



CENTRAL COUNCIL of German Sinti & Roma



National Research Report

Considering the Swedish Commission against Antiziganism 2014-2016: experiences, lessons learned and recommendations

By Jan Selling*

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CHACHIPEN

Remembrance, Recognition,
Justice and Trust-Building



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About the project

CEPS, together with the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma, the European Roma Grassroots Organisations (ERGO) Network, the Federación de Asociaciones Gitanas de Cataluña (FAGIC), the Asociația Fast Forward (AFF) from Romania, has launched an EU Rights, Equality and Citizenship programme & German Ministry of Foreign Affairs funded project called 'Paving the way for Truth and Reconciliation Process to address antigypsyism in Europe: Remembrance, Recognition, Justice and Trust-Building', abbreviated as 'CHACHIPEN' for 'truth' in the Romani language.

This project aims to lay the foundations for the transitional justice, via tools like Truth and Reconciliation processes as a way to address historically rooted antigypsyism in Europe. Using the experiences from Swedish and German Independent commissions, the project will draw the lessons on what has (not) worked. We elaborate what processes could be of relevance for Romania and Spain and at the EU level to combat antigypsyism, aiming to build a common narrative on Roma equality.

In this context, the project has produced four country reports that provide the evidence and baseline for the calls for a larger debate on transitional justice with Roma communities, civil society, external scholars as well as national and EU policy makers, as well as regional and international Human Rights bodies.

More about the project: <http://antigypsyism.eu/chachipen/>



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CENTRAL COUNCIL of German Sinti & Roma



Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full name
BRÅ	Swedish Crime Prevention Council
CoE	Council of Europe
Commission	Commission against Antiziganism
Delegation	Delegation for Roma Issues
ENAR	European Network Against Racism
EU	European Union
GONGO	Government-Organised Non-Governmental Organisation
IHRA	International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRIS	National Roma Integration Strategies
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
RIKC	Roma Information and Knowledge Centre
RORHIN	Roma and Resande History in the Nordic countries
SIN	Security and Integrity Protection Board
TRP	Truth and Reconciliation Process
UN	United Nations
US	United States



Executive summary

At the European level, the Swedish example has frequently been cited in discussions around truth and reconciliation processes (TRPs) concerning Roma and policies against antigypsyism. Based on desk research and interviews with key Romani and non-Romani actors, this report puts the Swedish Commission against Antiziganism (the Commission) into context and analyses its impacts and limitations. Its background was the major state inquiry, Roma Rights (SOU, 2010, No 55), which urged a combination of measures to achieve equality for the national minority of Roma:

- a truth commission on historical abuses against Roma in Sweden, aiming for proposals for historical justice such as collective material compensation, and immaterial redress such as the state declaring historical responsibility;
- comprehensive measures against all forms of antigypsyism;
- implementation of a 20-year strategy for Roma inclusion;
- establishment of a permanent secretariat for Roma issues, to give Roma actual monitoring power and influence over the inclusion policy.

In 2011, the government chose only to follow parts of the above recommendations, and in a less radical way: an inclusion strategy was adopted, but without conceptually addressing antigypsyism and, instead of a truth commission, the government assigned a committee to write a 'White Paper' on historical abuses, which focused solely on victims' statements and not on responsibility for the abuses.

All interviewees who contributed to the current report agree that the 2014 White Paper was an important document, but that it was not a truth commission. The White Paper was criticised by parts of Roma civil society and scholarly experts for treating antigypsyism as a chapter from the past, and for not being independent or connected to any policy recommendations. Thus, key actors repeated their demands for a truth commission.

Shortly before the launch of the White Paper, it was revealed that the police had kept a massive register of Romani people, solely based on ethnicity. It was against this background that the Commission against Antiziganism, with a mandate for 2014-2016, was established by the government. The idea was not publicly discussed, investigated or anchored in hearings. Yet, the composition of the Commission, with Thomas Hammarberg as Chair and the majority of members being Roma, provided for a high level of credibility from the start. The Commission's task was to monitor ongoing manifestations of antigypsyism and to develop policy recommendations. However, it was not a truth commission. In fact, several interviewees saw it as counterproductive to the demands for a Roma truth commission.



A major task was to monitor and act for redress regarding the police register, which was ultimately deemed to be ethnic discrimination, and the Chief of Police issued an official apology. The Commission also proposed a permanent secretariat for Roma issues, which was in line with the suggestions made by the previous Delegation for Roma Issues 2006-2010 (the Delegation).

The Commission was successful in agenda-setting during its mandate, and it evidently contributed to establishing the concept of antigypsyism in official language. Other impacts were that the process leading to the ongoing Sami truth commission was inspired by – and learned from – the mistakes of the corresponding Roma process. Also, the German Bundestag Commission on antigypsyism benefited from the Swedish experience. Yet, there is widespread frustration that the Swedish Commission did not have a lasting effect due to lack of time, resources and political will. Several interviewees also stressed that lack of independence was a major weakness.

The Commission came to suffer from the same problems as many other Roma policy measures: the impact weakens if projects are short-lived and without a clear successor. In this case, the Commission leaned too heavily on the goodwill of one individual minister, and a change in political leadership left its results hanging in the air.

The Commission's recommendations have not been followed up in a comprehensive way. For example, Roma are still waiting for an official apology from the state; there is still no comprehensive strategy against antigypsyism; and the idea of empowering Roma through a permanent secretariat has been dropped. As Roma in Sweden have no non-governmental organisations (NGOs) of comparable strength to the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma, for instance, the power disadvantage identified by the Delegation persists. This report also confirms the conclusions of international studies, which state that the Swedish model of consultation with Roma representatives is not functioning well: Roma are rarely involved in decisions, but rather cited as alibis.

Antigypsyism in Sweden is still less questioned and seen as more acceptable than other forms of racism, in terms of both hate crime and structural racism. Up to now, Sweden has ignored demands to upgrade the national Roma inclusion strategy in accordance with the new EU framework for National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS), which prescribes a paradigmatic shift in focus: from a one-sided focus on Roma as the problem towards a holistic approach to antigypsyism.

An important conclusion is that Roma ownership of a TRP presupposes powerful, dedicated and knowledgeable allies in the state who are dedicated to ensuring meaningful participation, but also careful planning of Roma civil society structures.



Main recommendations:

- The new EU NRIS framework should be fully implemented and monitored.
- Roma participation in policymaking must be better secured, e.g. through the institutionalisation of Romani representation, the improvement of consultation methods and the strengthening of civil society through higher education.
- Policy measures against antigypsyism must be multidimensional and grounded in scientific knowledge, which presupposes funding and structural conditions for independent and academic knowledge production at both the national and European level.
- Transnational dimensions of antigypsyism such as racialised poverty, the Roma Holocaust and the legacy of Romani enslavement in Romania must be acknowledged as part of European TRPs.
- All forms of antigypsyism must be unequivocally condemned by judiciaries, parliaments, other political bodies and public inquiries. This would provide a basis for media and political guidelines, and ultimately impact public opinion.



Introduction and methodology

The report is based on two methods. First, desk research analysing state inquiries and other official documents relevant to the process leading to the establishment of the Commission, and to the Commission itself. These are mainly from the period 2010-2016, but also from 2020-2021 concerning the current status of the Swedish NRIS. This research is informed by state-of-the-art of research on antigypsyism in Sweden and media discourses. Second, semi-structured online interviews between 8 December 2021 and 13 January 2022 with key individuals, who have all agreed to the use of their names in the report:

- Hans Caldaras, Roma rights advocate, member of the Delegation for Roma Issues 2006-2009;
- Mirelle Gyllenbäck, Development Manager for Roma Inclusion Strategies at the County Administrative Board Stockholm;
- Mujo Halilovic, Head of the Roma Information and Knowledge Centre (RIKC), Malmö;
- Lars Lindgren, investigator at the Equality Ombudsman, Sweden;
- Sunita Memetovic, lawyer and Roma rights advocate;
- Soraya Post, former Member of the European Parliament, Roma rights advocate;
- Erik Ullenhag, former Minister for Integration 2010-2014;
- Charles Westin, Professor Emeritus, academic expert in the Delegation for Roma Issues 2006-2010.

The interviewees were selected in their capacity of having played key roles in the process around the Swedish Commission against Antiziganism and/or their personal expertise in the field of antigypsyism and Roma rights in Sweden, as well as meeting the CHACHIPEN criterion that a substantial part of the interviewees identify as Roma.

These semi-structured interviews lasted for 45-60 minutes and followed the interview guide agreed by the CHACHIPEN research team.



PART 1: Historically rooted antigypsyism in Sweden

1. Background

Facts on the historical dimension of antigypsyism in Sweden have been established by academic research and state inquiries, as well as an inquiry of the Church¹. In short, the history of persecution and exclusion of Roma, justified both religiously and by academia, and carried out by the Church and the state, shares many similarities with other countries in Northern Europe. Above all, it became systematic through the growing influence of racial biology at the beginning of the 20th century. A peculiarity of Swedish antigypsyism is that it had distinctly differentiated strategies towards the two major Romani groups at the time, which is important for understanding the history and even the situation today.

The first group were perceived to be descendants of Romani people who had already immigrated in the 16th century, with the self-designation 'Resande'. Officially they were given the stigmatising exonym 'tattare'. They were described as an unwanted 'racial mixture' and were subjected to harsh assimilation, including forced child removals. They were commonly threatened with forced sterilisation, which also was implemented in many cases. They were treated as citizens, and in principle had access to civil rights such as the right to attend school, but had to face constant harassment. The near disappearance of the Resande-Romani language, as well as the reluctance even today to publicly acknowledge the Resande identity, are effects of this antigypsyism.

Second, the Roma groups who immigrated from Russia at the end of the 19th century were seen as unwanted aliens, labelled as 'Zigenare' ('Gypsies'). The outspoken strategy was to make their lives so hard that they would leave the country. This was done by constant evictions and the exclusion from all civil rights. The politics towards 'Gypsies' changed radically in the 1950s and transformed into semi-voluntary assimilation politics, which in hindsight were counterproductive in many ways and prolonged the structures of antigypsyism, without challenging antigypsyist attitudes. It is also important to note that the immigration of 'Gypsies' was officially forbidden from 1914 to 1954, which means that Sweden was not a safe haven for Roma escaping Nazism, and there are

¹ SOU (2010), *Romers rätt – En strategi för romer i Sverige*, Slutbetänkande från Delegationen för romska frågor [Roma rights – a strategy for Roma in Sweden, final report from the Delegation for Roma Issues], No 55; Selling, J. (2013), *Svensk antiziganism: fördomens kontinuitet och förändringens förutsättningar* [Swedish antiziganism: the continuity of prejudice and the prerequisites for change], Limhamn, Sekel; Ohlsson Al Fakir, I. (2013), *Svenska kyrkans förhållande till romer och resande ca 1900-1950* [The Church of Sweden's relationship with Romani and Resande 1900-1950], Uppsala, Svenska kyrkans forskningsenhet; Government Offices of Sweden (2014), *The dark unknown history – White paper on abuses and rights violations against Roma in the 20th Century*, Stockholm; Westin, N., Wallengren, S., Dimiter Taikon, K. and Westin, C. (2014), *Antiziganism i statlig tjänst. Socialstyrelsens behandling av romer och resande under 1900-talet* [Antigypsyism in government services. The National Board of Health and Welfare's treatment of Roma and Resande in the 20th century], Socialstyrelsen, Stockholm.



only two known cases of survivors coming to Sweden in 1945. However, the Roma Holocaust has become a Swedish collective memory since the immigration of Roma groups from East and Southeast Europe in the last four decades.

The government officially apologised to the Resande in 2000 and the Church to the Roma in general in the same year, but no official apology has followed from the state to the Roma. Material compensation was paid for sterilisations and forced child removals, but without recognising the overall antigypsyist context of these². Also the recognition of the Roma Holocaust is disputable, since Swedish official memory politics do not include Roma in the concept of the Holocaust.

1.2 Relevant academic research on antigypsyism in Sweden

Academic research on antigypsyism has slowly grown since the first international conference was held at Uppsala University in 2013. Apart from research by Associate Professor Jan Selling at Södertörn University and by Professor Emeritus Charles Westin, academic research at postgraduate level has only adapted/developed theories of antigypsyism to a limited degree³. Other than that, research in Sweden has not focused on conceptual and holistic perspectives on antigypsyism, but rather on specific areas, such as the situation of EU citizens in precarious conditions⁴, social and educational discrimination⁵, hate crimes against Romani people⁶, persecution and

² Selling, J. (2013), p. 69 and pp. 163-165.

³ Selling, J. (2013); Selling, J., End, M., Kyuchukov, H., Laskar, P. and Templer, B. (eds) (2015), *Antiziganism: What's in a Word? Proceedings from the Uppsala International Conference on the Discrimination, Marginalization and Persecution of Roma, 23-25 October 2013*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne; Westin et al. (2014).

⁴ Hansson, E. (2019), "'Det känns fel." Om det svenska samhällets reaktioner på närvaron av tiggande EU-medborgare 2014-2016' ["'It feels wrong." About Swedish society's reactions to the presence of begging EU citizens 2014-2016'], PhD dissertation, Uppsala University; Hansson, E. and Persdotter, M. (2019), 'Vad är den svenska modellen? Socialdemokratisk historieskrivning i den samtida "tiggeridebatten"' ["What is the Swedish model? Social Democratic historiography in the contemporary "begging debate"'], *Creating the City. Identity, Memory and Participation*, Conference proceedings, Malmö University, edited by Brunström, P. et al. (2019), pp. 343-362, Malmö University, Malmö, 10.24834/2043/28212; Memetovic, S. (2020), 'Between Freedom of Expression and Discriminatory Policies. Is there a Right to Beg?', MA thesis, Central European University, Budapest.

⁵ Sjögren, D. (2010), *The safety zone: Motives, suggested measures and activities in the separative education policy targeted at native minorities [in Sweden] 1913-1962*, PhD dissertation, Uppsala University; Rodell Olgaç, C. (2006), *Den romska minoriteten i majoritetssamhällets skola: från hot till möjlighet [The Roma minority in the majority society school: from a threat to a hope for the future]*, PhD dissertation, Lärarhögskolan, Stockholm; Lauritzen, S.M. (2019), 'Nomadism in Research on Roma Education', *Critical Romani Studies Journal*, No 1, pp. 58-75.

⁶ Wallengren, S. and Mellgren, C. (2017), *Romers upplevelser av hatbrott: upplevelser, konsekvenser och stöd [Romani's experiences of hate crimes: experiences, consequences and support]*, FoU Rapport, No 3, Malmö; Wigerfelt B. and Wigerfelt, A. (2015), 'Antisemitiska och antiromska hatbrott i Sverige: erfarenheter, konsekvenser och hantering av utsatthet', *Socialvetenskaplig tidskrift*, ISSN 1104-1420, Vol. 22, No 3-4, pp. 265-282; Wallengren, S. and Mellgren, C. (2017), *Gatans tysta offer: en studie av socialt utsatta EU-medborgares utsatthet för brott, hatbrott och annan kränkande behandling i det offentliga*



genocide in the 1930s and the 1940s⁷, and media representation of Roma⁸.

The Department of Critical Romani Studies at Södertörn University, Stockholm, offers courses in antigypsyism studies and hosts a colloquium for PhD candidates in Critical Romani Studies and antigypsyism research. This department has declared the inclusion of Romani standpoints as crucial, and thus has an outspoken goal to recruit Romani students and scholars. Södertörn researcher Solvor Lauritzen is leading a major project on the memorialisation of Romani slavery, which includes scholars Margaretha Matache, Delia Grigore and Jan Selling and the PhD candidate Maria Dumitru⁹.

1.3 Stakeholders' positions on the term 'antigypsyism'

The notion of 'antiziganism' (Swedish for antigypsyism) is well established as an officially used term by authorities and the media. It is also almost unanimously preferred by Romani civil society representatives and activists, as was made clear in a wide counselling survey and hearing by the Living History Forum in conjunction with the national discussion about the work of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) to establish a working definition of the term in 2020¹⁰. However, the terms 'racism against Roma' and 'discrimination of Roma' are also used in certain contexts and by individual researchers. Lars Lindgren clarifies that in his work as investigator at the Equality Ombudsman, the term 'discrimination' is instrumental, but that the term 'antiziganism' is necessary for general understanding and instructions to the Ombudsman¹¹.

Lawyer Sunita Memetovic tells of a recent experience of her using the concept of antigypsyism as a defender in a court case: 'This way, we could make circumstances clear to the prosecutor, which explained that the accused had been abused by the principal offenders because of their being Roma. I used the concept of antigypsyism to explain the context of their vulnerability related to xenophobia, structural discrimination, the dark history and the extreme poverty among Roma in the Balkans.'

rummet [*Silent Victims in the Public Eye: Socially Vulnerable EU Citizens' Exposure to Crime, hate crime and other offensive treatment in the public space*], FoU Rapport, No 4, Malmö.

⁷ Hurd, M., *Police, Experts and Race: Handling the 'Gypsy Plague' in Denmark, Sweden and Latvia, 1930-1945*, Research project 2016-2019, <https://www.sh.se/english/sodertorn-university/research/our-research/research-database/research-projects/police-experts-and-race-handling-the-gypsy-plague-in-denmark-sweden-and-latvia-1930-1945>.

⁸ Truedson, L. (ed.) (2015), *Mediebildern av Romer* [*The media image of Roma*], Holmbergs, Malmö.

⁹ Project MEMOROBIA, <https://www.mf.no/en/memorobia>.

¹⁰ IHRA working definitions, <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/ihra-working-definitions-and-charters>; Living History Forum, working documents in possession of author.

¹¹ Interview with Lars Lindgren, 10 December 2021.



This is still rarely done in courts and there is certainly a lack of knowledge on all sides¹². Mujo Halilovic, Head of the Roma Information and Culture Centre (RIKC) in Malmö, states that the notion of 'antiziganism' is widely used and understood in the community, and is a particularly useful tool in the work of the RIKC to counter the phenomenon: 'It captures the structural as well as discursive dimension and is not limited to attitudes. As Brisenstam says, "antigypsyism doesn't even require Roma"¹³.

1.4 Key controversies or misunderstandings regarding the term 'antigypsyism' and its usage

a) That antigypsyism only means hate and intentional discrimination of Roma

During the first years of its use in the official Swedish language, the following short definition was used: 'Antiziganism' = racism against Roma (Equality Ombudsman, 2004). As the term 'racism' is often understood in its literal, historical, narrow sense (i.e. biological/scientific racism), antigypsyism could thus be understood as something that hardly exists in contemporary Sweden. Even though official definitions have expanded (SOU, 2010, No 55) to include antigypsyism constituted in social structures and discourse, still today structural antigypsyism is often denied or even ignored.

One example is that the leadership of Södertörn University simply ignored the grounded criticism against the appointment of a Dr Honoris accused of antigypsyism, while at the same time declaring that the university was working against all forms of antigypsyism¹⁴.

Another example, which shows the inability of legislation to address antigypsyist propaganda, is the recent court case against the former head of the populist party Ny Demokrati, Bert Karlsson. In his online talk shows, he not only persisted in using the derogatory term 'Zigenare', but also used it to collectively describe Roma as dishonest troublemakers. He argued 'I am not a racist. There are hardly any racists in

¹² Interview with Sunita Memetovic, 6 January 2022.

¹³ Interview with Mujo Halilovic, 8 December 2021. Reference to Brisenstam, R. (2011), 'What is a "Gypsy"? On some differences between the legal prerequisite "Gypsy" and some Romani self-denominations', *Romani E Journal*, 6/2011.

¹⁴ Selling, J. (2021), 'How to detect antigypsyism and racism in academic research on Roma', dikko.nu, 24 July, <https://dikko.nu/how-to-detect-antigypsyism-and-racism-in-academic-research-on-roma/>; Amberg, G. (2021), 'Official statement', dikko.nu, 1 May, <https://dikko.nu/sodertorns-hogskolas-klargorande-om-elena-marushiakovs-som-hedersdoktor/>.



Sweden'. The Chancellor of Justice ruled that the statements were covered by freedom of speech¹⁵.

b) That anti-Roma discrimination would be a full synonym of antigypsyism

The working definition adopted in 2021 by the IHRA states that the 'discrimination of Roma' would equate to antigypsyism. This was accepted by the Swedish Delegation, who admittedly also stated that in Sweden 'antiziganism' would remain the main term. The suggestion of 'discrimination against Roma' came late into the discussion, with the result that the Roma civil society was not given the opportunity to react. Consequently, independent experts sent an official protest to the Swedish and Norwegian governments and IHRA Delegations¹⁶.

The main argument of the protest was that the suggested equation would be an unacceptable reduction, in that only part of the phenomenon of antigypsyism was to be understood as discrimination, and that this understanding had not been agreed upon in the Swedish hearings. In the reply from the Head of the Swedish IHRA Delegation, it was claimed that the Swedish Delegation had proposed only to use the terms antigypsyism/antiziganism but would accept a compromise. In the reply it was falsely claimed that the compromise addition of 'anti-Roma discrimination' as a synonym had been discussed in the Swedish hearings¹⁷.

c) That antigypsyism (antiziganism) would be derogative since it was reproducing 'Gypsy' and 'zigan'

This argument has only had very limited acceptance in Swedish Romani civil society and among few scholars in Sweden, who referred to discourses on the term in the United States and Canada. However, the international discussion on the matter needs to be addressed¹⁸.

PART 2: Current manifestations of antigypsyism in Sweden

¹⁵ Chancellor of Justice (2021), Sweden, Dnr. 2021/2307.

¹⁶ Gardell, M., Hammarberg, T., Post, S. and Selling, J. (2020), Letter to the governments and IHRA Delegations of Norway and Sweden, 23 September.

¹⁷ Ben David, A., Foreign Department of Sweden, Email communication with Author, 23 September 2020.

¹⁸ SOU (2016), *Kraftsamlings mot antiziganism*, Slutbetänkande från Kommissionen mot antiziganism [Concerned efforts against antigypsyism final report of the Commission against antigypsyism], No 44, p. 192; Westin, C. (2015), 'Concluding Remarks', in Selling et al., pp. 194-201; Oprea, A. and Matache, M. (2019), 'Reclaiming the Narrative: A Critical Assessment of Terminology in the Fight for Roma Rights, Dimensions of Antigypsyism in Europe, Markus End and Ismael Cortéz Gómez (eds), European Network Against Racism (ENAR) and the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma.



The structural power disadvantage of Roma in democratic participation and politics had already been framed in the context of antigypsyism in the final report of the major inquiry by the Delegation for Roma Issues in 2010. The starting point for the Commission against Antiziganism on this topic in 2014 was therefore the Delegation's idea that a permanent state institution for Roma Issues be set up, tasked with 'closing the wealth gap' between Roma and non-Roma, providing a knowledge resource and above all strengthening the political influence of the Roma minority. The reason for this unusual proposal was the assessment that structural antigypsyism in the democratic system would not disappear without intervention. The Commission developed this proposal further and especially stressed the importance of empowerment.

The manifest dimension of antigypsyism in politics was confronted mainly in the form of opinion statements. In these, the most common topic was the 'begging issue', which at the time was running high. Through political discourses, the concept of 'beggar' was increasingly becoming linked to the concept of 'Roma' or even 'Gypsy'¹⁹. During the 2014 European Parliament campaign, the right-wing populist party Sweden Democrats argued that begging was organised by 'criminal leagues', which on social media was spelled out as 'criminal Gypsy leagues'. But also, mainstream politicians of the Conservative party and even the Social Democrats often argued for begging prohibitions, describing the presence of beggars as a nuisance and questioning their need as fake. The Chair of the Commission, Thomas Hammarberg, and its member Soraya Post argued frequently that this discourse was antigypsyist, as well as the practice by local authorities of evicting homeless EU citizens from place to place.

However, as will be explained further below, the awareness of ongoing structural and manifest antigypsyism was not enough for the state to act. This changed instantly on 23 September 2013 when the Swedish daily Dagens Nyheter revealed that the police had registered several thousand Roma only for the reason of their ethnicity, i.e. without legal reason. The register included many children and even deceased people. This was an immense scandal and the main reason for the Commission against Antiziganism being set up in March 2014. One of the governmental assignments for the Commission was thus to monitor the reviews and actions taken by different actors on the issue of Roma ethnic segregation. The overall purpose of this assignment was 'bridging the trust gap that exists between the Roma community and society at large'²⁰.

It goes without saying that the police register widened this gap immensely. The Commission published its results on this topic in a special report, which ends with the conclusion that the register was an indication of a larger problem: 'The Commission

¹⁹ Selling, J. (2019), 'A Short Momentum for Roma Rights', in Córtes Gomez and End (eds).

²⁰ Kommittédirektiv (2014), No 47, in SOU (2016), No 44, p. 133.



believes that a concrete and effective action plan is needed to counteract antigypsyist attitudes and behaviour within the police force'²¹.

The Commission also paid special attention to antigypsyist hate crimes by means of media monitoring and analysis of crime statistics. Consultations were held with several organisations and institutes, such as law enforcement agencies; the Equality Ombudsman; the Ombudsman for Children; anti-racist, Muslim and Sami non-governmental organisations (NGOs); and the human rights initiative Civil Rights Defenders. It was shown that the reported number of antigypsyist hate crimes had increased, but that very few cases had been resolved. Further, the Commission concluded that there were likely to be many unreported antigypsyist hate incidents, especially against homeless EU citizens. A particularly interesting finding was that antigypsyist hate crimes commonly occur in public settings and where the perpetrator is known to the victim, such as a serviceperson or a neighbour²². This would indicate that antigypsyism is more socially accepted than other forms of racism.

The final report of the Commission provides no systematic analysis of antigypsyism in the health system but refers to individuals reporting to the Commission abusive treatment in their contacts with health and social services, and regarding the forced removal of children. A related topic, mainly discussed in opinion pieces by the Commission, is the precarious social and health situation of homeless EU citizens who are temporarily in Sweden. It is not possible to judge the extent of these problems from the report.

The Commission did not monitor or analyse antigypsyism in media and culture. However, it discusses the importance of Romani public service broadcasts as a means of strengthening Roma positions in public discourse, as well as strengthening the Romani language. The Commission did not analyse antigypsyism in religious organisations but refers to previous inquiries regarding the historical role of the Church as an executor of state-sponsored antigypsyism²³.

²¹ SOU (2016), No 44, p. 265.

²² Commission against Antiziganism (2016), *Agera mot antiziganistiska hatbrott*, p. 6; cf. Wallengren and Mellgren (2017) a and b.

²³ Ohlsson Al Fakir, I. (2013); Westin et al. (2014); Swedish Government (2014), *White Paper*.



PART 3: Efforts to recognise, remember and remedy

The problem of antigypsyism in Sweden was addressed for the first time in the Swedish Riksdagen in 1953, though under the notion of 'racial discrimination against the Gypsies'²⁴. It was discussed in conjunction with the shift of perspective from exclusion to semi-voluntary assimilation policy, but no actual measures were taken against the phenomenon.

The issue also played a role in the struggle of the Roma rights movement, headed by Katarina Taikon in the 1960s. By highlighting the parallels to the struggles against racism in South Africa and the US, Taikon reached out to new allies who had previously had little interest in the situation of Roma²⁵. It must be noted, however, that the official antigypsyism against 'tattare' suddenly stopped after the implosion of racial biology after the Second World War. In fact, Resande were completely ignored in the post-Second World War 'Gypsy' policies.

The next decisive step was the recognition of Roma as one of the Swedish national minorities in 1999, which included the Resande as part of the national minority of Roma. From this point on, the perspective in politics gradually changed, from seeing Roma as the problem to seeing the problem as Roma being deprived of their rights. The notion of antigypsyism (antiziganism) was used for the first time by the Equality Ombudsman in a 2004 document. The author was Lars Lindgren, who is still an employee of the Ombudsman. He recalls that he imported the notion from discursive events between European Roma and scholars, one of those being the German historian Wolfgang Wippermann²⁶.

The next step was taken by the Delegation for Roma Issues 2006-2010, which was the first major inquiry to adopt a fully-fledged rights perspective and made serious efforts to integrate Roma people in policy development. Professor Emeritus Charles Westin, who was the only scholar in the Delegation, recalls: 'We used the term antiziganism frequently in talks and writing, without defining it. There was an instinctive understanding. In the end it became my part to launch a definition. So, I took Helen Fein's definition of antisemitism and adapted it to the Roma topic'²⁷. The novelty of this approach was that not only attitudes and actions, but also structures could be labelled antiziganist.

The final report of the Delegation contained an extensive and quite radical catalogue of measures to establish equal rights for Roma and bridge the trust gap, which was the result of historical and ongoing antigypsyism and internalised

²⁴ Sveriges Riksdag, Motion by the SCP, 'Motion i andra kammaren 1953 nr 82 Fru Gerda Nilsson...'

²⁵ Selling, J. (2022), *Romani Liberation. Northern Perspectives on Emancipatory Struggles and Progress*, CEU Press, Budapest, pp. 136-137.

²⁶ Interview with Lars Lindgren, 10 December 2021.

²⁷ Interview with Charles Westin, 16 December 2021. See also SOU (2010), No 55, p. 83.



antigypsyism, leading to a lack of confidence in state institutions. Among other things, the Delegation talked about the necessity of a truth and reconciliation process (TRP), involving an independent commission for the investigation of 20th century Swedish antigypsyism. The commission should also have the mandate to propose individual and collective material compensation. This was inspired by the Norwegian experience, which included funding for a Resande cultural centre and museum, as well as a foundation for the interests of Resande. Further, the Delegation proposed a 20-year Roma rights strategy: in 20 years' time, equality for Roma should be established in terms of welfare, power and trust. To safeguard implementation of the strategy, a permanent secretariat for Roma issues was suggested, following the model of the Finnish Roma Delegation, which acts as a permanent interface between Roma civil society and government agencies²⁸.

The Delegation was established by the Social Democratic government led by Göran Persson, shortly before it was replaced by a centre-right government led by Fredrik Reinfeldt. This political shift did not influence the autonomous work of the Delegation, but it did change the preconditions for the realisation of its demands. In 2011, the Reinfeldt government decided to launch the 20-year 'Roma inclusion strategy', which is still in place today. No specific measures to combat antigypsyism were mentioned in this strategy. The government also declined the idea of a permanent secretariat and an independent truth commission, deciding instead to order a White Paper to shed light on 20th century abuses.

The work of the White Paper Committee soon became criticised for its lack of independence and transparency²⁹. According to Lars Lindgren, there is a logic that the Roma demands for a truth commission were answered by a White Paper, since establishing a truth commission at that time 'would have required politics to tie itself in knots, which was probably not possible'³⁰. In his assessment, the White Paper was problematic, but had its merits in focusing on the abuses against Roma, which would help to explain the present-day situation of Roma. Hans Caldaras, who had been a part of the Delegation and was later consulted on the White Paper, describes the White Paper as a failure: 'It ended up on the shelf. Didn't get the response we were hoping for'³¹. Mujo Halilovic at the RIKC, who was himself part of the White Paper Committee is less categorical and regards it as an asset. In his eyes, the main problem is that the White Paper was not connected to any consequences³². In fact, the White Paper did not even end up with any conclusions, and it appears strange

²⁸ Cf. Stenroos, M., Jääskeläinen, K. and Attias, M. (2021), *Opportunities of the Finnish Roma and other actors to influence regional and European Roma policy*, 10.13140/RG.2.2.17310.05441.

²⁹ Hazell, B. (2011), 'Sanningskommission måste ge resandefolket upprättelse' [Truth commission must bring redress to the Resande people], *Dagens Nyheter*; Eriksson, M., Email to Author, Lund University, 29 December 2022.

³⁰ Interview with Lars Lindgren, on 10 December 2021.

³¹ Interview with Hans Caldaras, 15 December 2021.

³² Interview with Mujo Halilovic, 8 December 2021.



that only the Romani consultants, but not the editors, are mentioned in the publication.

Several interviewees recall intensive lobbying to reach the goal of a truth commission after 2011. The Liberal Minister for Integration at the time, Erik Ullenhag, was seen as supportive, but with a weak position against other forces in the government, for example the Conservative Minister for Migration, who himself was accused of antigypsyist politics and defending the ongoing antigypsyist practices of the police³³. It is also indicative that the police were one of the heaviest referral bodies to oppose a truth commission. In an academic hearing by the scholarly network for Roma and Resande History in the Nordic countries (RORHIN) in January 2014, shortly after the revelation of the police register, Charles Westin judged that 'a White Paper is not a policy position, but rather a compilation of research'³⁴.

Aware of these arguments, Erik Ullenhag today defends the choices that were made at the time and says that even if his views on Roma policies were not shared by the whole government, he never felt tied down in these matters. From his perspective, there was a logic in the process: 'There was a gap between what the majority community thought had happened and what the Roma thought had happened. The forced sterilisations were questioned, for example. The White Paper provided evidence. A common picture was established and the Roma, including the Resande group, felt comfortable with that. I understood the criticism that the White Paper was not independent, but in my opinion, it was exactly the point that in this way, the government had taken responsibility by producing it. It was clearly something different from a truth commission, yet it was based on testimonies. The objective was redress. Even today I feel satisfied and proud that a majority of Resande and other Roma endorsed the White Paper. It became a process towards healing'³⁵.

For people outside the government, the decision to set up the Commission directly after the White Paper launch then came as a total surprise. This has been interpreted in research and by the interviewees as a strategic manoeuvre to disarm the proponents for a truth commission³⁶. This judgement is supported by a statement of This judgement is supported by the former head of the Norwegian Tater/Romani TRC-Commission, Knut Wollebaek, who at the academic hearing in January argued that 'an excellent opportunity for public attention opens up for RORHIN's position when the White Paper is published'³⁷. When it came, this opportunity was instead closed by the launch of the Commission.

³³ Selling (2013), pp. 176-180.

³⁴ RORHIN (2014), meeting protocol by Ludvig Wiklander, Uppsala University, 15 January.

³⁵ Interview with Erik Ullenhag, 13 January 2022.

³⁶ Selling, J. (2022), pp. 152-153; Interviews conducted as part of this study, 8 December 2021 – 13 January 2022.

³⁷ RORHIN (2014), 15 January.



When asked about this, Erik Ullenhag described the idea of the Commission as an 'in-house idea', i.e. it was developed by officials in his department and, as he says, 'there was no investigation about the idea, for better or worse'. Also, he does not recall if the idea was expedited given the police register scandal. However, Ullenhag testifies about the shock he experienced at the revelation: 'We had gained great trust among the Roma. When the scandal broke out, I felt that this could destroy everything. We sat down and telephoned around'.

Considering Ullenhag's story and the fact that none of the key actors from Roma civil society or academic experts at the RORHIN January 2014 meeting knew about the Commission idea at that time, this strengthens the impression that the Commission against Antiziganism was indeed an ad hoc in-house product; a quick fix for a suddenly accelerated situation.

Several former key actors of the Delegation for Roma Issues, such as the Chair and Liberal politician Maria Leissner, academic expert Charles Westin and the Roma representative Hans Caldaras, had been active in lobbying for a truth commission since 2010. This was supported by many other individual Roma, as well as by 17 scholars of RORHIN³⁸.

The demands were triggered by the revelation of the police register, which was seen as proof that the White Paper was insufficient. Caldaras recalls that he and other Roma representatives, supported by Leissner and Hammarberg, tried to convince the government in this direction³⁹. Lawyer Sunita Memetovic, who was a student of law at the time, recalls: 'To me it was obvious that there needed to be some sort of commission. The police register was a complete system failure'⁴⁰.

Erik Ullenhag was seen as an ally by many Roma, but it is unclear whether he ever supported the idea of a truth commission. Also, it was evident that Ullenhag did not have the support of other important parts of the government, which included hardliners on the issue of the so-called 'Roma beggars'. This topic was, besides the police register, the most important factor that seemed to make a commission necessary.

On 20 March 2014, the very day that the government took the decision to set up the Commission, Hammarberg demanded 'a commission to counteract antiziganism' in an interview with the anti-racist magazine Expo. In this article, he mentions the police register, but mainly talks about the treatment of homeless EU citizens from Romania and Bulgaria. Hammarberg describes the position of Swedish politicians as 'hypocritical', in that they were now pursuing basically the same politics and anti-

³⁸ Andersson, L.M. et al. (2013), 'Dags att göra upp med den statliga antiziganismen' ['Time to put an end to state antigypsyism'], *Dagens Nyheter*, 1 October.

³⁹ Interview with Hans Caldaras, 15 December 2021.

⁴⁰ Interview with Sunita Memetovic, 6 January 2022.



Roma rhetoric that they had criticised in the case of France⁴¹. The close dialogue between Hammarberg and Ullenhag is indicated by the timing of this interview, as well as the fact that at the press conference about the new Commission on 26 March, Ullenhag said that the topic of 'Roma beggars' would also be discussed⁴², even though this topic was not actually mentioned in the government directive.

Apart from the obviously different positions in the government, and right-wing populists even denying the existence of antigypsyism⁴³, there was no significant public opposition to the Commission as such at the time. However, as had also been the case with the White Paper, the Commission was occasionally criticised by its consultants for its hard management to ensure that the right message got through. One interviewee of Roma origin, who was consulted for writing an opinion piece, felt censored by an official working for the Commission: 'This was not independent, this was not the way it should be done'. It should also be mentioned that one member of its Roma advisory group strongly opposed the notion of 'antiziganism' and instead favoured the term 'antiromaism', though this position gained little support among other Roma⁴⁴.

3.1. The mandate and work of the Swedish Commission

The decision on the Commission against Antiziganism was announced the day after the release of the White Paper, without previous public discussion. The stated overall purpose was to provide 'a gathering of forces to combat antigypsyism and to bridge the gap of trust' between the Roma community and society in general' (p.133), and the Commission was stated to be independent. The Chair, Thomas Hammarberg, as well as its nine members, were appointed by the government, following the criteria that the majority should be Roma, representing different subgroups. Additionally, a reference group was composed of representatives of Romani organisations. The Commission included legal experts, but no scholars specialised in the field of antigypsyism studies. Shortly after beginning the work, Hammarberg commented on the process in the following way: 'it is not enough to acknowledge the sins of the past. That is why many of us demanded action against today's antigypsyism, the prejudice and discrimination that continues to blight the lives of Roma in Swedish

⁴¹ Vergara, D. (2014), 'Hammarberg: "Sverige hycklar om romska migranter" [Hammarberg: "Sweden is hypocritical about Roma migrants"]', *Expo*, 20 March.

⁴² Ridderstolpe, E. (2014), 'Regeringen tillsätter kommission mot antiziganism', *SR*, 26 March, <https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/5820047>.

⁴³ Winberg, K. and Lundgren, P. (2014), 'Fp försöker vinna godhetspoäng' ['The Liberal party tries to win goodness points'], i *Svenska Dagbladet*, 26 March.

⁴⁴ SOU (2016), No 44, p. 192.



society. The White Paper demanded a follow-up. That is why the Commission against Antiziganism was set up' (SOU, 2016, No 44, p. 145).

The mandate was for two years, and the assignment was to collect information about contemporary and ongoing antigypsyism, as well as spreading information about the notion and the phenomenon, i.e. through mass media. It was also specified that the Commission should closely follow up on the actions taken by different actors following the revealed police registration of Roma. Additionally, the Commission was assigned the task of disseminating historical knowledge by distributing the White Paper and developing teaching materials.

The Commission conducted a series of hearings with local Roma communities and individuals around Sweden, to form a nuanced picture of the different kinds of antigypsyism affecting Roma. A key objective was to monitor the different reviewing processes of the police register of Roma by governmental agencies such as the Security and Integrity Protection Board (SIN). The Commission was frequently contacted by individual Roma and by the media, and supported with advice and provided numerous public statements. Having reached the conclusion that the police must acknowledge their wrongdoings and apologise, the Commission initiated meetings with the national police, which ultimately led to an apology. The results were published in the 2015 comprehensive report, 'Registration of Roma'⁴⁵.

A further assignment for the Commission was to produce a schoolbook about antigypsyism with a related teachers' guide. It produced regular reports and published topical texts on its website as well as many opinion articles in print media. A declared strategy was to take a clear stand against every form of antigypsyism in as many forums as possible. The final report of the Commission provided several policy recommendations. Several of these concerned the issue of historical justice: a key demand was a public apology by the Prime Minister, which should declare historical responsibility and a commitment to prevent future abuse; another was the creation of memorials and the acknowledgement of memorial days, such as 2 August as Roma Holocaust Memorial Day. Further, it was recommended that geographical names with antigypsyist connotations be revised. The case of the police register was followed closely by the Commission, which demanded that measures be taken so that a similar practice would not be repeated. Another important recommendation was to assign an Equality Ombudsman, as well as for the police to increase their efforts in taking antigypsyist cases to court.

To address antigypsyist structures, the Commission recommended assigning a special representative at EU level to coordinate national efforts. For Sweden it recommended the strengthening of Roma civil society organisations, that the rights of EU citizens struck by racialised poverty be protected when in Sweden, and finally that a 'National Centre for Roma Issues' be created in Sweden. The centre would be

⁴⁵ Documented in SOU (2016), No 44, pp. 243-265.



a body for developing knowledge about antigypsyism and monitoring measures against antigypsyism, as well as safeguarding Romani cultural and linguistic rights. The latter recommendation was a follow-up to the previously mentioned suggestion by the Delegation for Roma Issues to set up a secretariat.

3.1.1 Gains and limitations of the Commission

The Commission had great credibility when it started, not least since it provided a legitimate contrast to the openly racist practice of the police and had a clearer political and more up-to-date approach than the White Paper. A further asset was its composition with a majority of Roma and a Chair with internationally renowned moral integrity. The limitations were mainly its limited time of existence and its lack of financial resources to consult scholarly experts. Another weakness was its dependency on the government.

In the major state inquiry (SOU, 2010, No 55), recommendations were made for the first time for the use of TRPs, including collective material compensation. Subsequently, especially the tool of the truth commission was demanded by key actors in the Delegation. Erik Ullenhag was seen as benevolent to Roma rights, but according to several interviewees, Ullenhag's views were not widely shared in the government. Thus, the White Paper and an EU-inspired NRIS were seen as the best possible options at that point.

However, several interviewees who had been advocating for a TRP retrospectively claim that they were disappointed. As one former Commission member puts it: 'this was not what we had been fighting for'⁴⁶. In fact, the launch of the Commission rather cut short the growing debate on a truth commission, which had gained strength after the revelation of the police register. Whether intended or not, the Commission became an excuse for not creating a truth commission, as one interviewee puts it. Westin concludes: 'It seems that people gave up, it was a way to kill the issue, to remove it from the agenda and to do [the Commission] instead'⁴⁷.

As mentioned above, Westin had already criticised the lack of independence of the White Paper in January 2014 and declared that it would also not represent a political stand of the state in favour of Roma rights⁴⁸. The subsequent Commission gained more credibility because of its composition and mandate to put pressure on the case of the police register. However, in the eyes of the informants this was also not a truth

⁴⁶ Interview with Soraya Post, 14 December 2021.

⁴⁷ Interview with Charles Westin, 16 December 2021.

⁴⁸ RORHIN (2014), 15 January.



commission and, as Lars Lindgren at the Equality Ombudsman states, it was in fact 'far behind international standards for truth commissions'⁴⁹.

The dependency on the government is indicated, first by the fact that the appointment and exchange of Commission members was in the hands of the government, second that a controversial matter within the government such as the Migration Minister's position on Roma and EU migrants was not officially discussed by the Commission, and third that opinion statements of Roma consultants of the Commission were edited by a non-Roma official appointed by the government. Besides the fact that the Swedish Commission lacked independence, it also did not have the resources to conduct comprehensive examinations of abuses, nor did it have the mandate to propose legal or legislative reforms. However, the Commission's recommendation to establish a 'National Centre for Roma Issues' may be interpreted as suggesting an institutional reform, which is one of the transitional justice tools listed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights⁵⁰.

The 'right to know the truth' was already partly met by the White Paper, which the Commission was assigned to disseminate. However, this White Paper was also not an independent investigation, but subject to the government approval. In addition, it was criticised for having too limited a scope – solely the 20th century – and for not focusing enough on the institutions and officials responsible for abuse, but rather on the victims' experiences. However, the Commission actively supported the Roma 'right to know and right to justice' in the case of the police register, and in its intervention against the antigypsyist bias of the 'begging prohibition' demands at the time⁵¹.

It was beyond the Commission's mandate to demand individual or collective material remedies or compensation. However, it forcefully argued for the state to take responsibility in the form of apologies and memorialisation. Also, the Commission was in close contact with the initiative Civil Rights Defenders, which pursued the claims for compensation made by Roma who had been illegally registered by the police.

It should also be mentioned that the Commission did demand several collective remedies in the sense of historical justice [transitional justice], which have only partly been fulfilled:

- that the Prime Minister apologise to the Roma for historical abuses, together with a commitment to 'forward-looking work to prevent violations of the human rights of Roma' (SOU, 2016, No 44, p. 15). This apology never happened in the requested form. In his address on the occasion of International Roma Day, 8 April 2021, Prime Minister Stefan Löfven regretted the dark history and committed to combating

⁴⁹ Interview with Lars Lindgren, 10 December 2021. He refers to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Office (2006), *Rule-of-Law Tools for Post-Conflict States: Truth Commissions*, and to the United Nations (2010) *Guidance Note of the Secretary General: United Nations Approach to Transitional Justice*.

⁵⁰ OHCHR, p. 20.

⁵¹ Cf. media research confirming antigypsyist bias in the 'begging debates': Selling, J. (2022), pp. 154-157.



antigypsyism. However, this was issued only during a Romani event, and not communicated to a wider public⁵².

- that the Head of Police apologise to the Roma for the register (p. 63). This was achieved on 8 May 2015 because of direct meetings with the Board of the Swedish Police. The apology was widely communicated in mass media⁵³.
- the establishment of memorials and commemoration days to recognise the antiziganist history of Sweden, as well as the revision of antiziganist geographical names. 2 August has become established as an official commemoration day in Sweden, not as 'European Roma Holocaust Memorial Day', however, but as 'Commemoration Day of the genocide of the Roma during the Holocaust'⁵⁴. Local memorials have become established in Gothenburg and the region of Skåne commemorating the Swedish history of exclusion, but there is no memorial yet in the capital and no memorial regarding the Roma Holocaust. It is still unclear what role Roma history will have in the planned Holocaust Museum, since the Swedish state has a clear position that Roma are not included in the concept, whereas Roma representatives have demanded inclusion on equal terms: 'Give the Holocaust of the Roma the same dignity as the Holocaust of the Jews'⁵⁵.
- the distribution of its schoolbook on antiziganism and a new printed edition of the White Paper, which was fulfilled by the Stockholm County Administrative Board⁵⁶.

An important recommendation of the Commission was to follow up on the Delegation's idea to set up a secretariat for Roma issues. This was now suggested under the new label 'National Centre for Roma Issues'. The Commission argued that this could be a powerful tool for guaranteeing continuity and consistency in the work against antigypsyism, but that a prerequisite would be that Roma would have real influence on the Centre and would have the majority on its Board (p. 114).

⁵² É Romani Glinda (2021), 'Live!! 50-årsjubileum av den Internationella romadagen 8 april 2021' ['Live!! 50th anniversary of the International Roma Day 8 April 2021'], Facebook, 8 April, <https://fb.watch/aK1vJfd4w6/>.

⁵³ *Dagens Nyheter* (2015), 'Dan Eliasson: "Vi gjorde fel. Vi ska bättra oss"' ['Dan Eliasson: "We made a mistake. We will do better"'], 8 May.

⁵⁴ Living History Forum, <https://www.levandehistoria.se/fakta-fordjupning/forintelsen/minnesdagen-folkmordet-pa-romer>.

⁵⁵ Andersen, Dolores et al. (2019), 'Varför osynliggörs den romska Förintelsen?' [Why is the Roma Holocaust made invisible?], *Expressen*, 29 December, <https://www.expressen.se/debatt/varfor-osynliggors-den-romska-forintelsen/>. A statement by the Roma Council in Malmö in 2020 further clarified the position in an official response to the state inquiry on a Holocaust museum in Sweden: 'The purpose of this consultation and its demands is not to diminish the genocide of the Jewish group, but we ask that the Holocaust of the Roma minority be recognised by including the genocide of both Jews and Roma in the activities of the Holocaust Museum on an equal footing', <https://www.regeringen.se/4a3e64/contentassets/e8af6654fee04f8590f8e89b5215b244/malmo-kommuns-rad-for-nationella-minoriteten-romer.pdf>.

⁵⁶ Statement by the County Administrative Board Stockholm, 12 December 2016, <https://www.regeringen.se/4af056/contentassets/c2b7817bfc9444f8a578cead1438e87/lansstyrelsen-stockholm.pdf>.



The main argument was that a body in the form of an authority would provide strength and continuity. According to the final report of the Commission, the suggestion was widely supported by Roma. At the same time, some authorities, such as the Equality Ombudsman, the Living History Forum and the National Agency for Education were hesitant and preferred to integrate the work into existing authorities, and that higher demands were made with regard to following up on the work carried out. This recommendation was then followed by yet another inquiry, by Charlotta Wickman, who provided a more comprehensive model for what was now labelled an 'Agency for Roma Issues'⁵⁷. After a consultation process, the suggestion was ultimately dropped, and it is uncertain whether it will be resumed. According to information from government officials, it was mainly because the Roma consultants rejected the proposal. Obviously, opinions were divided within the group, but as one of the interviewees puts it: 'That's an easy solution to blame us for the failure. This way we got nothing instead'.

3.1.2 Similarities and differences to the recognition of historical and ongoing injustice against other minority groups

In the 2016 Swedish national plan against racism, three of the five national minorities are highlighted as targeted by contemporary racism: Roma, Jews and Sami people⁵⁸: i.e. antisemitism, antigypsyism and anti-Sami racism are given particular attention. However, in the hate crime statistics cited in the document, anti-Sami hate crimes do not appear as a category, and antigypsyist hate crimes are incoherently labelled as 'anti-Roma', subsumed under the category of 'xenophobic/racist' hate crimes, whereas antisemitic hate crimes are put in a separate category. This inconsistency might be interpreted as an unripe understanding of racism and antigypsyism theory on the side of the Crime Prevention Council (BRÅ), which in 2020 was corrected⁵⁹. The new policy lists 'antigypsyist' hate crimes as a separate category and points out that the self-identification of the targeted person is irrelevant, only the motive of the perpetrator. In this sense, antigypsyism is now treated in a way that corresponds to European standards. However, the national plan has not been updated accordingly.

More problematic are the Swedish memory politics around the concept of the Holocaust and the historical responsibility derived thereof, which includes Jews and antisemitism, but in practice excludes Roma and antigypsyism. Starting with resource allocation and knowledge production, an illustrative example is a recent Swedish

⁵⁷ Wickman, C. (2019) *Långsiktighet och stadga i arbetet framåt. En myndighet för romska frågor* [Long-term perspectives and consistency in the work ahead. An Agency for Romani issues]. Kulturdepartementet, Ds. 2019:15.

⁵⁸ The national minorities of Tornedalers and Swedish Finns are not mentioned at the same level.

⁵⁹ Crime Prevention Council (BRÅ), <https://bra.se/statistik/statistiska-undersokningar/hatbrottsstatistik.html>.



research investment in relation to the 2021 IHRA conference in Malmö. In mapping the research needs in the area, the mission statement by the Swedish Research Council made clear that Roma were not included in the concept of the Holocaust itself, but would be included in the research investment as one of the groups that suffered during the Holocaust, and that the investment also would cover research into present-day 'Roma vulnerability and antigypsyism'⁶⁰. However, in the subsequent recommendations that formed the basis for the final budget decision on the research investment, neither Roma nor antigypsyism were mentioned⁶¹.

In the final budget proposal for 2022, a research investment of SEK 12 million annually (2022-2026) was allocated to research on 'the Holocaust and antisemitism'. The initiative was declared to be 'part of Sweden's commitments ... presented at the Malmö International Forum for Holocaust Remembrance and Combating Antisemitism'⁶². This is highly problematic, since the Swedish government used this alleged commitment as an argument that Sweden does not have to change anything in legal, structural or budgetary terms to meet the demands of the new European framework for Roma inclusion⁶³.

In other words: a non-fulfilled promise to Roma around the Malmö conference was used as justification for not upgrading the fight against historically rooted antigypsyism. This again led to strong reactions from Romani voices in Sweden. The Romani intellectual Bagir Kwiek, who is a son of a Holocaust survivor, writes: 'I would consider it a great insult to my family and my people who were exterminated during the Roma Holocaust in Poland and the rest of Europe if anyone were to accept this in any way'. He also states that it is not a question about what notion is being used, but the hierarchisation of historical responsibility that is unacceptable⁶⁴. One interviewee interprets this as an indication of a more general attitude: 'They did not want to acknowledge that the Roma were part of the Holocaust. That says a lot about how the politicians think. So how could you demand more from people in general?'⁶⁵.

Roma were the first of the national minorities in Sweden to demand a truth commission, and their demand was frustrated in 2014. However, according to Lars Lindgren, this does not have to be the end of the story: 'I ask myself, why do Roma

⁶⁰ Swedish Government Offices, *Regleringsbrev för budgetåret 2021 avseende Vetenskapsrådet*, U2021/02276.

⁶¹ Swedish Research Council (VR), 13 September 2021, dnr. 3.3-2021-06621.

⁶² Swedish Government Offices, Prop. 2021/22:1, Heading 16, p. 270.

⁶³ Swedish Government Offices, Kulturdepartementet, *Rapport avseende Europeiskt ramverk om romers jämlikhet, inkludering och delaktighet 2020-2030*, Promemoria 2021-10-21 Ku2021/' [Report on the European Framework on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2020-2030], pp. 4-7, <https://www.minoritet.se/7184>.

⁶⁴ Bagir Kwiek, email to author, 15 December 2021.

⁶⁵ Interview with Hans Caldaras, 15 December 2021.



today not demand a truth commission?'⁶⁶. As an official of the Equality Ombudsman, he explains that this is not in the hands of the Ombudsman, but that the Ombudsman may be supportive in the process. A perfect example is the upcoming Sami truth commission, which was requested by the Sami Parliament and approved by the government. To achieve this, the Sami representatives contacted the Equality Ombudsman, who assisted in preparing a model. Among other things, seminars and workshops were arranged, where representatives of truth commissions in Canada and South America were able to share their experiences. As Lindgren explains, a truth commission for Roma seemed incompatible with the Swedish system in 2013, above all as investigative services of the state had traditionally been closely connected to the political executive, which does not allow political autonomy. Another expert interviewed echoed this view of the Swedish system⁶⁷. However, Lindgren says that the processes leading up to the truth commissions for Tornedalers and Sami people show that the government administration may have become more creative in finding ways to meet the international standards of truth commissions: there is no 'one-size-fits-all' model for such commissions. Each country must find its own model suitable to the context at hand⁶⁸. Against this backdrop, one interviewee concluded that it would in fact be 'illogical' not to have a truth commission for Roma⁶⁹. Another is less optimistic about this option: 'We had a White Paper and the Commission: why would anyone now agree to set up a truth commission?'⁷⁰. In March 2022, the Swedish Parliament turned down a motion for a Roma truth commission, tabled by the Left Party⁷¹.

⁶⁶ Interview with Lars Lindgren, 10 December 2021.

⁶⁷ Interview with Charles Westin, 16 December 2021.

⁶⁸ Interview with Lars Lindgren, 10 December 2021.

⁶⁹ Interview with Charles Westin, 16 December 2021.

⁷⁰ Interview with Sunita Memetovic, 6 January 2022.

⁷¹ Sveriges Riksdag, Motion 2021/22:2604 'Bättre livsvillkor för romer och resande', ['Better living conditions for Roma and Travellers'], Mia Sydow Mölleby m.fl. (V).



3.2. Assessing the impacts of the Swedish Commission

As already mentioned, the Swedish Commission was not the truth commission that the Roma and pro-Roma voices had asked and hoped for. On the other hand, shortly following the revelation of the police register, the Commission was a much-welcomed body with high credibility and was well received in the press. Yet, all interviewees gave the impression that its long-term impact was very limited. Soraya Post bluntly summarises: 'Today it's gone, it crumbled. In retrospect, it almost seemed unnecessary. The Commission was good, but political will was lacking on the side of the government'⁷².

In this context it should be mentioned that the government that set up the Commission in March 2014 lost power in September 2014, and Minister Ullenhag, who developed the idea, completely withdrew from Swedish domestic politics in May 2016, i.e. shortly before the presentation of the Commission's final report on 22 June 2016. Given the circumstances, the fact that the Commission was an 'in-house product' of department officials under a minister no longer in office probably contributed to the outcome that no minister in office could – or wanted to – claim full ownership of its results.

Another observation is that the Commission came to suffer from the same problems as many other Roma policy measures: the impact disappears gradually if projects are short-lived and without a clear institutional successor. Yet in the case of the Commission at least, a remaining impact seems to be that it established the concept of antigypsyism in political and administrative language⁷³.

3.2.1 Impacts on the legal system

Legislation has not been changed. The aforementioned adjustment in terminology by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention to list 'antigypsyist' hate crimes may be one direct or indirect effect of the Commission. The Equality Ombudsman also reports several cases of Roma being discriminated against. This may have been an effect of the Commission to partly restore trust in the legal system among Roma, so that it seems meaningful to report discrimination. It would require a criminological and legal analysis to judge whether the police have improved their protection of the rights of Roma.

However, lawyer Sunita Memetovic claims that there may have been a snowball effect initiated by the Commission: awareness-raising also influences the legal system. 'If cases of antiziganism are taken to court and attract media attention, legal professionals will get better in understanding the context'⁷⁴. She cites the example of

⁷² Interview with Soraya Post, 14 December 2021.

⁷³ Interview with Mirelle Gyllenbäck, 13 December 2021.

⁷⁴ Interview with Sunita Memetovic, 6 January 2022.



the aforementioned case against a former leader of a populist party, which failed, but that only four months later a student was convicted for antiziganist hate speech⁷⁵: the latter would probably not have happened without the first. Memetovic also refers to another example, which is directly related to the Commission: during the existence of the Commission, four public review agencies concluded that the register had violated the Police Data Act, but none of them wanted to see the dimension of ethnic discrimination. 'This felt very wrong from a legal point of view. They should have seen that it was discrimination. When the case finally went to court, it became clear that it was a case of ethnic discrimination. The Court of Appeal reporter had done his homework'. From this point of view, it was decisive that the Commission had delivered the background analyses necessary for closing the case.

3.2.2 Impacts on the national inclusion strategy and measures targeting antigypsyism

In 2011, Sweden adopted a 20-year strategy for Roma inclusion. By September 2021, the European Commission had called on EU Member States to adopt national strategies based on the new EU framework. The Swedish government, however, concluded in a memorandum that the Swedish strategy would not need to be changed in any substantial way. The specific goal most relevant to CHACHIPEN was assessed in this way: 'No revision of Skr 2011/12:56 [the Swedish 2011 inclusion strategy] is deemed necessary regarding antiziganism and discrimination'⁷⁶. This statement claimed the affirmation of the Roma representatives consulted by the government, who, however, had 'pointed out that strong efforts are needed to combat antigypsyism and discrimination'. This ambiguous statement indicates a nuance of difference, but that 'the Roma' had given their OK to changing nothing.

The memorandum cites several points to show how Sweden is already addressing the specific goal to 'fight and prevent discrimination and antigypsyism':

- the 2014 White Paper and the 2014-2016 Commission against Antiziganism;
- investigative and information efforts by governmental agencies such as the Living History Forum, the Ombudsman for Children, Stockholm County Administrative Board and the State Media Council;
- special assignment to the Police Authority to improve investigating antigypsyist hate crimes, especially IT related;
- Holocaust remembrance, including a planned Holocaust Museum, the hosting of the Malmö forum and the chairing of IHRA 2022-2023.

⁷⁵ District Court of Gävle, Case No B 875-21.

⁷⁶ Swedish Government Offices, Promemoria 2021-10-21 Ku2021.



While this research report cannot judge the effect of each of these measures, the mentioning of the Holocaust remembrance under this point seems problematic, since the Swedish government has repeatedly been criticised by Roma representatives. Sweden's strict application of the Stockholm Declaration clearly excludes Roma from the notion of Holocaust and marginalises the topic of antigypsyism in this context⁷⁷. This also means that Swedish policy is at odds with the recommendations made by the EU to adopt the terms Roma Holocaust, Roma Holocaust Memorial Day, etc. and to disseminate knowledge with this understanding.

It should also be mentioned that the memorandum claimed it to be an asset that in 2020 the IHRA had developed a working definition. The definition, however, is falsely cited as being 'antigypsyism/anti-Roma racism' when in fact it reads 'antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination', which was sharply criticised by Swedish experts⁷⁸. The Ministry of Culture report thus avoided mentioning that this equation of antigypsyism with anti-Roma discrimination was strongly criticised by Roma activists and experts on antigypsyism. Together with the aforementioned opinion of the Roma reference persons that the Swedish inclusion strategy needed a stronger emphasis on antigypsyism, the question arises whether Roma voices are listened to or just cited as alibis.

The Swedish model of reference groups has in fact been criticised. A recent Finnish policy analysis report, which compares Nordic Roma strategies, concludes that Roma reference persons in Sweden 'do not feel that their involvement in Roma policymaking is meaningful and satisfactory'⁷⁹. The reports describe the common practice of inviting Roma representatives to comment on documents that in practice have already been decided, and rarely involving them in their preparation. This seems also to be the case in the cited Swedish governmental assessment that there is no need to revise the Swedish strategy, but probably less so in the work of the Delegation (2006-2010), the White Paper (2011-2014) and the Commission (2014-2016), since they all had thorough dialectic working group processes involving Roma.

Another problem affecting the latter cases is that differences in educational attainment and professional experience tend to put Roma in a subordinate position. This is to a large extent the result of the structural discrimination in the educational system, but also of the fact that formal qualifications rarely play a role in the selection of reference persons. The problem of representation and actual inclusion in policymaking was also the focus of the aforementioned Wickman inquiry⁸⁰. The conclusion was partly in line with the findings of the Finnish report. The Wickman inquiry additionally pointed out the weakness and fragmentation of Roma NGOs in

⁷⁷ This policy was again confirmed at a governmental reference meeting with academic experts on 14 December 2021. (Personal notes by the researcher.)

⁷⁸ IHRA (2020); Cf. Gardell, Hammarberg, Post and Selling (2020).

⁷⁹ Stenroos, Jääskiläinen and Attias (2021), p. 39.

⁸⁰ Wickman (2019).



Sweden as a factor. According to the inquiry officer, the Swedish inclusion strategy would fail if the system were not changed. The proposed solution was to pursue the work to set up an Agency for Roma Issues, with real Roma influence and a declared mission to strengthen Roma NGOs.

As with every other governmental initiative on Roma policies, the Commission involved Roma advisors, whose involvement as such had a positive impact. Even though, in general, the Swedish system of reference groups has its weaknesses, the particular rights perspective of the Commission may have strengthened and inspired the individuals involved. One interviewee also points out the advantages, that individual Roma had a platform to make their voices heard, and that participation in this kind of work could be seen as a qualifying education process⁸¹. On the other hand, there is no evidence of political parties at national level engaging Roma because of the Commission.

3.2.3 Assigned status and follow-up

As already mentioned, the Commission was seen by the interviewees as counterproductive to the demands for a Roma truth commission. Most probably the process leading to the Sami truth commission was inspired by – and learned from – the mistakes of the corresponding Roma process, since the Sami Parliament took its decision in 2014, as the Roma White Paper was being finalised. A further indication is the comment by the Head of the Sami Parliament during a roundtable discussion at the Equality Ombudsman in October 2016: 'The Roma's own organisations had also called for a truth commission, but instead the state chose to carry out its own work that led to a White Paper. With the benefit of hindsight, it has not resulted in sufficient action or compensation for the abuses suffered by the Roma. In other words, a White Paper is not enough in any respect'⁸².

It is also indicative that only the White Paper and not the Commission against Antiziganism was mentioned during this roundtable. Several interviewees confirm the impression that the White Paper, regardless of its merits and weaknesses, is better remembered. Former MEP Soraya Post reflects on this: 'At international conferences, Swedish representatives mention the White Paper more often than the Commission. Probably because they know that the Commission was not followed up'⁸³. Mirelle Gyllenbäck concludes that the White Paper was given a higher status through its ceremonial launch, which even included the presence of the Crown Princess and

⁸¹ Interview with Lars Lindgren, 10 December 2021.

⁸² Equality Ombudsman (DO) (2016), *Rundabordssamtal om internationella erfarenheter av sanningskommissioner Minnesanteckningar* [Minutes of Roundtable on International Experience with Truth Commissions], Umeå, 25-26 October.

⁸³ Interview with Soraya Post, 14 December 2021.



thus was seen as an official statement⁸⁴. This was not the case for the Commission, which delivered its final report at a press conference. One interviewed representative of the Roma civil society organisation says that the White Paper 'left traces' in a way that the Commission did not, which 'shows that we must perhaps think in another way around this'⁸⁵. As already proposed, the shift of political leadership is a possible reason for the lower level of political promotion compared to the White Paper, as well as for the apparent lack of will to follow up.

To sum up, there is widespread disappointment about the lasting effects of the Commission. The Commission proposal for institutional reform, i.e. to establish a permanent Roma rights institution, remained unheard. There is also little evidence that the Commission influenced the justice system, as it was beyond its mandate. However, the Commission successfully supported the claims of Roma against the rights violation through the police register. An indication of its influence is that the Police Chief channelled his apology to the Roma through the Commission. During its existence, the Commission also contributed to awareness of antigypsyism in general, and to a more nuanced discussion around the 'begging prohibits' and the situation of homeless EU citizens in Sweden.

Finally, it most probably inspired the setting up of truth commissions for other national minorities in Sweden. It should also be mentioned that the Swedish experiences were discussed internationally, not least in the process of establishing the German Bundestag Commission on Antiziganism⁸⁶.

⁸⁴ Interview with Mirelle Gyllenbäck, 13 December 2021.

⁸⁵ Interview with Mujo Halilovic, 8 December 2021.

⁸⁶ Interview with Soraya Post, 14 December 2021; cf. Selling, J. (2016, unpublished), *Summary report of the high-level meeting: Confronting Anti-Gypsyism – The Role of Political Leaders in Countering Discrimination, Racism, Hate Crimes and Violence against Roma and Sinti Communities*. Hosted by the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office in cooperation with the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the Council of Europe (CoE) and the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma, Berlin, 6 September.



PART 4: Lessons learned and recommendations

The individuals interviewed have a deep understanding of the concept of antigypsyism. Officials in general in public authorities at the national level, as well as politicians and the media, are also well informed, as are Roma in general. Occasionally, however, too narrow an understanding tends to underestimate the problem, such as acknowledging antigypsyism only when it constitutes racism in a narrow sense, or not wanting to understand the dimension of structural or secondary antigypsyism. In some cases, this may be a deliberate way of avoiding criticism, for example when a right-wing populist is taken to court accused of hate speech⁸⁷, a university is criticised for honouring a scholar accused of antigypsyism⁸⁸ or mainstream politicians blame Roma subjected to structural discrimination for their own situation⁸⁹. Occasionally the question still arises, ‘why should we say “antigypsyism” when we are not allowed to say “Gypsy”?’.

The experience of the researcher of this study is that the possibility of clarifying such questions at the individual level depends on the attitude of the person asking, but that at the same time it is important to set official standards and have the concept sanctioned by means of courts, parliaments and political bodies such as the IHRA or public inquiries. These can provide a basis for guidelines for the media and politicians and ultimately change ‘public opinion.

Life prospects for Roma in Sweden are still very much limited by structural antigypsyism, which is especially evident in the educational sector and on the labour market. However, this must be seen nuanced, as the Roma community in Sweden is extremely heterogeneous. As the interviewed official from the Equality Ombudsman points out, too narrow a focus on antigypsyism may blur other factors and inter-contextuality with structural discrimination shared with other groups, i.e. an intersectional perspective would be beneficial to understanding⁹⁰. Inquiries and research reports also show that Roma are confronted with antigypsyist attitudes at all levels of society. Results by the BRÅ indicate that antigypsyism is less questioned and seen as more acceptable than other forms of racism, as indicated by the fact that antigypsyist hate crimes are more rarely committed anonymously than other hate crimes. Also, as the Commission concludes, few cases of anti-Roma discrimination and antigypsyist hate crimes have been remedied, and there is little evidence that this has changed since 2016.

⁸⁷ Ericksson, L., Memetovic, S. and Selling, J. (2021), ‘Därför anmälde vi Bert Karlsson’ [‘That’s why we reported Bert Karlsson’], *Expressen*, 10 February.

⁸⁸ Selling, J. (2021).

⁸⁹ Statements by former Social Democrat Prime Minister Göran Persson are analysed in Hansson and Persdotter (2019).

⁹⁰ Interview with Lars Lindgren, 10 December 2021.



The assessment by the interviewees could be summarised as follows: the Commission as such was good and had high credibility; above all it was successful in its agenda-setting function during the time of its work. At the same time there is widespread frustration that the Commission did not have a lasting effect and that this was due to lack of time, resources and political will. Several interviewees also stress that its lack of independence was a major weakness.

Soraya Post concludes: 'The mandate was too short. It is necessary to give full strength to such commissions, as the Germans did. There must also be a guarantee that what the commission comes up with is followed up. A commission must be seen as a start and not an end'⁹¹. Post also affirms the impression of another Romani interviewee that there is a lack of political will to really confront antigypsyism: 'It takes people in positions of genuine interest, it doesn't help how much civil society pushes on if there isn't support from people with power and interest'.

Sunita Memetovic concludes that the issue of antigypsyism is cyclical in Swedish politics of the recent decade: 'Now interest has shifted to the topic of gang shootings instead'⁹².

Charles Westin assesses that the limited time and resources of the Commission reflect a general trend, that the investigation service is seen more as a quick-fix political instrument: 'It is a bit unfortunate, it is to dismantle the Swedish governmental commission system that has meant a lot for the development of our society in the 20th century'⁹³.

Equality Ombudsman investigator Lars Lindgren critically remarks that, as the Commission was set up, there was a remarkable lack of understanding of the importance of independent research for knowledge development: 'It is absolutely necessary that the reality description provided by a commission is grounded in research. The research also needs to include documentation of Roma voices; it needs to draw on the perspectives of both perpetrators and victims to arrive at a common description. To know what to do, we need to know what has happened, to see the link between history and the current situation'⁹⁴.

From his position as representative of a Romani information centre, Mujo Halilovic also stresses the importance of independent research: 'We see a continuity from the state through a long series of inquiries that are basically concordant. But little has followed in practice. It is necessary that academic researchers are given a clear mandate to work with antigypsyism: a mandate should be given to one academic institution to compile everything related to antigypsyism. We need an independent

⁹¹ Interview with Soraya Post, 14 December 2021.

⁹² Interview with Sunita Memetovic, 6 January 2022.

⁹³ Interview with Charles Westin, 16 December 2021.

⁹⁴ Interview with Lars Lindgren, 10 December 2021.



evaluation of what has come out of all these inquiries and what is their interrelationship. It is incomprehensible that this has not been done⁹⁵.

4.1 Promising practices in combating antigypsyism

The assets of the Swedish Commission were that it was headed by a person with extremely high integrity, and profound experience in human rights work and communicative skills, as well as the fact that it was well anchored in Roma civil society and that it was timely. Apart from the Commission activities already mentioned, the following promising practices against antigypsyism should be mentioned:

- Teacher training arranged by, for example, the Living History Forum to give tools to combat antigypsyism and other forms of racism. This still has too small an outreach, as did the training for police officers specialised in hate crime. The Commission also provided valuable schoolbooks and teaching materials.
- The Stockholm County Administrative Board regularly offers different kinds of awareness-raising activities for regional and local officials about antigypsyism.
- Public service plays an important role in providing high-quality Roma news channels for the journalistic scrutiny of antigypsyist conditions, as well as giving a platform for Romani voices. This is especially important in Sweden, as at the time of writing there is only one independent Romani news magazine⁹⁶.
- The research and university courses in antigypsyism studies at Södertörn University have, in the last years, been one of the few bases in Sweden for developing knowledge about antigypsyism.

4.2 Pitfalls to avoid when setting up antigypsyism commissions

When assessing the process from the Delegation to the Commission it is important to note that the centre-right government of Fredrik Reinfeldt only picked out pieces of the recipe prescribed by the Delegation in its 2010 report: the White Paper by no means replaced a truth commission, and the 20-year inclusion strategy was adopted without addressing antigypsyism. Above all, the Delegation's idea to empower Roma through a permanent secretariat to give Roma actual monitoring power and influence over the inclusion policy was investigated twice and then dropped without replacement.

As Roma in Sweden do not have NGOs of comparable strength to e.g. the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma, the power disadvantage identified by the Delegation persists. The main academic expert of the Delegation, Charles Westin,

⁹⁵ Interview with Mujo Halilovic, 8 December 2021.

⁹⁶ The online magazine *DIKKO*, www.dikko.nu.



recalls that 'our idea was some sort of empowerment. We were discussing a model like that of the Sami Parliament. This didn't work out. We will see what works'⁹⁷. Former Commission member Soraya Post concludes that some sort of institution would be necessary to secure the possible gains of a Commission, and that the government should not have simply dropped the idea: 'For them it was the easiest way to listen to the sceptical voices and then do nothing'⁹⁸. However, doubts about an Agency for Roma Issues were also expressed by the Stockholm County Administrative Board, which today has the assignment of following up on the inclusion strategy. Its argument was that the follow-up should rather be integrated into the already existing state structures: It would be all too easy to shut down an agency if the political wind changes⁹⁹.

An important lesson to transfer is that Roma ownership of a TRP presupposes powerful, dedicated and knowledgeable allies in the state apparatus with an actual interest in ensuring meaningful participation, but it also presupposes careful planning of Roma civil society structures, whether in the form of NGOs or government-organised NGOs (GONGOs). Another lesson taken from the Sami example, which benefited from institutionalised representation of interest, is to cooperate both with state institutions such as the Equality Ombudsman and with other minority or indigenous groups.

4.3 Swedish perspectives on the European dimension

Several interviewees argue for integrating European or transnational perspectives, which would both correspond to the transnational history of antigypsyism and provide a possibility for Roma in different countries to cooperate around a common interest. Charles Westin points at the universal relevance of a possible Romanian truth commission, which thus ought to be supported internationally: 'a commission in Romania would not only deal with the Second World War, but would also go back to slavery and serfdom, which is so fundamental to understanding antigypsyism. All sociological research, from Myrdal onwards on racism in the US against African Americans, puts the finger on the historical legacy of slavery. We need to understand that it also applies to the enslavement of Roma, which lasted longer and ended roughly at the same time as Afro-American slavery. There is not yet an awareness of this in Europe. This would be a huge task for a Romanian commission'¹⁰⁰.

Finally, a response to the new EU NRIS framework would be to set standards that demand public research funding in antigypsyism studies. As mentioned, this need is

⁹⁷ Interview with Charles Westin, 16 December 2021.

⁹⁸ Interview with Soraya Post, 14 December 2021.

⁹⁹ Interview with Mirelle Gyllenbäck, 13 December 2021.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Charles Westin, 16 December 2021.



stressed by several interviewees. As it currently stands, the new framework emphasises the importance of knowledge production and dissemination in several ways. However, it is not specified that the conditions for knowledge production must be provided for in terms of funding. We can see from the Swedish example above that there is a lack of understanding of this, and even a deliberate neglect of Roma and antigypsyism. Conjoint to this it might be added, as Soraya Post proposed in her interview, that the will to include Roma at all levels of research projects should be a prerequisite for funding.

This would provide for independent systematic monitoring and create a better basis for policy development, which would be a necessary addition to the suggested permanent agency or secretariat for Roma issues. The immediate step to take by Sweden, however, would be to upgrade the national Roma inclusion strategy to the norms specified in the new EU NRIS framework¹⁰¹.

¹⁰¹ European Commission (2020), COM(2020) 620, 7 October.



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CHACHIPEN
Remembrance, Recognition,
Justice and Trust-Building



CENTRAL COUNCIL of German
Sinti & Roma



FAGIC
Federación de Asociaciones
Gitanas de Cataluña

ASOCIATIA FAST FORWARD

About the project

CEPS, together with the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma, the European Roma Grassroots Organisations (ERGO) Network, the Federació de Associacions Gitanas de Catalunya (FAGIC), the Asociația Fast Forward (AFF) from Romania, has launched an EU Rights, Equality and Citizenship programme & German Ministry of Foreign Affairs funded project called 'Paving the way for Truth and Reconciliation Process to address antigypsyism in Europe: Remembrance, Recognition, Justice and Trust-Building', abbreviated as 'CHACHIPEN' for 'truth' in the Romani language.

This project aims to lay the foundations for the transitional justice, via tools like Truth and Reconciliation processes as a way to address historically rooted antigypsyism in Europe. Using the experiences from Swedish and German Independent commissions, the project will draw the lessons on what has (not) worked. We elaborate what processes could be of relevance for Romania and Spain and at the EU level to combat antigypsyism, aiming to build a common narrative on Roma equality.

More about the project:

<http://antigypsyism.eu/chachipen/>



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