian, Macedonian, Polish and Roma background and the four of us spoke 12 different languages. Together we had an excellent access to sources in new and candidate-member-states in Eastern Europe. We focused on corruption, abuse of funds, lack of transparency and on the fate of so-called minorities.

During the privatizations in post-communist countries, many people were reduced to poverty, others got extremely rich. And the poorest got the blame. There was a pattern. Former state officials financed far-right movements to distract people's attention from their profitable business to the misery of Roma. The scapegoating started long before the crisis, and worsened tremendously in the last 5 years. As a MEP I did my utmost to lay bare the facts. My team even went that far that in 2006, we helped opening the files of the former secret service in Bulgaria. The price we paid consisted out of hate-mail, spam, libel and a funny nickname. The leader of the EU Bulgaria Joint Parliamentary Committee, Geoffrey van Orden, was called the good cob, helping Bulgaria to join the EU. I was the bad cob.

Not only Geoffrey van Orden wanted Bulgaria to join in January 2007. Many in Brussels were in a festive mood and ready to welcome their comrades from Romania and Bulgaria.

As if they made scrapped metal out of the remainders of the iron curtain. Thus the main entrance condition, social inclusion of Roma, was set aside.

Worse... the blame for their exclusion was put on the Roma themselves. I quote from Van Orden's report, October 2006: "... They (Roma) should be urged to do their utmost to adapt to the society and use the possibilities offered to them..." Quote from the final report, in November: "... social integration is a two-way process, requiring that the Roma make efforts to adapt..."

Bulgaria and Romania joined. Walking in the Parliament, it could happen that I met a colleague MEP who was a former secret agent or former party boss. Bulgarians did not like them, but in Brussels was no screening. It was even taboo to discuss someone's past in public. Other new colleagues came from far-right parties: Ataka and Romania Mare. Together with Front National and a few other parties they formed the new parliamentary group ITS, Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty. Not coming to Brussels were Roma. Among the nearly 800 MEPs, only two were of Romani descent.

Roma, however, did come! Ten thousands profited from EU-membership to escape from social exclusion in East and build a future in the West. Berlusconi sent them back, Sarkozy copy-pasted his policy and Hollande prolonged it. Roma were no fortune-hunters. Denied education and jobs and threatened by far-right, they are basically political refugees, but they come from member-states that have been approved by Brussels. Europe DOES NOT HAVE political refugees! Thus Roma crossed the Ocean and asked for asylum in Canada. So many came that Canada begun to refuse them, playing down racism in faraway Europe.

Front National, Romania Mare, Vlaams Belang, British National Party, Jobbik, FPÖ, PVV, Sweden Democrats, Danske Folkeparti, True Finns, all have in common their euroscepticism. Their national identity is their main identity, Brussels is an invader and foreigners are suspicious.

ITS collapsed, the European Alliance for Freedom came, and according to polls about next year's elections, 100 seats will be taken by far-right parties. The number of populist MEPs will be even higher. Europe is close to failing its Litmus Test.

Having finished my mandate in 2009, I offered the European Commission to work out a Roma strategy with the help of my vast network. When that offer was declined, I started World Artists Initiative "Khetanes": a global movement of 900 Romani artists and scholars, who strongly focus on Europe. It is my firm belief that democracy must fulfill

two conditions: *all* people deserve representatives and *all* representatives must be qualified for their job. We don't need smooth talkers, we need brains to guide us.

Our biggest crisis is a moral one, our being in two minds. We want to build that public park, for reasons of efficiency, peace and stability, but we also want to keep our tiny little gardens. We want to move forward and to turn back, but there is no back. Internet and other modern technology have turned us into people without borders, like the Roma, indeed. Let us make the best out of it!

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