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RECENT ROMANI MIGRATION FROM SLOVAKIA TO EU MEMBER STATES: ROMANI REACTION TO DISCRIMINATION OR ROMANI ETHNO-TOURISM?[1]

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In contrast to most other analyses of Romani migration, this article is based on a series of interviews conducted with Romani migrants which formed part of an International Organisation for Migration (IOM) survey. The survey results suggest that socioeconomic factors are an important catalyst in the emigration of Slovak Roma. After providing a background to the migrations, the article analyses the Communist regime's policy towards the Roma, and its impact on their socio-economic status both prior to and after the changes of 1989. The authors identify a "Romani socialist-style middle class," created primarily by these policies, which constitutes the primary group of migrants. Reasons for their migration include limited chances for personal development, a perception of being discriminated against and a lack of focus on developing local responses. Their migration signifies an attempt to escape from social exclusion. The article further considers the reasons why migration is seen as a preferable solution, and then moves on to an analysis of both Romani and majority perceptions of the migrations. The authors conclude with a set of recommendations for policy-makers and non-governmental organisations.

The following article is the result of a survey conducted by the authors for the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), Bratislava, between April and July 2000. The survey's methodology was to conduct half-standardised interviews, while respondents were selected through the so-called "snowball" method.[2] This survey represents the first attempt to conduct a sociological test to conceptualise the reasons for Romani emigration from Slovakia.[3] The scope of this survey is unique, though there were two research attempts in Slovakia in the last two years to try to explain reasons for Romani migration.

The main objective of the survey was to identify the causes of migration of Romani asylum seekers into European Union (EU) member states since 1997, and subsequently to seek solutions that might contribute to eliminating those causes. Consequently, the article focuses on finding answers to the following questions: What groups of Roma migrate and why? Who are the potential migrants and what

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circumstances may create the impetus for their decision to migrate into EU member states? What is the position of migration among the strategies applied by the Romani ethnic minority in order to solve its problems? And, what are the possible ways of eliminating the causes of Romani migration? In addition, the article hopes to dispel some of the myths about recent Romani migration from Slovakia to EU countries. The article further reflects upon the reactions of the majority population in Slovakia to the migration of Roma.

Background Information about the Recent Migrations

Romani efforts to migrate from Slovakia to EU countries began in 1997 and have continued to the present date. In April 1998, the U.K. Home Secretary issued a statement in response to the increased numbers of Roma from Slovakia arriving in the United Kingdom. His straightforward message warned the Roma, "My message is: Don't think that you can get here. In the cases where there are no legitimate grounds for granting asylum, my policy is to refuse entry and to deport such people."[4] In response to the Romani exodus from Slovakia, the British government reintroduced a visa obligation for citizens of the Slovak Republic on 8 October 1998.[5]

More than 1000 Slovak Roma sought asylum in Finland in June 1999. There was speculation that the Romani migration to Finland was organised: Finland would hold the EU Presidency in July 1999 and Slovak diplomacy held great expectations that the December 1999 summit would upgrade Slovakia to the first group of EU candidate states. The political opposition (Vladimír Mečiar's Movement for a Democratic Slovakia—HZDS) and travel agencies issued plane tickets to Roma, and a shadow of suspicion was cast even on the influential Romani political party Romani Intelligentsia for Coexistence (RIS) led by Alexander Patkoló.[6] The Finnish government did not grant refugee status to any of the Romani applicants and on 6 July Finland introduced a visa obligation for Slovak citizens in an effort to prevent another influx of Slovak Roma.

Several top Slovak political representatives, including Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda, have admitted that the recurrent mass exodus of Slovak Roma represents a serious threat to Slovak membership of the EU. Romani migrations also drew the attention of EU representatives interested in Slovakia's human and minority rights protection. The so-called Romani "exodus" to Finland has aroused negative public responses and repeatedly worsened relations between the Romani minority and the Slovak majority. Because the country's potential EU membership could be jeopardised by the issue, Deputy Prime Minister Pál Csáky and Deputy Foreign Minister Ján Figel' established an interdepartmental committee to tackle problems related to the migration in July 1999.

The migration of the Roma to EU member states continued from 1999 to 2000. Many destination countries tried to protect themselves from immigration waves by introducing visa regimes, a move that sparked an intense and often emotional public

debate. By that time, however, many Roma were already returning to Slovakia both voluntarily and by force.[7] The Slovak government even aided their return by sending a special government aircraft to bring Roma home. The return of the Roma exposed their unpreparedness to reintegrate into Slovak society, and the disinterest among state authorities in helping them to do so. Recent Romani migration also demonstrated the breadth of the social distance between the majority population and the Roma and the depth of Slovak myths about Roma.

From 2001 to 2002 the migration of Slovak Roma to EU member states continued but its form changed. There was no massive exodus of Slovak Roma to any particular destination, although departures by individual families and small groups of Roma to various EU member states have become a regular phenomenon. Fortunately, the majority population avoided emotional reactions to the threat of certain EU member states to reintroduce a visa regime, and the public debate on this issue has calmed somewhat.[8]

Initially, the westward migration of Slovak Roma shifted the attention of EU officials to human and minority rights in Slovakia, feeding a general anxiety that the country's integration ambitions would be thwarted. However, during his visit to Slovakia in February 2001, EU Commissioner for Enlargement Günter Verheugen soothed concerns that the Union would connect these two issues. Verheugen declared that it was impossible to connect the issue of Romani migration and the issue of racial discrimination in Slovakia. He also stated that Slovakia complied with the Copenhagen criteria for EU membership.

On 22 May 2001, Deputy Prime Minister Pál Csáky presented a report based on information gathered by the Interior and Foreign Ministries and the Slovak Intelligence Service suggesting that certain Romani representatives were capitalising politically on Romani migration. According to the report, these officials were using the threat of Romani migration and its international implications as pressure to increase financing for programmes to improve the status of the Romani minority. The report observed that Romani migration has sometimes had a criminal background: Romani usurers who forced their debtors to emigrate to be able to repay their debts. Groups that according to Csáky benefited from Romani migration included controversial international groups such as Opre Roma, as well as other ultra-left groups from EU countries.[9]

The migration of Slovak Roma represented a serious political problem for some EU member states. The United Kingdom and Belgium were subjected to heavy international criticism for their decisions regarding Romani immigrants from Slovakia. The United Kingdom was chastised particularly harshly after the House of Lords decided on the matter of Milan Horváth in July 2000.[10] Belgium, for its part, came under fire after it deported 74 Slovak Roma in October 1999.[11] The case of the 74 Roma was also pleaded before the European Court for Human Rights in Strasbourg, which in March 2001 sustained some parts of the complaint of mass deportation by a group of Roma.[12] The Court also awarded 10,000 euros in damages to a Romani

family called Čonka, who had filed a complaint in relation to the case. In this decision, the Court found that Belgium had violated various articles of the Convention including Article 5(1) (the right to liberty and security of person) and Article 4 of Protocol 4 (prohibition of collective expulsion of aliens) through the manner in which it lured the applicants to the police station in order to effect their removal.[13]

Basic Information about the Romani Population in Slovakia

The Roma are the second-largest ethnic minority in the Slovak Republic. This is corroborated by data from the two population censuses conducted during the country's post-Communist history. In the 1991 census, 75,802 Slovak citizens declared Romani nationality (1.4% of the Slovak population); in the latest census conducted in May 2001, the official size of the Romani population had increased to 89,920 inhabitants (1.7% of the Slovak population).[14] Various estimates, however, put the Romani population at vastly higher figures. Head counts conducted in 1989 by local and municipal administrations suggested that there were 253,943 Roma (4.8% of the population); however, these statistics registered only socially dependent citizens. It can be assumed that the number of Roma in Slovakia is today even higher.[15] Recent estimates by experts put the total number at between 420,000 and 500,000,[16] a number continuously on the rise due to the high Romani birth rate. Slovakia has one of the largest *per capita* Romani communities in the world, constituting potentially 8% to 9% of the country's population.[17]

The Romani community in Slovakia has many different subgroups. The most common are colonies of settled Roma—Rumungros—and nomadic Vlach Roma; the remnants of the Germanic Sinti represent a separate group. Slovak Roma also differ in the language and dialects they use—in mainly ethnically Slovak regions they use some Slovak words and dialects, while in the predominantly ethnically Hungarian area of southern Slovakia they use Hungarian.[18]

The Roma constitute a truly distinct minority and resolving the Romani issue requires a rather complex approach. The unsatisfactory socioeconomic situation of most Roma in Slovakia raises the question: are they becoming more of a social rather than an ethnic minority? Expert and professional circles see the Roma as becoming an "underclass," a word that perhaps best describes the inhabitants of segregated Romani settlements. The general characteristics of an underclass—such as long-term unemployment, fragmentary work history, permanent success on the secondary labour market only and dependence on social welfare benefits—accurately describe the situation of those Roma who dwell in Romani settlements and, increasingly, those who reside elsewhere.[19] The "Romani issue"—the deteriorating socioeconomic status of the Roma and the majority's strongly negative perception of the Roma—is becoming the most important challenge faced by Slovakia in its effort to join the EU. Slovakia has proportionately the largest Romani minority of all EU candidate countries, and the one with the worst social status. The European Commission has

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repeatedly commented that the Roma are an exception to the generally acceptable situation of ethnic minorities in candidate countries aspiring to join the EU.[20]

The Situation of Roma in Slovakia under Communism

The IOM survey and this article proceeded from the assumption that the mass migration of Roma outside the borders of Slovakia was a direct consequence of policies regarding Roma pursued by both the Communist regime before 1990 and the democratic regime in the years since. The following paragraphs outline these policies.

The Communist regime refused to recognise the Roma as a particular nationality. They assumed that the Roma could overcome their backwardness only if they gave up their way of life and assimilated as far as possible to the majority. Besides other things this meant that they should not found Romani cultural organisations and youth and sports clubs. The Roma in Slovakia tried in 1948 to found an organisation of a cultural and social character, the Association of Slovak Gypsies, but the association was not permitted. In 1969 the Union of Gypsies/Roma was created, but the Communist Party and state establishment abolished it in 1973.[21] The Roma could not sing Romani songs at school, or publish Romani books and magazines. There could be no Romani children's programmes on television. Moreover, they could not be classified as "Roma" or "Gypsies," but only as "citizens of Gypsy origin."[22]

The state government did not try to understand the Roma, nor to learn about their opinions and expectations, but instead imposed on them what the state considered to be beneficial programmes and spent a large sum of money doing so.[23] The efforts of the state were primarily aimed at resolving problems associated with residence, employment and school attendance. Nevertheless, even these well-aimed intentions were carried out unprofessionally, insensitively and frequently violently. In the case of Vlach Roma, the last to be living a nomadic lifestyle, the Communist authorities came to the conclusion that living in houses was more appropriate. On 17 October 1958, without consulting those whom it concerned most, they issued Act no.74/1958, "O trvalom usídlení kočujúcich osôb" (On the Permanent Settlement of Nomadic Persons), on the basis of which they "settled" the Roma. They later resolved issues over places of residence for Roma in a similar fashion—they moved disadvantaged Romani families into new apartment blocks. The Roma had many difficulties in adapting to these new conditions to which they were not used.[24] The same approach was again used to educate Romani children: new legislation was issued that forced Romani parents to send their children to school.

Consequences of the Regime's Policies Towards the Roma

The majority of the Roma were at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder and were the target of different experiments by the Communist regime aimed at the improvement of their social status. The Communist regime based its policies on the assump-

tion that equalising the standard of living of the Roma with that of the national average would eliminate any reason for other differences between them and the majority population.[25] The government employed different measures that could be characterised as acts of social engineering. These included the dispersal of the Roma within Slovakia as well as from Slovakia to the Czech Republic; the disintegration of natural Romani communities; the removal of the rural Romani population from Romani settlements to cities and industrial areas; the destruction of natural bonds between the Romani community and the majority population; insensitive and forced allocation of flats to Roma from socially disadvantaged environments; forced compliance with general compulsory employment, under threat of imprisonment; statutory enforced school attendance for children; and the obligatory participation of Roma in disease prevention campaigns.[26] These apparently positive results were achieved through force and by employing measures that imposed external pressure without the active participation and acceptance of the Romani community. Despite the fact that the government managed to achieve a much higher standard of living for most Roma in comparison with past decades, many of the forms of behaviour typical to the traditional Romani family remained.[27] The process of modernisation of the Romani community during the Communist era was predominantly one-dimensional, taking place only on the level of material improvement.

However, these meagre material gains came at a much higher cultural cost. Measures regarding Roma adopted by the Communist regime after 1948 disrupted the traditional structure of the Romani community and the traditional place of the Roma in the social structure of local communities. A new structure, along with a new way of incorporating Roma emerged as a result of the following interrelated social processes.[28]

Newly Permeable Borders in Romani Settlements

Many Roma began to leave their native settlements, which traditionally protected them from the non-Roma world. They divided into two groups—urban Roma with higher prestige and rural Roma with lower prestige. They also began to be divided into Roma who lived in "proper" houses and flats, dispersed among non-Roma, and Roma who continued to dwell in shacks, concentrated in typical Romani settlements. The former class, naturally, enjoyed higher prestige, while the latter had lower status. The majority society has never given adequate attention to this process. The prevailing opinion was that the painful problems of integrating Roma into society and reversing their marginalisation were only contemporary and that eventually they would be resolved by assimilation.

Changing Social Organisation of the Romani Population

Measures adopted by the Communist regime were aimed at atomising the then

communal way of Romani life into a nuclear family structure. This paved the way for the Communist administration to have the Romani community "under control." At the same time, the cultural dominance of the majority prevented the Roma from organising their community according to the traditional Romani structure.

Assimilation Offered as the Only Possible Way of Solving the Problem of Integration into Society

The Communist regime tried to make the Roma part of the "people of the Socialist country." For many Roma, this meant liberation from their original society and from traditional ties. It invited them into the space of citizenship, in which every person is protected regardless of his or her physical, ethnic or other specific identities. However, after 1989, the majority began to promote a differentiated approach. While this enabled the majority population's own members to become more and more individual, it began to force the Romani minority to return to its traditional communal type of organisation, based on common anthropological features that differentiate them physically from the rest of society. One female respondent from the IOM survey said that she always considered herself to be a Slovak of Romani ancestry. She married a non-Rom and both have always considered such a marriage quite normal. "Today I know that I am Romani and a second-class citizen," she said. "The colour of my skin always betrays me. In the Communist times it wasn't so. Nobody seemed to care about it back then. Neither my classmates at school nor my colleagues at work ever reminded me that I was Romani. Today, you have forced me to become one."

Romani Emancipation Offered through Special Policy Measures

The Romani community's way of life was fundamentally influenced not only by the Communist regime's measures directed at the entire Slovak population, but also by those social measures designed specifically for the Roma. Of the former, the most important was a general ban on running any kind of private business. The Roma, who have traditionally run their businesses almost exclusively as small entrepreneurs—artisans and tradesmen—were particularly affected by this. Because Roma were not motivated enough by the Communist regime to acquire education, their income and employment options became fully dependent on the supply of manual labour jobs.[29]

The social measures designed specifically for the Roma were meant to eliminate their poverty. The main tools for achieving that objective were special social security benefits and social advantages. On the one hand, this method of external social assistance limited the extent of poverty among the Roma; on the other hand this approach led to the creation of a culture of dependence.

New Stratification of the Romani Community

As a result of the above-mentioned processes, two new classes of Roma emerged: the Romani intelligentsia and a new social class that we call the "Romani socialist-style middle class."[30] In fact, however, the second has never been a true middle class. Viewed from the perspective of the entire Slovak society, this class should be placed as an "upper working class." Only a handful of the Romani intelligentsia members belonged to a true middle class during the Communist period. Viewed from the Romani community's perspective, they were a constantly growing class of people whose social status was positioned between those who continued to live in the vicious circle of poverty and exclusion in Romani settlements and members of the Romani intelligentsia. Typical in this respect was the experience of one of the female respondents of the IOM survey. As a mother, she would read Slovak bedtime stories to her children. Neither she nor her husband would ever speak Romani in front of their children; had other children on the street not told them, the children would have never known that they were "Gypsies."

Impact of Previous State Policies for the Roma after 1989

The social, economic and political transformation after 1989 began in circumstances that, with regard to the Romani population, can be characterised by the following: relatively tense relationships between the majority population and the Roma, originating from feelings of unjust redistribution of resources; adjustment by Roma to the conditions introduced by the Communist regime and its rules; Roma entering the transition period with considerably lower qualifications in comparison with the majority population; and Romani working habits that were inadequate for the requirements of the transforming economy.[31] The gradual reconstruction of the economic, political, cultural and social life of Slovak society had taken away all of the securities obtained by the Roma during the Communist regime. The Roma were not prepared for these changes. In the new social conditions, the typical Slovak family has revitalised a strategy of in-house consumption separate from family networks. Self-sufficiency has not been characteristic of most Romani communities either in the past or in the present.

The unemployment rate among the Roma rose to extremes after 1989, reaching 100% in some Romani settlements. Exact statistics for Romani unemployment do not exist, and one can only make estimates on the basis of an assessment of the overall situation in Slovakia's more troubled regions.[32] Districts with the highest share of Roma are also those districts that are most severely hit by unemployment. However, unofficial data from the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family show that the number of unemployed Roma in Slovakia is increasing consistently, and that the Roma represent a significant majority of the long-term unemployed in Slovakia. The main factors influencing the high unemployment rate among the Roma are the

following: their low level of qualifications; the poor work ethic of some Roma; the lack of interest among some Roma in finding a job on public benefit work projects; the general scarcity of job opportunities, especially in regions with a large Romani population; and social discrimination in the labour market.[33]

Why do Roma Migrate?

The question of the nature of recent Romani migration into EU countries is very sensitive. It is important to mention in this respect that in the twentieth century Roma in Slovakia did not lead a nomadic way of life, unlike Roma in Mediterranean and Balkan countries. Therefore, recent Romani migration from Slovakia is not a reflection of a nomadic Romani past.[34] When evaluating recent migrations, two controversial opinions prevail among Slovak citizens. While the Roma explain their migration as a result of discrimination, most Slovaks label the migrations "ethno-tourism." In fact, emigration is merely one of the many strategies used by local Romani communities to solve their problems. Our survey has shown that if a particular Romani community chooses migration over other strategies, it is usually due to a combination of the following factors:

The Existence of an Example, and Informal Information and Assistance

Any Romani person who has successfully improved his or her socioeconomic situation through migration provides detailed information on the necessary methods and procedures to people to whom he or she feels connected. Subsequently, he or she becomes an example, a model to be followed by others. This information spreads through Romani communities. The result is a mass migration, an originally spontaneous movement that attracts speculators who profit by helping to organise the movement.

Legislative Measures and Calculation of Profit

During their stay abroad, some Roma have managed to save significant amounts of money if they had the financial discipline. Because certain Slovak laws may also give an incentive to migrate, even those who are not able to save large amounts of money may consider migration.[35]

Organised Migrations and the Indifference of State Authorities

Over recent years, usury has become a very lucrative business within the Romani community. There have been cases of Roma who owed money to the local usurer and were forced to emigrate in order to obtain funds to pay off the debt. Other Roma take out loans from the local usurer in order to migrate, and pay it back on their return. There have even been cases of usurers migrating in order to be able to lend money.

Racially Motivated Violence and Feelings of Helplessness

Racially motivated violence in Slovakia is a motive to migrate. Each asylum seeker told authorities in his destination EU country that he feared violence in Slovakia. Yet only a small proportion of asylum seekers have actually been victims of a racially motivated assault.[36]

The IOM survey findings indicate that the main reason for Roma migrating into EU member states is a desire to maintain the living standard they have achieved. Every single Romani person with whom IOM researchers have spoken claimed that it was easier for Roma to live in Slovakia before 1990. One of them said, "It is necessary to return the Rom to where he was ten years ago." He voiced a typical desire among Roma to return to the higher standard of living under the Communist regime. The main objective of the Romani emancipation endeavour is to overcome deepening economic, social, cultural and political exclusion. To the Romani middle class that emerged during the Communist period, this means continuing the socio-economic growth that Roma, in their own opinion, witnessed before 1989.

The theoretical base for understanding the emergence of international migration as a basic structural feature of industrialised countries remains weak. The recent boom in Romani immigration to EU countries has therefore taken officials, citizens, and demographers by surprise and popular thinking remains mired in nineteenth-century concepts, models and assumptions. At present there is no single, coherent theory of international migration, only a fragmented set of theories that have developed largely in isolation from one another. Current patterns and trends in migration suggest that a full understanding of contemporary migratory processes will not be achieved by relying on the tools of one discipline alone.

Understanding the recent Romani migration from a theoretical point of view is at least as difficult as finding a satisfactory solution to the migration crisis and designing tools to improve the status of Roma in the countries affected by migration. The new economics-of-migration theories show promise in evaluating why migrations commence; the network theory may offer insights as to why migrations continue.[37]

However, economic theories cannot satisfactorily explain the beginnings of Romani migration. Roma from Central and Eastern Europe have virtually no possibility of long-term labour migration to the West. Short-term labour migration is impossible because of the nature of Romani migration: Romani emigrate in nuclear or extended families rather than as individual skilled labourers. Therefore, the only possibility for leaving the "East" to seek an improvement in quality of life in the West since 1989 has been to apply for political asylum. Typical Romani migrants at the end of the twentieth century were therefore almost exclusively asylum applicants from Central and Eastern Europe.

Another difficulty in applying economic theories of migration to Romani migration from central Europe lies in the spectrum of problems they are currently

facing. Their historical marginalisation, lifestyle and a social consciousness that is ill-suited to a post-industrial way of life mean that the majority of the Roma are literally "out of time." Unless Roma are provided with, and are willing to take, the opportunity to acquire the necessary skills, they will find themselves even further disenfranchised as Central and Eastern European economies catch up with those of the West.

Who Are the Migrants and Who Are the Potential Migrants?

Most members of the so-called "Romani socialist-style middle class" (hereafter "Romani middle class") gradually lost their jobs between 1990 and 1998. A sharp decline in the living standard they had achieved, enhanced by the real threat of decreasing social security benefits, has endangered the social status they acquired in the past and has pushed them back into the lower class. However, these are people who could make a living during the Communist era, and they are trying to manage now. They are seeking and exploring various defence strategies; migration is one of them. Due to their social intelligence and skills, but most of all thanks to assistance and information offered by the entire Romani community, they know how to get to Finland, Belgium, The Netherlands or the United Kingdom with their whole family. They also know that they stand better chances in those countries of maintaining their existing level of income and of creating opportunities for their children either through finding work or through exploiting a more generous social security system, or a combination of both.

Roma who live in a desperate social situation in segregated Romani settlements do not migrate: their social exclusion is absolute. Roma who are wealthy or are becoming wealthy do not migrate either, because they have something to lose. Wealthy Roma are willing to migrate only after they have gone bankrupt or out of business for other reasons. Representatives of the Romani intelligentsia also do not migrate, since they too have something to lose. For the time being, they hope to be given the same chance to win adequate recognition as members of the non-Romani intelligentsia are given, especially as civil servants.[38] It is not easy to establish a clear profile of the typical Romani asylum seeker from Slovakia using classic demographic categories. Most asylum seekers have come from the Košice and Michalovce districts in eastern Slovakia, especially from the town of Michalovce and the villages of Pavlovce nad Uhom and Malčice. According to the IOM survey, the typical Romani asylum seeker

1. hails from eastern Slovakia (the western Slovak territories have remained virtually unaffected by Romani migrations);
2. speaks Slovak (Hungarian-speaking Roma do not often migrate);
3. resides in towns and larger villages (smaller villages and settlements have also remained virtually unaffected);

4. enjoys an above-average social status in comparison with other Roma (most migrants originate especially from the Romani middle class);
5. has an above-average education in comparison with other Roma (most migrating Roma have completed primary, some of them even secondary, education);
6. has experience of work outside his or her own region (among migrants, a significant number of Roma have worked in remote regions of Slovakia, in Prague or in the mining region of northern Moravia); and,
7. as far as Romani subethnic differentiation is concerned, most migrants are Rumungros and not Vlach Roma (although, in terms of their habits and traditions, Vlach Roma are much closer to the nomadic way of life than Rumungros).

One fact that is often disregarded in analysis Romani migrations is internal migration within Slovakia after 1989. This was particularly apparent in eastern Slovakia, where the Roma have migrated from villages to larger towns; at the same time, other Roma, especially those with lower economic standards, have migrated out of towns back to their original settlements. This internal migration has a profoundly socioeconomic character and has contributed to the overall trend towards "ethnicising" poverty in Slovakia. Since Romani migrations within Slovakia in most cases result in *de facto* segregation by creating urban and rural ghettos, they should be perceived as a negative phenomenon that will generate even more problems in the future and will further undermine society's efforts to resolve the Romani issue.

Reactions of the Majority Population to the Romani Migration

A particular aspect of Romani migration is collective departure, including the departure of entire families from a certain locality. The collective departure of the Roma creates and multiplies existing social tensions: the majority population blame Roma for the re-imposition of visa requirements for Slovak citizens by several EU member states, such as the United Kingdom in 1998. Given the EU membership ambitions of the Slovak Republic and the gradual harmonisation of visa policies of applicant and EU member countries, the re-imposition of visas for Slovak citizens has led to an increased EU interest in the situation of Roma in Slovakia and, at the same time, has increased tensions between the majority population and Roma.

Differences in opinion over the reasons for Romani migration are connected to political orientation, sociopolitical position and ethnic origin. The majority population, in general, believes that Roma leave for EU countries with an intention to improve their financial situation; the majority of the media in Slovakia refer to Romani migration as "ethno-tourism." Roma, on the contrary, often point to the existence of both hidden and open forms of discrimination in Slovakia as a direct cause of migration. At the same time, it is necessary to note that even Slovak Romani representatives do not have a single, united position regarding migration to the EU. Indeed, a smaller, more liberally oriented segment of the majority population does

not share the widely accepted idea that Romani migration is simply a matter of ethno-tourism.

According to an analysis conducted by the Slovak Helsinki Committee, the migration of Roma into EU countries significantly influenced the frequency of news items about Roma in the Slovak media.[39] Often, the topics of discussion were not directly connected to migration, but the media's interest seemed to be influenced by a realisation of the importance of this issue for Slovakia's aim of integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. For the majority population, Romani migration into EU countries is a question of economics and a product of efforts by the Roma to make easy money through the asylum process. The Slovak media create and shape public opinion—the vast majority of reports present Romani migration first and foremost as a result of efforts to improve economic conditions.

This bias is illustrated by the way in which the different media report the "fact" of organisation of the Romani exodus. The nationalist daily *Slovenská republika* frequently reports that the migration of Roma is organised by groups with an interest in ruining the good name of Slovakia abroad. The social-democratic *Pravda* and liberal *Sme* similarly spread the suspicion that the exodus of Roma is organised, but without the same degree of obsession with the idea that *Slovenská republika* presents. Media bias can also be found in an analysis of the expressions used when discussing the migration of Roma. Neutral phrases include the "departures of Roma," the "migration of Roma" and the "emigration of Roma" and can be found in the pages of *Pravda* and *Sme*. More expressive phrases, which to a certain extent present an opinion about Romani emigration, include "Romani exodus," "organised departure of Roma," "asylum adventure," the "tricks of Roma during organised events" and the "conspiracy of Roma," as well as the broadly used phrase "Roma ethno-tourists." Expressions of this type are found in all three dailies; however, the strongly evaluative and sometimes condescending expressions are found only in *Slovenská republika*: "they head towards a fjord" and "Roma on a research trip."[40]

From 2000 to 2001, the unrelenting Romani migration gradually changed the attitudes of majority populations toward the Roma in EU member states as well as Slovakia. While in the past drug addicts used to be the least desired neighbours for Belgian citizens, recently they have been replaced by the Roma—39% of Walloons and 30% of Flemish would not want a Roma as their neighbor.[41]

Conclusion

To summarise the findings of the IOM survey, mass migration of Roma from Slovakia to certain EU member states is in general a consequence of the following:

1. Degradation of the socioeconomic status of members of the so-called "Romani middle class"; obstacles to upward mobility for children of these people; and a decline in the degree of integration into particular local communities that this

"class" has already achieved.
2. Attitudes on the part of a certain group within the Romani minority that are characteristic of an "underclass." Long-term social work is required to change these attitudes.
3. Distrust of non-Romani institutions and organisations, which leads to disrespect for the rules and principles that are in place in those institutions and organisations.

The ongoing mass migration of Roma has remained local in character, at least for the time being. Information and assistance from members of the Romani community provide the proximate catalyst for this migration. Subsequently, this impetus may have been joined by other elements, such as the profit that migration may offer and organisation of the migration movement. The effect of merely suppressing the factors that catalysed and triggered the migration, as opposed to eliminating the deeply rooted reasons for the Romani migration, will ensure that the tension and frustration in the Romani community will be manifested in another form. The increasing levels of cooperation of the fragmented Romani political scene in Slovakia and a radicalisation of some Romani leaders suggest that Roma will articulate their needs more effectively in future.

Therefore, measures should be adopted on both a short-term and a long-term basis. Short-term measures should focus on suppressing the immediate factors that trigger mass departures of Roma; long-term measures should be designed to eliminate the deeply rooted reasons for the Romani migration in an appropriate context.

Recommendations for Policy Makers

In accordance with the results of IOM survey, the measures adopted and the solutions pursued should comply with the following conditions:

1. The care provided to those who willingly emigrated in search of a better life or for financial profit, and had to or wanted to be repatriated after a certain period of time, must in no way, quantitatively or qualitatively, exceed or differ from in any way the care provided to any other citizen of Slovakia. Otherwise, migration would become a vehicle toward acquiring undeserved benefits.
2. The existence of migration waves testifies to the fact that migration has its own reasons to occur, regardless of factors that triggered or "organised" it. Both the factors that trigger a migration wave and the deeply rooted reasons behind it require solutions. However, the need to eliminate the fundamental reasons for migration seems to be more urgent: as long as they exist, the factor that may eventually trigger a migration wave will be found.
3. Nowadays, migration is one of the few solutions that the Roma have left if they want to escape their current unhappy situation, which is mostly the result of high unemployment. Therefore, the objective should not be to deprive the Roma of the possibility to migrate in order to find jobs.

Specific attention must be paid to the additional barriers of the lower educational status of the Roma, their geographic isolation and the discrimination against the Roma. Experiences from Spain and Hungary provide examples of promising employment projects, including: provision of anti-discrimination legislation and of the right to appeal; training programmes; expansion of employment and income-generating programmes; strengthening work incentives in social assistance; and promoting small business development in areas of low regional development. Increasing the educational performance of Roma is critical to their ability to take advantage of opportunities in the economy and labour market. A number of successful initiatives have been undertaken in Slovakia in the area of education; however, most of these have been initiatives by non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Now it is time for systematic utilisation of their knowledge by state institutions.

In 1999, the Slovak government adopted a document entitled "Strategy for Solving the Problems of the Roma Ethnic Minority," as well as a set of implementation measures.[42] The government must give enough time to evaluate its effectiveness. Therefore, our recommendations are directed especially at the NGO sector or at problems requiring immediate resolution. In this context, we recommend the following:

1. Encourage the emergence of a network of civil advisory bureaux that would be both able and competent to resolve issues related to minorities, in particular the Romani minority.
2. Encourage the emergence of Romani social and charitable organisations, especially in eastern Slovakia.
3. Encourage the emergence of Romani organisations that would specialise in providing temporary accommodation for those Roma who have no place to live for a number of reasons, including their recent repatriation from EU member states.
4. Support initiatives designed to reduce the rate of unemployment among the Roma, especially among the young and educated.
5. Support initiatives designed to enhance the quality of social work among the Roma, especially in Romani rural settlements and urban colonies.
6. Extend personnel, financial, and material support to Romani non-governmental, non-profit organisations that will be connected into these regional networks and initiatives.
7. Promote programmes to enhance the level of Romani education in general and Romani children's education in particular. These initiatives should concentrate especially on the following activities.
   a. supporting Romani teachers and their assistants;
   b. scouting Romani children who stand a fair chance of finishing secondary and university education;
   c. working with these children's families in order to encourage them to support

their children's ambitions and efforts;

d. organising special courses that would prepare these children for entrance examinations at secondary schools and universities;
e. working with these students during their studies in order to encourage them in their endeavour.

8. Assist schemes to eliminate communication barriers and to enhance confidence in state administration institutions on the part of Romani representatives and Romani non-governmental, non-profit organisations.
9. Assist schemes to solve the housing problem of Roma, enhance infrastructure and improve health conditions in Romani rural settlements and urban colonies.

NOTES

1. Ethno-tourism is a term widely used by the Slovak public, media and by politicians. It reflects the belief of the Slovak majority that Roma are migrating into EU countries to increase their income and improve their socio-economic status, while applying for asylum without justification.
2. The following groups of respondents were selected: 1. Roma who had migrated into an EU member state and returned, either voluntarily or forcibly; 2. Roma who may be considered potential migrants and who confirmed this assumption during the interview; 3. Representatives of leading Romani non-governmental, non-profit organizations; 4. Representatives of concerned non-Romani non-governmental organizations.
3. The only other attempt was a relatively short survey, conducted by Romani activists without a sociological background (Jozef Červeňák, *Správa o príčinách migrácie Rómov v SR., Záverečná správa projektu—Report on the reasons for migration of Roma from Slovakia, Final project report*, Rožňava: Roma-Gemer, 2000).
4. Statement of the UK Home Secretary Jack Straw on Czech and Slovak Roma of 9 April 1998 as issued by the UK Embassy in Bratislava (author's translation from Slovak).
5. Michal Vašečka, "The Roma", in Grigorij Mesežnikov, Michal Ivantyšyn and Tom Nicholson, eds., *Slovakia 1998–1999: A Global Report on the State of Society*, Bratislava: Institute for Public Affairs, 1999, pp. 395–415.
6. Vincent Danihel, then Governmental Plenipotentiary for Romani minority problems, admitted these allegations at a press conference held on 6 July 1999. Danihel also pronounced his opinion that the Romani exodus to Finland stemmed from speculation over lucrative asylum benefits from the Finnish government.
7. See Claude Cahn and Peter Vermeersch, "The Group Expulsion of Slovak Roma by the Belgian Government: A Case Study of the Treatment of Romani Refugees in Western Countries", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 13, No. 2, Spring–Summer 2000, pp. 71–82.
8. Emotions surrounding the migration of Slovak Roma to EU member states calmed down in March 2001 after the European Commission placed Slovakia on the so-called "white list" of countries which have a visa-free regime with the European Union (Juraj Hrabko, "Čierno-biely zoznam", *SME*, 17 March 2001).
9. TASR news agency, 26 April 2001.
10. In their decision in *Horváth* [2000], 3 WLR 379, the House of Lords found that in the case of Milan Horváth, the Slovak authorities were willing and able to provide a level of state protection against the persecution which the applicant claimed to fear, which was

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sufficient to meet and overcome his fear of persecution. Since then, the Horváth "test" of "sufficiency of state protection" has been used by the courts in the UK, as a means of dismissing the vast majority of asylum claims by Roma. The test has been criticised by the New Zealand Refugee Status Appeals Authority as placing too high a burden of proof on the asylum seeker.

11. For details see Cahn and Vermeersch, "The Group Expulsion of Slovak Roma".
12. Romano L'il Nevo, 468–485.
13. *ERRC Welcomes Landmark Decision by Strasbourg Court in Expulsion Case*, Open letter, 5 February 2002, ERRC Website, http://www.errc.org/publications/letters/2002/belgium_febr_5_2002.shtml.
14. From the viewpoint of regional differences, most Roma officially live in the Prešov region—31,653 (4.0 per cent of the region's population), followed by the Košice region—29,803 (3.9 per cent), the Banská Bystrica region—15,463 (2.3 per cent), the Nitra region—4,741 (0.7 per cent), the Trnava region—3,163 (0.6 per cent), the Žilna region—2,795 (0.4 per cent), the Trenčín region—1,547 (0.3 per cent), and the Bratislava region—755 (0.1 per cent). Prešov and Košice are the easternmost of these regions.
15. Activists and researchers attribute the reluctance of the Roma to declare their nationality mostly to their fear of being persecuted, and to the integration of many Roma into majority society. Many experts suggest that the most important factor preventing the Roma from declaring their nationality is a serious crisis in Romani ethnic identity caused by decades of often forced assimilation, and the perception that being Romani carries the stigma of inferiority. This belief is widespread among the majority population and among Roma themselves. See e.g. Olga Gyárfášová, Vladimír Krivý, Marián Velšic *et al., Krajina v pohybe* (Nation in Transit), Bratislava: Inštitút pre verejné otázky (Institute for Public Affairs), 2001, pp. 225–228.
16. Minority Rights Group International, ed., *World Dictionary of Minorities*, London: MRG International, 1997.
17. Gyárfášová, *et al., Krajina v pohybe*, pp. 225–228.
18. Michal Vašečka and Roman Džambazovič, Sociálno-ekonomická situácia Rómov na Slovensku ako potenciálnych migrantov a žiadatel'ovo o azyl v krajinách EÚ (Socio-economic Situation of Roma in Slovakia as Potential Migrants and Asylum Seekers in EU Member States), Bratislava: International Organisation for Migration, 2000, p. 5.
19. Michal Vašečka, "The Roma", in Grigorij Mesežnikov, Miroslav Kollár and Tom Nicholson, eds., *Slovakia 2000: A Global Report on the State of Society*, Bratislava: Institute for Public Affairs, 2001, pp. 169–198.
20. Michal Vašečka, "Roma in Slovakia—The Crucial Issue on Slovak Way to EU-Membership", in Shlomo Avinieri and Werner Weidenfeld, eds., *Integration and Identity: Challenges to Europe and Israel*, Bonn: Europa Union Verlag, 1999, pp. 159–174.
21. Michal Vašečka, "Roma and the 1998 Parliamentary Elections", in Martin Bútora, *et al.*, eds., *The 1998 Parliamentary Elections and Democratic Rebirth in Slovakia*, Bratislava: Institute for Public Affairs, 1999, pp. 255–263.
22. Vašečka, "The Roma", in *Slovakia 1998–1999.*
23. David Crowe, *A History of the Gypsies of Eastern Europe and Russia*, New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1996, pp. 46–48.
24. Many of the Roma who were moved (sometimes forcibly) from rural shanty villages into modern flats were not familiar with basic features of modern living. It was just expected that they would automatically adjust to the modern urban lifestyle. In fact, the opposite was true—many blocks of flats were destroyed by Roma, which gave the majority an excuse to put more blame on Roma for disrespect to property that was given to them for free.

25. Anna Jurová, *Vývoj rómskej problematiky na Slovensku po roku 1945* (The Evolution of Romani Issues in Slovakia after 1945), Košice: Spoločensko-vedný ústav Slovenskej Akadémie Vied (Institute of Social Sciences, The Slovak Academy of Science), 1993, pp. 67–83.
26. A Joint Report of the World Bank, The Open Society Institute, INEKO, Foundation SPACE, *Poverty and Welfare of Roma in the Slovak Republic*, Draft, 2001, pp. 11–12.
27. Here we mean the following characteristics: life in a broader family; community-oriented lifestyle; an absence of borders between private and public; considering housing as temporary or provisional; a clear division of roles in the Romani family. See: Arne B. Mann, "Výskum rodinných obycajov ako prostriedok poznania rodiny Cigánov-Rómov" (Examination of Family Customs as a Means of Understanding the Families of Gypsies-Roma), in *Teoreticko-metodické východiská výskumu cigánskej rodiny a cigánskych obyvatel'ov* (Theoretical-Methodological Approaches to Researching Gypsy Families and Gypsy Citizens), Košice: Spoločensko-vedný ústav Slovenskej Akadémie Vied (Institute of Social Sciences, The Slovak Academy of Science), 1989, p. 8.
28. See Imrich Vašečka, *Profil a situácia žiadatel'ov o azyl a potenciálnych migrantov do krajín EÚ zo Slovenskej republiky* (The Profile and Situation of Asylum Seekers and Potential Migrants from the Slovak Republic to EU Countries), Bratislava: International Organisation for Migration, 2000, pp. 9–14.
29. Income differentiation and living standard in Communist Slovakia was not proportionate to the achieved degree of education. Certain branches of industry, mainly the manufacturing ones, were privileged, and from the point of view of achievement of a certain social status, there was a principle of collective, not individual, mobility. Education was not exclusively understood as a means of reaching a certain living standard and social position. Having the education required by and the opportunity of working in a certain sector was the guarantee of securing a decent living standard. The overall educational structure in Slovakia was adjusted to this principle, with the majority of citizens having only primary or secondary education without a certificate of apprenticeship. Orientation towards these types of education has become a trap after 1989.
30. The term "Romani socialist-style middle class" requires a brief explanation. Until now, no sociological surveys have been devoted to examining the social differentiation of the Romani population in Slovakia. All Roma who acquired their social status during the Communist period, when they mastered common labour professions of the non-Romani community, may be considered members of this class. Although they worked in areas of industry that required a high supply of unskilled physical labour, jobs in these fields were ideologically privileged by the regime and hence paid above average. For these Roma, departure from a Romani settlement was a factor that promoted their gradually deepening emancipation. This process was marked by Romani efforts to equal the majority population, mostly in the material sense.
31. World Bank, The Open Society Institute, INEKO, Foundation SPACE, *Poverty and Welfare of Roma in the Slovak Republic*, Draft, pp. 56–57.
32. The lack of data is due mainly to privacy legislation, adopted in 1993, which prohibits the collection of data based upon ethnicity.
33. Iveta Radičová and Michal Vašečka, "Problems of Social Exclusion and Double Marginalization of Roma in Slovakia after 1989", paper delivered at the conference *Labour, Employment and Social Policies in the EU Enlargement Process: Changing Perspectives and Policy Options*, organized jointly by the World Bank and the Bertelsmann Foundation, Baden, Austria, June 2001, pp. 12–17.
34. According to the quantitative representative survey, "Roma 1994" conducted by the

Slovak Statistical Office (ÚVVM, 1995), only 11% of Roma in the Slovak Republic consider the nomadic style of life as a preferential option.

35. For example, parts of the Labour Code and laws on social assistance.
36. Very few Roma are able to prove direct persecution. But even in cases when Roma asylum-seekers successfully present cases proving persecution in Slovakia, they are very likely to be rejected by the authorities of EU states. See e.g. footnote 10 above for an explanation of the decision in *Horváth.*
37. According to the typology advocated by Douglas S. Massey, "Causes of Migration", in Montserrat Guibernau and John Rex, eds., *Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Migration*, Cambridge: Policy Press, 1997, pp 257–269.
38. Although expectations for the outcome of cooperation with the new, post-Mečiar, regime were high after the 1998 elections, the reality was disappointing. This in turn has led to a radicalisation of Romani leaders, and consequentially to a new impetus to migrate. A small migration of Romani intelligentsia can be observed, including members of RIS.
39. Boris Benkovič and Lucia Vakulová, *Obraz Róma vo vybraných slovenských médiách* (*1. jún 1998–31. máj 1999*) (The Picture of Roma in Selected Slovak Media: 1 June 1998–31 May 1999), Bratislava: Slovenský helsinský výbor (Slovak Helsinki Committee), 2000, pp. 14–16.
40. Michal Vašečka, *Coverage of Roma Migration to EU Countries in the Main Slovak Daily Newspapers* (*January 1999–April 2000*), Bratislava: International Organisation for Migration, 2000, pp. 12–13.
41. Romano L'il Nevo, 455–467.
42. Following the change in government after the 1998 parliamentary elelctions, the Dzurinda Administration abolished the Office of the Slovak Government Plenipotentiary for Citizens Requiring Special Care and established a new *Office of the Slovak Government Plenipotentiary for Solving the Problems of the Romani Majority*, which worked under the auspices of the Cabinet Office. Shortly after its establishment, the office began to design the Government's new strategy for solving the problems of the Romani minority. The strategy comprised two stages. On 27 September 1999, the cabinet approved a document entitled *Resolution No. 821/1999 Regarding the Strategy of the Slovak Government to Solve the Problems of the Romani Minority and the Set of Implementation Measures—1st stage* and on 5 May 2000, the cabinet began the second stage of the scheme, approving a document entitled *Elaborated Strategy of the Slovak Government to Solve the Problems of the Romani Ethnic Minority*, which transformed the initial strategy into a set of concrete measures planned for 2000 (Governmental Resolution No. 294). See Vašečka, "The Roma", in: *Slovakia 1998–1999.*