

Eight circles of anti-Gypsyism¹

The purpose of this exercise is to make the case that prejudice against the Roma - anti-Gypsyism - has different levels ("circles") which deserve to be differentiated because they cannot be effectively dealt with in the same way.

EXTREMISM

1. Anti-Gypsyism is often understood as meaning only, or mainly, the **violence and hate speech of political extremists** (far-right nationalists, neo-Nazis, skinheads). That is an important dimension of anti-Gypsyism – the most extreme one – and it needs to be dealt with primarily with *instruments of criminal law*, but also with re-education of young people with extremist tendencies towards basic civic values.²

NOT JUST EXTREMISM, BUT ALSO MAINSTREAM ANTI-ROMA RHETORIC

2. However, anti-Gypsyism should not be reduced just to the hate speech of recognized far-right extremists. It is not just about what extremists say and do, but also about a much broader second circle, i.e., widespread **anti-Roma rhetoric on part of mainstream party politicians, civil servants and journalists**. Often it concerns local or regional politicians, but sometimes even those at national level.³ In most cases it will not reach the threshold at which criminal sanctions could apply, and even if it hypothetically could, the use of criminal law might be politically unrealistic. What is needed, however, is for activists as well representatives of international organizations to *challenge such discourse vigorously in the public domain*, ensure that it is condemned, that party leaders (superiors in civil service or chief editors in media) distance themselves from those employing such discourse and/or discipline them. *More focus on leaderships of mainstream parties or media* may be needed, and not just when incident actually do occur.

NOT JUST OPENLY ANTI-ROMA RHETORIC, BUT ALSO SELF-FULFILLING FATALISM

3. Thirdly, it is not just about rhetoric that is openly anti-Roma, but also about statements by mainstream politicians, civil servants or media **that are fatalistic, underestimate the Roma, perpetuate low expectations** – often with the hint that Roma are too different to have the same aspirations as other people (as if it was the preference of the Roma to be unemployed, live in poor quality houses, and having their children go hungry to sleep). This, too is anti-Gypsyism – but the way to deal with it is different again: *rather than attacking people who hold these beliefs as enemies, we need to persuade them (and the*

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² This has been done with some success in various States, e.g., in Germany.

³ For instance, a Prime Minister of an EU Member State saying that "most Roma do not want to integrate". Sometimes the word "Roma" is left out while the message is clear, e.g., another Prime Minister campaigning under the slogan "we will take welfare benefits from those who don't want to work".

broader public) that the Roma have, by and large, very similar aspirations to other members of society (and insofar as they don't, it's not so much because "they are different" and rather because from a profoundly disadvantaged starting point, it is difficult for anyone to envisage what others can take for granted.

NOT JUST WHAT IS SAID, BUT ALSO WHAT ISN'T

4. Fourth, it is not just an issue of what mainstream decision-makers and opinion-makers say about the Roma, but also an issue of **what they say – or, rather, don't say – to and with the Roma**. One of the key problems is that politicians from mainstream parties, mainstream journalists and others only speak about the Roma, and rarely if ever to them and with them – they usually don't even address them as an audience, or a relevant part of a mixed audience, let alone talk with them and listen to them. It has to be understood as a form of anti-Gypsyism if Roma are only being referred to as "objects" of speeches, not interacted with as subjects. *Activists should encourage mainstream decision-makers and opinion-makers to do so.*

NOT JUST WHAT IS SAID, BUT ALSO WHAT IS DONE

5. Fifth, anti-Gypsyism should be understood as involving not just speech but also **action that discriminates against the Roma, directly or indirectly**. This has to be dealt with both by *legal means* (using the equal treatment legislation, filing complaints) and, when there is a pattern of such discrimination on part of public authorities, by investing into *prevention – i.e., training the staff of these authorities so that they develop an awareness of what constitutes discriminatory conduct, and learn to avoid it.*

NOT JUST WHAT IS DONE BY INDIVIDUALS, BUT ALSO WHAT STATES DO

6. Sixth, it is not just about action (discrimination) by individuals, but **also about State policies that have a discriminatory impact** on the Roma, even when they are formulated in a seemingly ethnically neutral way, without explicit reference to the Roma⁴. *Here the instruments again need to be different – we need credible evidence of disproportionately negative effects of such policies on the Roma, and we need to be able to launch discussions on such policies in the public domain.*

NOT JUST WHAT STATES ACTIVELY DO, BUT ALSO WHAT THEY FAIL TO DO

7. Seventh, it is not just about policies which actively damage the Roma but also about **State's failure to act, their inaction and neglect**, which is often based on the fatalistic, self-fulfilling acceptance of low expectations mentioned under (3). Lack of action on

⁴ Several welfare reforms in Central and Eastern European States can be seen as examples of policies with intended discriminatory impact on the Roma. The same is true about some citizenship laws in the region. Increased formal qualifications requirements, as a result of which many Roma advisors, teaching assistants and mediators have lost their jobs, can be seen as examples of probably unintended consequences of formally neutral policies – the anti-Gypsyism dimension would be in

extremely poor living conditions of Roma – conditions that would not be tolerated if they concerned people of majority ethnic background – is also a form of anti-Gypsyism. *Here the activists, researchers and allies of Roma equality (from the EU and international organizations) once again need to bring the evidence and create a powerful moral momentum for change. It can probably be done more effectively by emphasizing common humanity and human rights rather than emphasizing cultural identity and difference, which are being used (at least implicitly) to blame the Roma themselves and justify the lack of action by public authorities.*

NOT JUST ALL THE ABOVE, BUT ALSO THE DENIAL THEREOF

8. **Denial** is a major problem because if all of the above forms of anti-Gypsyism are being systematically denied, it becomes difficult to address them. *What we need here is to at least start a public discussion about overcoming denial, in a most non-accusatory way possible, admitting that we all have prejudices, and that we all need to be self-critical and start from ourselves.*

It would be unhelpful to try to deal with all these circles or levels in the same way, i.e., by addressing them as if they were all similar to extremist hate speech and as if they should be dealt with by criminal law – that would be counterproductive, because all those whose mainstream actors who are not political extremists will regard it as unfair, and will just become more defensive.

Moreover, none of the above should be interpreted as imposing “political correctness” and prescribing a discourse which denies problems and paints a folkloric picture of idealized cultural traditions. This is not at all a call for silence on dramatic social problems that exist in Roma communities, from harmful traditional practices to contemporary problems of shantytowns and ghettos (which are, of course, not specific to the Roma but rather typical of all ghettos where poverty and lack of opportunities drive their inhabitants into the informal economy, where organized crime occurs). This is not about “political correctness”: it is about realizing that collective stereotyping/prejudice is wrong, about accepting that very widespread forms of speech (and absence of speech) as well as political action (as well as about the lack of political action) are based on very widespread forms of prejudice, and that challenging or demystifying this prejudice (anti-Gypsyism) is key to success, or at least an important part of it.