

1. A CHRONOLOGICAL DIGEST OF EVENTS AFFECTING THE ROMA OF HUNGARY IN 2003

January

One in every ten pupils enrolled at Hungarian general (elementary) schools is of Roma descent. More than one third of these children are in classes where the majority of the pupils are also Roma. Almost one in every five of Roma children attending general school has at least a mild learning disability. Through the integration norms to be introduced from the coming school year onwards, the Ministry of Education intends to intervene at the core of the system by having segregation replaced by integrated education.

Forty to fifty Roma families are returning to Hungary from Canada every month. They are people who emigrated there over the past five years but have failed to secure refugee status or residence rights. Some statistics indicate that at least 5,000 Hungarian citizens applied to the Canadian authorities for refugee status, about 300 of whom were able to satisfy the agencies considering their cases. The Canadians declared the remainder economic migrants and returned them to their country of origin. Some time ago the Hungarian authorities undertook to give returnees every possible assistance.

According to an analysis carried out by the United Nations Development Programme and International Labour Organisation, the living standards of the Gypsy populations of prospective European Union members Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia are stuck at much the same level as Black Africa, the world's poorest zone. One Gypsy in ten suffers more or less constant hunger, one in two suffers it on a regular basis; their drinking-water supply is unsanitary, their children are severely malnourished, their educational opportunities are slight, so that the chances of securing employment would be low even if they were not subjected to racial discrimination. Alongside a relatively high birth rate is an alarmingly high infant mortality, and a low life expectancy; thus, even though the Roma populations themselves consider their health 'reasonable' in reality it is catastrophically poor. Despite their multiple disadvantages and being caught in sundry social traps, very nearly half of Gypsies nevertheless manage to find work on an

occasional or regular basis, though usually in the black or grey economy. Their incomes (including all social assistance) are so minimal that more than half is spent paying for everyday necessities. When hard-pressed, their only available sources of private loans are at predatory interest rates. The poorest Romas, the study alleges, receive no assistance even from wealthier Gypsies, but a ‘class solidarity’ does exist with the most underprivileged non-Roma populations. Despite a widespread perception to the contrary, the vast majority of Romas resort to begging or stealing for their survival only in extremis, and with feelings of shame and guilt at having been reduced to that. In reality, the bulk of Romas seeks to be integrated into society at large. but at the same time—like any other minority—they reject assimilation and the loss of their own identity.

Candidates for the Democratic Roma Coalition (DRC) obtained 52 of the 53 seats on the newly elected National Gypsy Minority Self-Government (NGMS) in voting at the 11th January electoral assembly as, with a single exception, only individuals representing this organisation appeared on voting papers. Apart from DRC candidates, only Elemér Farkas, who was sponsored by the Democratic Alliance of Hungarian Gypsies, gained a seat in the self-government. At the assembly, with some 2,700 electors registering their attendance, a total of 1,347 individuals actually voted at the ballot boxes late on the Saturday night. Lungo Drom did not participate in the voting; its supporters had previously left the hall to travel home because the protests that the party had lodged with the National Electoral Commission (NEC) over the assembly were rejected as unfounded. The highest number of votes were received by the NGMS’s previously serving deputy chairman, Miklós Pálfi, whilst among the DRC candidates for the chairmanship Vilmos Kövesi came in third and Aladár Horváth in 26th place. At a press conference early on the Sunday morning, after the declaration of results, Aladár Horváth promised a democratic system instead of the ‘despotic’ one-party system and personality cult that had characterised the NGMS hitherto, laying emphasis on the importance of humanity in the ‘change of Roma régime’ that was now being ushered in. Vilmos Kövesi stated that the new NGMS would be working in close partnership with the current national government to further the interests of Hungary’s Roma population.

A Supreme Court ruling has quashed the decision by the National Electoral Commission to uphold the results of the election to the National Gypsy Minority Self-

Government and ordered a re-run of the voting. In its pronouncement on an appeal lodged by the Lungo Drom electoral coalition, the Supreme Court found that only 1,347 of the total 4,592 electors qualified to vote had actually participated at the electoral assembly to choose members of the NGMS, and the voting had in consequence failed to reach the numbers required for a quorum.

Flórián Farkas, a Fidesz national assembly representative and chairman of the Lungo Drom coalition, has asked the prime minister, Péter Medgyessy, to appoint a government commissioner to ensure fair and legal conduct of the re-run electoral assembly for the National Gypsy Minority Self-Government. Lungo Drom's chairman considers that close supervision is necessary to forestall electoral irregularities. The request was made in a letter that was sent to the head of government on Wednesday. Mr Farkas justified the request on the grounds that "he had no wish to be a party to serial fraud and infractions of the law." Provided there was no repetition of the events to which they had taken exception during the previous vote, they would not walking out of deliberations at the re-run electoral assembly that is due to be held on 1st March. In his letter Mr Farkas urges "avoidance of possible mass manipulation," whilst in the interests of ensuring equality of chances coaches transporting electors to the assembly venue should only set off from county centres and deliver electors straight to the place where the deliberations are to be held, with the timetable for the coaches being communicated to those concerned at least eight days ahead. Mr Farkas furthermore asked that seating provision be made for the total of 4,500 electors at the assembly venue; that entry to the area that was being used be allowed only via 'control points'; and that VIPs—invited in equal numbers by the big national Gypsy organisations—be located in a 'clearly separated area' within the hall. Registration and the counting of the votes should be scrutinised by observers who were on no account to be electors, Mr Farkas proposed. He also felt it was important that those arriving to vote should be registered by producing their identity card and using a PIN code; that the agenda of the meeting be split up between the parties; and electors "be informed that they may not take into or display in the hall any sort of distinctive marking that might lend itself to influencing the result." Lungo Drom's chairman also suggested that bars not be open whilst the meeting was in progress, or that they only be allowed to operate during intervals. For open votes he proposed that there be two tellers

per sector, with votes being recounted until both arrived at the same figure. Prior to secret ballots the presiding chairman should check that the assembly was quorate. “It is in the interests of every democratically minded and committed citizen that the election called for 1st March be fair and its result not under any shadow of dispute,” Mr Farkas noted in his letter to the prime minister.

February

The Democratic Roma Coalition addressed a number of questions to Flórián Farkas, the chairman of Lungo Drom. According to DRC leaders Aladár Horváth, Orbán Kolompár and Vilmos Kövesi, last year the National Gypsy Minority Self-Government, then led by Mr Farkas, received approaching HUF 1 billion in budgetary support. One of the questions runs: “When can the public expect to gain a proper account of how that support was spent?” The DRC leaders are also curious as to where Lungo Drom was at times when mass evictions of Roma families were taking place, and how many times it intervened against racist attacks or exclusionary measures directed against Gypsies. The Coalition claims that the NGMS designated HUF 300 million for the construction of social housing, whilst Flórián Farkas in his position as chairman had a budget allowance of HUF 20 million. It is seeking advice on how the said amounts were spent. In reference to recent statements made by Mr Farkas, the DRC leaders emphasised that, based on the position taken by National Electoral Commission, no fraud had occurred at the NGMS electoral assembly held on 11th January, and the DRC had won the election within the bounds of the law as it had been interpreted up till now. Even the Supreme Court was not ordering a re-running of the election on the basis of charges relating to fraud but on account of the failure to reach the necessary quorum at the time votes were cast, which had been occasioned by the walk-out staged by Lungo Drom. The Democratic Roma Coalition considers that the system of minority self-government is in need of radical reform, and it also regards it as being in the public interest to remove Flórián Farkas from his position at the head of the NGMS.

The Democratic Roma Coalition sees its basic principles as being the elimination of Roma segregation and their integration into mainstream society. Assuming that it wins the March election of the National Gypsy Minority Self-Government for which it is now

gearing up, the Coalition would reconstruct one third of the existing Gypsy shanty settlements within the next three years. “Experts have now worked out what needs to be done to close the gap for the Roma population; all that has to be done is start to implement it,” announced Aladár Horváth, one of the three leaders of the DRC. The grouping intends to enter the March 1st election without declaring a candidate for the chairmanship. In reference to ideas about provision of habitable housing, Orbán Kolompár noted that so far, of the HUF 300 million earmarked by the NGMS under Flórián Farkas’s leadership for its house construction programme, only HUF 48 million had been spent. Mr Kolompár feels sure that this amount could be multiplied threefold from EU sources. He also spoke about demolishing the 460 Gypsy ghettos in Hungary that currently provide dwellings for almost 100,000 people. As he expressed it, “The houses in the shanty settlements have to be bulldozed and homes fit for human beings constructed in their place.” As to implementing the item on slum clearance in the medium-term government programme that was accepted six years ago, no government has, as yet, accepted so much as a single draft decree. According to a briefing given by Aladár Horváth, the prime minister’s adviser on Gypsy affairs, the DRC wants to reach agreement with the government on the technical aspects of the plans so that at the very least one third of existing slum housing areas are cleared within three years. The alliance would like to set up a network of Roma social assistants who would maintain contacts with local schools, the local minority self-government and social institutions. Mr Horváth considers that a consolidation programme is needed to support families that have been caught in a tax trap. He declared that if the Coalition wins, the new NGMS would step in with all available means to fight segregation of Gypsy children at school.

Following the Supreme Court ruling that the election to the National Gypsy Minority Self-Government was null and void, Flórián Farkas, the chairman of Lungo Drom, requested the prime minister to appoint a government commissioner in order to guarantee the legality of the re-run ballot. In his written response, the text of which was published yesterday, Péter Medgyessy stated that the government was not at liberty to extend its role beyond that laid down in the constitution and thus was unable to comply with Mr Farkas’s requests. The cabinet was not in a position to exercise any influence on the legality of the election, either through the appointment of a government commissioner or by

prescribing any of the technicalities relating to the conduct of voting. The prime minister nevertheless is asking the office of the Minister of the Interior, under whose supervision the National Electoral Commission falls, to examine the other proposals made by Lungo Drom and, in so far as they are compatible with existing legal provisions, make use of them. In his letter, the prime minister finally noted: "I am sure that all public administrative bodies that are involved in preparing for the election will adhere strictly to a firm grounding of legality. Beyond that, however, democracy also calls for those who are entitled to take part in the election to be responsible and sober in their decision and thereby facilitate the formation of the minority self-government."

The poverty index of Hungary's Romas is three times that for the country as a whole, while the support provided to them by self-government is quadruple. Thus, Gypsies are employed somewhat more on public work projects, though such jobs are rather looked down on by society at large. These are among the findings of a survey commissioned by the National Association of Local Self-Governments from the Social Research Institution Rt. According to the survey, Gypsies tend to live in greatest deprivation in settlements where their numbers are relatively small. Examining social inequalities, the research found that in settlements where Romas form under 2 per cent of the population the chances that Roma children will attend a school in another village or town fall to one half that for the population as a whole. With higher ratios the chances of attending a school in a more distant district do grow, but this never attains the average mobility; or to put it another way, Gypsy children are always relatively at a disadvantage as compared with their non-Gypsy contemporaries when it comes to entering the school of their parents' choice. The survey shows that such inequalities are not affected by the size of the settlement in question. It is curious that 2 per cent came out as the breakpoint a number of other times in this work. For instance, when looking at interethnic conflicts it turned out that disputes were relatively uncommon when the Gypsy population was below 2 per cent, whereas there was 'a sharp increase' above that. In light of a sampling of opinions from local government leaders, the likelihood of conflict within a community is a function not just of the number or proportion of Romas but of the size of the settlement. The researchers were able to demonstrate a 'strong correlation' between the distribution of Romas within a settlement and the frequency of conflicts. Thus, social discord is more common in the case of Gypsies who

live in poverty on the margins of a community than it is with Gypsies living in better circumstances within the heart of the settlement. Based on estimates of experts in the local governments questioned, the group that undertook the survey put the size of the Roma population within the settlements they investigated at 8.8%.

The re-run election for the National Gypsy Minority Self-Government is to commence on 1st March at the Hungexpo site in Budapest. The results of an electoral assembly held on 11th January, 2003 were ratified by the National Electoral Committee, but the Supreme Court, in sustaining a complaint by the Lungo Drom coalition, which had marched out of the assembly site, ordered a new ballot on the ground that “fewer than half of the chosen electors at the electoral assembly had participated, consequently the electoral assembly was not quorate.” The NEC subsequently took the view that the number of votes cast did not necessarily have to reach the 50% required for quorum. In so far as the second election is also unsuccessful, Hungary’s Roma population will be left without a minority self-government for four years. One issue is what will happen if the assembly remains quorate but the number of votes cast nevertheless still falls below the 50% level: would the view taken by the Supreme Court ruling or the NEC’s determination take precedence? Emilia Rytókó, head of the National Electoral Office, did not wish to offer any opinion, noting that this was a matter of the NEC’s ‘informed decision’. In her briefing on the technical details Ms Rytókó pointed out that, as in January, electors arriving from outside the capital to vote on the Saturday would be able to use public transport free of charge. Those travelling by rail would be issued a free ticket on showing their letter of invitation. Apart from this, coaches would be transporting participants to the capital from every county centre, with almost one hundred coaches—95 to be precise—being placed at the disposal of the Roma electors. At the rerun election, an identity check would be made not only to register electors on arrival but also to keep track of those leaving, so that it would be possible to know precisely how many electors were present in the hall at any given time, Ms Rytókó stressed. She added that in order meet the Supreme Court’s expectations, the NEC had decided that, in addition to the number of electors registered at the start of the assembly, it would also be officially recorded how many electors were present when balloting effectively started. The electors would hold open votes on the individuals who would be chairing the assembly, the committee of tellers charged with

counting the ballots, and the nominees. In a departure from the procedure in January, the participants would be able to cast their votes with a special card issued at the venue, rather than with their invitation, Ms Rytók mentioned. In line with previous practice, the representatives in the NGMS would be chosen by the electors in a secret ballot.

March

The Democratic Roma Coalition recorded a clear-cut victory at the rerun electoral assembly for the National Gypsy Minority Self-Government held at the weekend. Only two of the candidates from Lungo Drom —Flórián Farkas and János Bogdán Jr—were elected to the 53-seat body. According to the results declared at dawn on Sunday, 2nd March, the highest vote was recorded for Aladár Horváth. Congratulations to the winners were offered by past chairman Flórián Farkas. The rerun NGMS election on Saturday evening was notable for its high turn-out and placid atmosphere. Lungo Drom had marched out of the first electoral assembly, held on 11th January 2003, and the Supreme Court had annulled the sweeping victory that the DRC had likewise registered then, ruling that the ballot was inquorate. The National Electoral Commission had accordingly called a new ballot for 1st March, and in line with the Supreme Court's reasoning it was required that a quorum of electors be present not just at when the assembly commenced but when balloting got under way.

In January 2,685 of the very nearly 4,600 qualified electors had registered for the first assembly, whereas this time there were 2,993, or in other words a turn-out of 65%. The proceedings at the Hungexpo site in Budapest started early on Saturday afternoon, considerably later than was officially scheduled. Electors of the Democratic Roma Coalition again wore white scarves, but unlike at the first assembly no red carnations, marking Socialist Party members, were on view. In order to avoid the chaotic scenes that had characterised the previous assembly, the two main alliances, Lungo Drom and the DRC, had reached prior agreement on nominees for the chairpersons for the proceedings and the committee of tellers. With the electors of both alliances keeping to the recommended individuals during the open voting, no count was made of the actual number of votes cast in view of the 'clear majority'. Thus, unlike at the January conclave, it could not be gathered at this stage which of the factions was numerically stronger. Alongside

Lungo Drom and the Democratic Roma Coalition, the Third Force Alliance, a new organisation that is seeking to support independent electors, was also in evidence. Nomination of candidates was completed speedily and with no hitches, the names of 150 electors being set out in alphabetical order on voting cards. Apart from the 53 candidates each proposed by Lungo Drom and the DRC, there were 35 nominees of the Third Force Alliance, led by Miklós Pálfi, and nine who were unaligned to any organisation. The sole surprise was that Mr József Ráduly, leader of the Budapest 100-Strong Gypsy Orchestra, who was running for the Third Force Alliance, failed to receive the 10 percent of the votes cast needed to be confirmed as a candidate. At the start of the secret vote to decide the composition of the new NGMS, the chairman announced that on the basis of the computer record 2,832 electors were present in the hall and thus the assembly was quorate. With voting papers being distributed at about 9 p.m., a total of 2,869 were finally counted as having cast their ballots, thus rendering irrelevant discussion as to what would happen if the number of votes did not achieve the necessary quorum.

Despite the clear-cut advantage in seats won by the DRC, it has to be said that, as with the NGMS electoral assemblies in 1995 and 1999, the margin was not as substantial in reality as that suggests; however, the rules of voting by party lists preclude any element of proportional representation in the result. The highest number of votes cast (1,537) were for Aladár Horváth, whilst of the other two DRC leaders, Orbán Kolompár (1,391) came in ninth, and Vilmos Kövesi (1,365) was twentieth. The 1,109 votes cast for Flórián Farkas only sufficed for 52nd place. In speeches from the platform, the DRC leaders and their elected representatives thanked the electors for their discipline and patience during the election. Mr Horváth gave assurances that the losers had nothing to fear from either witch-hunting or discrimination. He, along with the other two leaders, emphasised that the new NGMS would be doing everything within its power to be truly representative of Hungary's Roma population. Through the programmes that were to be launched for alleviating poverty, they would be seeking to improve the situation not just of Gypsies but of all needy Hungarian citizens. At present, there is no sign that Lungo Drom intends to lodge any objection to the election; in an announcement he made to press reporters on the Hungexpo site but in another building at the time the election result was announced, Flórián Farkas congratulated the winners. In response to questions, he said that he would "in all probability" be taking part in the work of the NGMS.

The new body will hold its inaugural meeting after the elected representatives have received their letters of credence. The person most likely to win the position of chairman—though the DRC did not officially nominate a candidate—is Aladár Horváth.

At its Tuesday meeting, the National Electoral College formally ratified the results recorded in the official minutes of the electoral assembly held last weekend for the National Gypsy Minority Self-Government. Prior to the decision making, the NEC chairman, Lajos Ficzer, reminded those present that no complaint or objection had been lodged to date in regard to the deliberations. “As we were able to observe, the assembly was conducted in an orderly fashion and in accordance with the provisions laid down for it,” Mr Ficzer added, also noting that the process had been quorate throughout, with a level of participation continuously in excess of 60%.

At its inaugural meeting on Wednesday, the National Gypsy Minority Self-Government elected Aladár Horváth as its chairman. In the ballot—with the candidate abstaining—31 representatives voted for Mr Horváth, who is one of the leading figures in the Democratic Roma Coalition. By a similar margin Orbán Kolompár, chairman of the Forum of Gypsy Organisations of Hungary, was elected executive chairman. Prior to the voting, members of the National Association of Gypsy Organisations (NAGO) who had been nominated onto the body staged a walk-out since, according to a statement made by vice-chairman Vilmos Kövesi, they considered that the manner in which the meeting was convoked had been irregular. In giving thanks for the support following the ballot, Mr Horváth declared that he had hoped that at the inaugural session, after months of strenuous effort, the NGMS’s affairs would finally reach a position of rest and would be able to elect a chairman in the presence of all representatives. On Thursday he would be appealing by letter to the leaders of NAGO to propose that they seek agreement on ways in which the Association would be able to gain representation in the charring of the NGMS. He singled out the creation of equality of educational opportunities for Roma children with the children of Hungary’s majority society, the provision of work for the unemployed, and the provision of decent living conditions as the most essential tasks, emphasising that their aim was that these benefits should also be accessible to underprivileged non-Roma Hungarian citizens.

The National Association of Gypsy Organisations considers Wednesday's election of the National Gypsy Minority Self-Government's chairman illegal and will be lodging an objection to the vote on Friday, Vilmos Kövesi, NAGO's vice-chairman announced. According to Mr Kövesi, several issues relating to yesterday's election had posed a legal problem. For one thing, invitations had been sent out to the members of the new NGMS only three—not the prescribed eight—days in advance; secondly, his own name had been printed on the invitations without his permission. The tension that arose during Wednesday's election had not subsided by the next day; on Thursday morning, one of the representatives had assaulted a colleague, who was currently receiving hospital treatment. Having examined the NGMS statutes, NAGO's own legal experts, including György Kolláth, a constitutional lawyer, have concluded that there are grounds for lodging a protest against Wednesday's decision. NAGO was a member of the Democratic Roma Coalition, the electoral alliance that gained a stunning victory at the rerun election of representatives on the NGMS on 1st March. Even before the election, there had been arguments between DRC members as to which organisation would supply the chairman of the NGMS. At its inaugural meeting on Wednesday, which NAGO's representatives had walked out of, the NGMS had ended up voting Aladár Horváth, a Roma Parliament politician, as its chairman. One of the deputy-chairmen chosen at the same meeting has already announced that he will step down from the newly won position. The statement released to the press, datelined Bányternye, 13th March 2003, runs: "At the National Gypsy Minority Self-Government's inaugural session yesterday, I did not agree that a walk-out was the appropriate response under the circumstances. In view of the divisions within the NGMS, however, I do not wish to play a leading role within the body, and for that reason I resign my office of deputy-chairmen. Szilárd Szomora, NGMS representative." In giving his own reaction to this to the Roma Press Centre, Aladár Horváth, the newly elected NGMS chairman, commented that he was staggered by the course events had taken, and he found it incomprehensible that defeat in an election could provoke such tempestuous passions: "This is a matter for the police, but equally a heavy political responsibility is borne by those who, by raising tempers and provocation, seek to undermine confidence in the newly elected NGMS." Mr Horváth called on all his fellow representatives to resolve their political differences peacefully. He noted, "There is no reason for anyone to be anxious. Just a few dozen are prepared, through actions such as this, to jeopardise the moral standing of several hundred thousand Romas."

April

The Gypsy minority self-governments of the S.W. Hungarian town of Mohács and surrounding villages are sending a petition to Prime Minister Péter Medgyessy to request that public works programmes be set up in their district. István Kovács, chairman of the Mohács Gypsy minority self-government, said that 80% of the able-bodied Romas living in the town are unable to find employment, and as a result the roughly 3,500 local Gypsy population faces major problems with making a livelihood. Those problems had been alleviated somewhat over the past 18 months by a public works programme that provided a modest, but more or less steady income for some 50-80 families. This year, however, the programme proposal worked out by the Mohács Gypsy minority self-government had been rejected by the Ministry of Works due to lack of funding, and that was made worse by the fact that public works projects were also not being organised for the Roma inhabitants of nearby villages, although these too were suffering from high unemployment. The district's Gypsy minority self-governments are now looking to the prime minister for assistance. If the Ministry of Works continues to reject the claims of the Mohács district's Gypsies, the Roma inhabitants were threatening to close down and paralyse traffic at the Hungarian-Croatian border crossing at Udvar, Mr Kovács declared. They were well aware that a demonstration of that kind was illegal, he added, but their level of deprivation and hopelessness had made them willing to run the risks that might arise from such an infringement of the law.

Many fewer people would lose out through Hungary's accession to the European Union than would have been the case had the country stayed out, chancery minister Péter Kiss suggested. Accession would give new opportunities, through teleworking or part-time employment, to those who had been unable to adapt to earlier changes, the head of the Office of the Prime Minister pointed out. He also noted that during the three years after accession roughly the same number of people would be able to work abroad as do so currently, the difference being that they would now be able to do so legally. Aladár Horváth, chairman of the National Gypsy Minority Self-Government, sees a chance for the Roma population not to come out as losers in the modernisation process. As he put it, Hungary could be a thriving nation if the Romas, who are in most need of progress, are

part of that. Mr Horváth sees the most important tasks as being to guide Roma children back into 'the normal educational system' and decreasing segregation within settlements. Under questioning, he said that he did not think there was likely to be a mass emigration by Gypsies following Hungary's accession to the EU.

A joint press conference to mark International Roma Day was held at the Kossuth Club in Budapest by Mrs Magda Kovács Kósa, the Socialist Party parliamentary representative, László Teleki, Under-Secretary of State for Gypsy Affairs in the Office of the Prime Minister, and Aladár Horváth, chairman of the National Gypsy Minority Self-Government. Information provided in a hand-out stated that the first World Gypsy Conference was held in London in 1971, with 21 countries sending delegations, and it was they who had decided that 8th April would thenceforth be designated International Roma Day. Speaking about the increasingly active part that Romas are playing in Hungarian public life, Mrs Kovács Kósa pointed out that surveys indicated that participation in the most recent parliamentary and local government elections had been as high among Romas as among the non-Roma population. As she put it, the Gypsies have produced their own political élite. The current government was seeking to improve the situation for the country's Roma population by working with Gypsies, not ignoring them or going over their heads. Mr Teleki asserted that what he was hoping to see from EU accession was an end to all forms of exclusion, including segregation in education, whilst from leading figures in Gypsy public life he was looking forward to common stands being taken on major issues. Mr Horváth now sees a possibility, for the very first time, of harmony being achieved between modernisation, catch-up by the Roma population and the achievement of human dignity. He called for a high turnout by Roma voters to support Hungarian accession to the EU in Saturday's referendum.

Radio C, the only radio station in the world that is broadcasting to a Roma audience round-the-clock, is facing serious financial difficulties. László Teleki, Under-Secretary of State for Gypsy Affairs, has revealed that György Kerényi, Radio C's head of programming, recently put in a request to his office for a HUF 30 million grant package. Teleki has offered Radio C HUF 6 million from the discretionary budget available to him, and he will be seeking to make up the remainder of the total from other government sources.

Aladár Horváth has announced that the National Gypsy Minority Self-Government will launch a collection to assist the station. The HUF 30 million will only provide a temporary respite. In a press release to the MTI news agency Mr Kerényi noted that Radio C needed altogether HUF 70 million to pay off its accumulated debts and still remain on air for the rest of the year. The head of programming reported that despite all belt-tightening Radio C has accumulated a debt of more than HUF 50 million, and so far they had seen none of the HUF 6 million that the government promised last December and that was needed for sheer survival. For the time being, programming was being cut back to transmissions of music only, but soon even that might not be possible.

One in ten Roma youngsters do not complete their elementary education—that is one of the findings of a survey carried out by Delphoi Consulting, an advisory and research firm, under the guidance of psychologist Ferenc Babusik. According to the study, 97% of non-Roma children complete their elementary schooling by the age of 15, whilst for Gypsy children the ratio is just 70-75%. There is also a substantial difference between Roma and non-Roma youngsters in regard to further education. More than three quarters of Roma children who complete their elementary education go on to enter trade schools, which offer little in the way of useful qualifications, whilst only 15% enrol in a vocational middle school, and fewer than 7% continue studies in a high school. For non-Roma pupils, some 47% go to a trade school, and almost one in five—18.5%—wins entry to high school. The summary of the results of the study takes the view that nowadays gaining a vocational qualification without passing the regular high-school diploma leaves people a short step away from finding themselves unemployable. Despite that, a mere 15-22% of Roma youngsters who complete their basic education manage to gain entry to secondary institutions that offer their students a decent chance of being able to obtain jobs in the current labour market. The researchers point out that the ratio of Roma pupils also strongly affects choices at secondary level: in general schools that have high numbers of Gypsy pupils, as compared with the national average, only half the non-Roma children go on to high school.

How Roma pupils fare at elementary school was also the subject of a study by Gábor Havas, István Kemény and Ilona Liskó, the results of which have appeared in book form.

This analysis shows that in the decade from 1985 to 1996 there was a 40% growth in places available at Hungarian high schools and 70% growth at vocational middle schools, while the number of youngsters completing elementary schooling actually declined. Due to the way school funding depends on hitting numbers for class sizes, it lies very directly in teachers' interests to accept and retain as many pupils as they possibly can. The book points out: "With fewer pupils applying for a greater number of places, room has now been found for Roma children as well. Secondary schools need children, and under those circumstances even Roma children have been accepted in the same way as Roma workers were accepted by mines and steel works 30-40 years ago. In order to ensure that pupil rolls were met, they have relaxed their insistence on previously applied standards. To put it bluntly, they have relaxed their insistence on the children being White and even on their knowing anything." In other words, significantly more young Gypsies are staying on in school, but those youngsters who belong to the majority society are gaining the education at a higher level. The gap between Romas and the others has not diminished in recent decades.

May

The Ministry for the Environment and Water Management has announced that it is inviting entries—to be submitted by the deadline of 31st July 2003—for projects aimed at "Reducing environmental hazards occurring in Gypsy settlements". The background to this competition, as the sponsor sees it, is that "the environmental state of Hungary's Gypsy settlements has been remarkably neglected. We therefore wish to make it possible for local Gypsy minority self-governments to put their surroundings into a more habitable condition by taking advantage of public works and utilities."

In Hungary the average level of registered unemployment is 6%, but among the Roma minority it can run as high as 60%. This year the Ministry of Employment Policy and Labour has allocated HUF 10 billion to programmes aimed at helping those in the Roma minority into work, said Gábor Csizmár, under-secretary of state at the ministry, in a speech to the Roma Job and Training Fair organised by the Békés County Job Centre. Fourteen Roma job-search managers have set about helping non-registered unemployed Roma to sign on. A total of 1,685 individuals have been assisted one way or another under

what was called the Roma Start programme, stated Ágnes Nagy, director of the Békés County Job Centre. Encouraged by the successes that have been achieved to date, they are continuing that programme under the name of Roma Start Plus. In addition to their primary service of giving careers and employment advice, the Roma managers would be helping to set up a family assistance network within the county. At the Job and Training Fair, which was organised at the Békés Sports Hall, approximately 1,000 Roma visitors had the opportunity to choose among 41 training opportunities and 520 jobs notified by close to 100 employers.

The National Association of Gypsy Organisations is calling on Aladár Horváth, chairman of the National Gypsy Minority Self-Government, to resign on account of his unethical political conduct and his opaque economic endeavours. Vilmos Kövesi, NAGO's deputy chairman, told the MTI news agency on Friday that he and a number of fellow representatives were hoping the present leadership would declare the NGMS's 29th May session an extraordinary meeting for the re-election of officials. He added that in his actions hitherto and during the elections Mr Horváth had not fulfilled his promises of democracy and régime change but, on the contrary, had stirred up conflict with the Under-Secretary of State for Gypsy Affairs and several ministries. "Hungary's Roma population and society at large need Gypsy leaders who are capable of thinking responsibly and have a feeling for social peace, not non-Roma experts hiding behind inauthentic programmes," Mr Kövesi asserted.

At this Thursday's session of the National Gypsy Minority Self-Government, a heated debate broke out between representatives loyal to the Horváth and Kövesi platforms. In line with the announcements that he had made beforehand, the NAGO leader proposed a motion of no confidence in Aladár Horváth, the NGMS chairman. Among the reasons that he cited for proposing the motion, which had twenty-one signatories, Mr Kövesi mentioned that over the past two months, in contravention of the electoral agreement, there had been no significant cooperation between the two platforms. In NAGO's view, Mr Horváth had not been successful in representing Hungarian Roma society and there had been no perceptible attempts to make further progress. To fend off accusations that might be made against himself, Mr Kövesi pointed out that the criticisms he was putting forward were not

fuelled by right-wing motives; he had already publicly dissociated himself from right-wing political attitudes. The mood then turned somewhat ugly. NAGO's representatives asked that the session be declared a closed meeting and the vote of no confidence be held by secret ballot; however, these requests were rejected by a majority of the representatives. The Kövesi platform then claimed that inappropriate provisions had been applied to determine the order of voting, and thus the decision made by Orbán Kolompár—deputising for Mr Horváth, who was disqualified on grounds of personal involvement—to put discussion of the motion of no confidence to an open vote had infringed the rulebook. In their opinion, Mr Horváth's supporters had thereby influenced the end result of the no-confidence motion by thwarting the possibility of Roma representatives voting according to conscience rather than along party-political lines. Aladár Horváth rejected NAGO's accusations at the meeting: "Experience has shown that the past two and half months have not been sufficient for NAGO to come to terms with the final outcome of the election [to the new NGMS]. Another attempt had been made to split the coalition that won that election. My congratulations to NAGO and Lungo Drom on their marriage, and may I be the first to wish them every success in their role as opposition. Gypsies will understand what the message of today's session is for NAGO and for us." For purposes of being able to reassure the group of representatives putting forward the no-confidence motion, the executive chairman had asked the NGMS's legal expert for an opinion on the matter in issue, and in the expert's view Orbán Kolompár and those present had proceeded in full compliance with the relevant provisions, and that in regard to the Rules of Procedure, as currently formulated, there is no foundation for requesting that a secret ballot be ordered.

June

The National Gypsy Minority Self-Government is striving to avoid giving even the least appearance of corruption or shady financial dealings, insisted Aladár Horváth. In the opinion of this Roma politician, who is widely known for his human rights work, the government will have to make serious efforts to head off a large-scale westwards migration of Romas following accession to the European Union. Mr Horváth noted, "As was promised, we are carrying out a régime change in Roma politics. The sham politicking that depended on whoever was in power is now a thing of the past with the defeat of Lungo Drom. All the

same, speedy, radical changes are not going to remove at a stroke received ideas of what the NGMS was about till now. Previously there was a tacit agreement between successive governments and the so-called Roma elite to the effect that we'll hand over a bundle of money but not look too closely at how you spend it, and in return you won't criticise us and you'll keep a muzzle on Roma opinion. That world of the old pals' act and unprincipled deal-making is finished, but some of my fellow representatives can't quite believe this and still think of Gypsy affairs as a cross between a system of nationalist tribal heads and a business enterprise. For my part, I am seeking to bring value-driven politics into wider currency. The absence of a democratic culture can also cause problems, with many people having not yet learned how to assert their rights and interests legally. That is understandable. For centuries the state has driven Gypsies to the margins, forcing them to adopt solutions that lie outside the law. It is in the balance right now whether the current government truly is offering Hungary's Gypsies a historical perspective on integration."

On Friday, Radio C asked the media regulator that it be allowed—contrary to the programming undertakings laid down in its contract—to carry on putting out music-only broadcasts for a further two weeks. In other words, it is still uncertain that the radio station, which is struggling with its finances, will be able to relaunch. According to a statement made by Mr György Kerényi, Head of Programming, donations of HUF 7 million have come in to the radio station, but these were insufficient to meet even the staff payroll for March. Radio C has been given HUF 3 million by the Pro Cultura Urbis Foundation, a fund set up by Budapest's Metropolitan General Assembly, or town council, HUF 2 million by the local self-government for Budapest's Eighth District, and HUF 1.6 million plus 25% VAT by the Ministry of Employment Policy and Labour. Due to its financial problems, Hungary's first Roma radio station has been forced, since 7th April, to suspend its programmes and broadcast a music-only stream. Statements made by the Head of Programming at that point indicated that in addition to its regular income of HUF 60 million the radio station required HUF 50 million in order to settle its accumulated debts and a further HUF 20 million to be able to operate satisfactorily. On 29th April, Hungarian Radio signed a long-term agreement to cooperate with Radio C, which would settle the Roma station's financial worries and guarantee continued future operation. Under the agreement, Hungarian Radio has undertaken to purchase from Radio C a min-

imum of one hour per day of a magazine-style compilation that will be broadcast by all of Hungarian Radio's regional radio studios.

On Friday, the Gyöngyös Gypsy Minority Self-Government this year awarded eleven individuals a Pro Egalitate prize for work done to promote Roma equality. Among those recognised, on what is now the fifth occasion the prizes have been awarded, were Nancy G. Brinker, the USA's ambassador to Hungary; Péter Kiss, chancery minister; Bálint Magyar, Minister of Education; László Teleki, Ferenc Baja, Under-Secretary of State of the Office of Prime Minister; and Jenő Kaltenbach, Parliamentary Commissioner (or Ombudsman) for Minority Rights. The others include Colonel Michael C. Hart and Major Mark Wills, US Army representatives in Hungary; József Pásztor of Érsek, counsellor; László Szabó, managing director of MAUT Kft; and Zsolt Iványi, general manager of the Property Managing Company of Gyöngyös. Most of the awards were accepted by proxies for the prize winners. In a speech following his own acceptance, Mr Teleki, the Under-Secretary of State for Gypsy Affairs in the Office of the Prime Minister, emphasised that the government was committed to securing a rise in social and economic standards for Gypsies and obstructing discrimination against them. One sign of that, he claimed, was the historical step of ensuring that Gypsy affairs were represented at a high level within the Office of the Prime Minister.

Radio C has so far received a fraction of the subventions that had been promised. György Kerényi, Head of Programming, hopes that with a few months it will be possible to end the station's current involuntary breaks in transmission.

According to a recently published survey, 15 per cent of Roma respondents who were questioned in five Central and Eastern European countries admitted to being more or permanently hungry. A sizeable generation of Romas is now growing up whose members often go without sufficient food, are in poor health, attend inappropriate schools and as a result are likely to find they have relatively few opportunities on the job market.

Aladár Horváth was relieved of his post as chairman of the National Gypsy Minority Self-Government chairman at an extraordinary meeting for the re-election of officials held

by the body on Wednesday. The majority of representatives who sit in the body were present and they unanimously chose Orbán Kolompár, hitherto the NGMS's executive chairman, as their new leader. Mr Kolompár asked Mr Horváth to continue to cooperate, promising that there would be no mudslinging within the NGMS. Mr Horváth, who lost the body's confidence because—among other things—he was seen as a divisive figure, described as irregular the fact that the extraordinary meeting had been called, and he anticipated that legal consequences were likely to follow. László Teleki, the Under-Secretary of State for Gypsy Affairs, was evasive in his response to a question about whether the government regarded the meeting as legitimate. That would only emerge after he and his legal experts had been able to go through the current rulebook. The NGMS headquarters had to be vacated yesterday after a bomb threat was received. It is not known whether this scare was in any way associated with the organisation's current internal dispute.

July

The nine countries taking part in a regional Roma conference have created an intergovernmental working group at prime ministerial level, which the Hungarian prime minister, Péter Medgyessy, was charged with setting up. At an international press briefing for the three-day conference, the Hungarian prime minister said that the shared goal was to elaborate a programme for the integration of Romas within their societies—a task that would span several generations but one on which a start had to be made without delay. The other task would be to help the nine countries make effective use of international aid that was received to promote Roma advancement.

Up till Monday afternoon, the local Gypsy self-governments of 19 settlements had informed the Hungarian new agency MTI that they objected to Aladár Horváth being stripped of the chairmanship of the National Gypsy Minority Self-Government at its recent extraordinary meeting. Reacting to this, Mr Horváth said, “I sense the confidence and affection in which I am held.” Gypsy politics in Hungary is well-organised, which explains how letters of protest from different parts of the country can appear with exactly the same wording and layout, he noted. Those who had signed the letters of protest “are giving utterance to their outrage” at what was happening within the NGMS and “are protesting about the ille-

gitimate and shameful attempt to replace its leader.” They were underlining that their reason for sending their representatives to the minority self-government was “so that a régime change should also take place at last in Roma politics.” Some letters that bear a 26th June date also note that “if necessary, we shall be able to enforce our will by way of street demonstrations.” Mr Horváth is calling for another NGMS general meeting to be held on Friday, because he considers that the Wednesday session convoked by Orbán Kolompár to relieve him of his office was unlawful. “My aim is that the NGMS should come to democratic and lawful decisions on Friday,” he stated, adding that he had been attending a conference in Budapest on “Romas in an integrating Europe” as chairman of the NGMS, and he “continues to regard himself as chairman” at least until the meeting he has called for Friday.

According to information he himself has passed to the news agency, László Teleki, the Under-Secretary of State for Gypsy Affairs, gained his high-school diploma this Wednesday. “I sat the examination at the István Széchenyi Vocational Secondary and Trade School, Nagykanizsa, and passed with an average grade of 4 [the highest grade is 5],” Mr Teleki announced. He noted that, contrary to the information supplied by the National Assembly’s home page, he does not have a college degree, but during the mid-1990s he completed a one-year extramural course in Roma studies at Zsámbék Catholic College. “The craft diploma that I gained more than twenty years ago was enough to be admitted for that,” the under-secretary of state commented.

In Hungary close to 20% of adult Romas and 60% of Roma children go hungry, it has emerged from a recently publicised UNO study. A piped supply of running water is not available to 34% of Roma households, whilst two thirds of households are not connected to a sewage disposal network. According to the survey, close to half of the Roma population lives on less than HUF 900 per day. The Romas find there is a lack of employment and educational opportunities, and they feel that their political interests are not represented either at national or the local level. Most think that they can only rely on themselves, and at best can look for help from their neighbours.

In line with earlier reports from the Roma Press Centre, Roma women of the Eger district have been complaining that on arriving to give childbirth at Eger County Hospital their

race is used as a ground for placing them in a segregated ward. Employees of the Press Centre used a hidden camera to record the hospital's midwife explain that Roma women in childbirth had separate wards. After its own subsequent investigation, the hospital claimed that no racially motivated segregation had occurred in the institution; it was filing charges to gain redress from those media organisations that had published the information. The cases against the Népszava daily newspaper and the Medical Tribune weekly specialist magazine, in which the court concluded that Roma women were indeed discriminated on the basis of skin colour, ended today. The Medical Tribune has been ordered to communicate to its readership that, despite this being the case, it had been wrong to report that segregation extended to the delivery rooms themselves. The court censured Népszava for featuring what it found was the unsubstantiated term 'C' Ward—[for 'Cigány' i.e. 'Gypsy']—in the title as well as in the body of article. The court felt that the report in question gave the false impression that a Roma woman had been sterilised on account of her race. The hospital had admitted that the woman was indeed sterilised, but this was not mentioned in her final report on discharge. The woman in question is expected to sue the hospital.

In so far as the National Gypsy Minority Self-Government fails to pursue policies that keep the interests of Gypsies and the country to the fore, then Aladár Horváth, having weighed up the situation, is contemplating withdrawing from the body, he communicated to the MTI news agency on Friday. According to information learned by the Népszava daily newspaper, and irrespective of any future decisions that the organisation or courts may make, Mr Horváth is soon to retire for good from the NGMS's work because he does not see the body's future as secure, while due to worsening relations he is finding it impossible to work with the NGMS's other Roma politicians. For the time being, Mr Horváth continues to regard himself as the NGMS's chairman, classifying his recent removal from the post as irregular. At Friday's session of the NGMS in Budapest, the Roma politician called on those who had ousted him from office to refrain from putting unlawful decisions into effect.

August

A good week since the Sziget [Island] Festival in Budapest, which this year may have been visited in even greater numbers than before by youngsters curious about the more

popular programmes, which undoubtedly did a power a good for the box-office receipts. Many people had been concerned that a one-week event would lead to a dilution of content, but those fears were not borne out because the main stage, the world music stage, and the theatre and Roma tents all presented important and demanding performances to maintain a balance. The Roma tent—given the very difficult situation in which Radio C, the organiser of its programmes, currently finds itself—was a focus of specially close attention. Operating the tent and putting together nearly 40 programmes cost approximately HUF 15 million, and György Kerényi, Radio C's Head of Programming, has pointed out that they still have to find HUF 3 million of that total. There are few opportunities to cut back on that expenditure because they feel under pressure, whether this is explicit or tacit, not to transmit what is actually the mass culture of Hungary's Gypsies but to provide a challenging international roundup of Roma music, in which space needs to be found equally for re-imagined authentic Gypsy musics as for Roma jazz or contemporary electronic dance music. Radio C's Roma tent, as a regular feature at the Sziget Festival, has become a major meeting point for people of Roma and non-Roma origin. Those who did not find an opportunity to visit the tent this year can look forward to a somewhat similar programme being run this autumn. As plans stand, Petőfi Hall in Budapest will host another festival of Roma culture, possibly somewhat wider-ranging than at Sziget, which is again being organised by Radio C staff members.

In an event organised as part of the Sport and Culture against Racism, Hungary's Gypsy national team beat a British team of ethnic-minority players by 7-1 at the Ferenc Puskás Stadium, Budapest.

One week before children go back to school, it is still impossible to learn exactly how many of them will be attending the *Mihály Antal Foundation School* in Jászladány and how many will remain at the local self-government elementary school. Anna Berkes, director of the latter, stated that it will only become clear on 1st September, the day the new school year commences, how many pupils will have transferred to the private school. Ibolya Tóth, headmistress of the foundation school, earlier indicated that two hundred and four children had applied for admission to classes there. It may be recalled that the foundation school began the school year at this time in 2002 but was forced to

close its doors on 2nd September due to its failure to obtain the Ministry of Education (MoE) identification number that is needed to operate. This year, however, the MoE have issued a number to the school, thus allowing it to announce that it would be opening from the start of academic year 2003-4. A meeting that was held to promote enrolment provoked scandalous scenes when the headmistress refused to accept letters of intent from a number of Roma parents. Ms Tóth claimed that in the cases of seven children who had sought admission late in the day the school would only be able to enrol them by setting up an eleventh class, instead of the ten classes on which earlier plans were based. The foundation that finances the private school's operations, however, did not have enough money for that, the headmistress said.

In another item of news relating to Jászladány, the Jászladány Job Opportunities Club for Gypsies has appealed to the non-Roma members of the local Roma minority self-government to resign from the body. The club's chairperson, Mrs Ferenc Lázók, declared that in their opinion the job of representing local Romas in the minority self-government ought to be a matter for real Gypsies. It may again be recalled that in the local elections held in October 2002 the only representative actually of Roma descent voted onto the five-person Gypsy minority self-government was Mrs Rita Banyáné Suki, who was later chosen to chair the body.

The Equal Opportunities Office has asked the government for HUF 1.2 billion for this year from the budget reserve. For the forthcoming 2004 financial year it will be calling for HUF 30 billion.

A new Roma organisation has been set up under the leadership of Aladár Horváth and calling itself the Roma Civil Rights Movement (RCRM). The organisation has been founded by some fifty Roma and non-Roma individuals to promote the effective assertion by Romas of their civil rights. At a press conference held during the organisation's inaugural meeting, Mr Horváth declared that the formation of the body had nothing to do with the situation that had arisen in the National Gypsy Minority Self-Government, from whose chairmanship he was recently removed under controversial circumstances. Mr Horváth did, however, express concern that in next year's budget the government was not going to commit enough money to promoting Roma integration. The press briefing and

inaugural meeting were later on interrupted by a bomb warning, as a result of which the founders continued their deliberations in the public square outside.

September

In a paper written before the start of the school year, Aladár Horváth comes to the following views on the practice of segregation in the educational system: “It is our responsibility that there is room for ambiguous selection procedures in all too many Jászladánys throughout the country. We have been training our teachers, conditioning society as a whole, for selective education for decades on end; since the 1989-90 change in régime, we have even given financial encouragement to segregation. That cost a big chunk of the budget then in order that it will now cost even more to end the segregation and bring in an integrated education system. The more Roma children were classified as unsuitable for normal education, the better that suited the body maintaining a school. The segregation of Roma pupils was linked to the intellectual undervaluing of an entire ethnic group, and vice versa. Attempts to promote ‘catching up’ never achieved any catch-up, only impairing self-respect, for generation after generation of Roma pupils. There are many who believe that the way today’s situation arose was a natural process, with a minority becoming detached from the ‘Magyar’ Hungarians, as if this form of apartheid were not an affliction for everyone, Roma and non-Roma alike. Because that’s what apartheid is, in the legal sense of the term as well.”

October

“The National Gypsy Minority Self-Government welcomes the fact that the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), as well as Fidesz, wishes to include candidates of Roma background on the list of candidates it puts together for the elections to the European Parliament,” announced Ferenc Fodor, the NGMS’s press chief. Speaking on behalf of the NGMS chairman, Orbán Kolompár, Mr Fodor noted that this would further increase the chances that Romas will achieve “effective representation in Europe” after Hungary has acceded to the EU. In confirming that news to the MTI press agency on Monday, László Kovács stated that the MSZP is indeed thinking along these lines, but no final

decision on the matter has been taken within the party: “That is one of the leadership’s intentions, just as it is also our intention to see that, sooner or later, a person of Roma origin is selected for an ambassadorial posting,” the MSZP chairman declared.

Not long ago, the local self-government for the town of Keszthely, at the southern end of Lake Balaton, ordered that a plank fence was to be built in front of a group of dilapidated houses that are standing on the land of a former brick works at the edge of town and currently provide dwellings for four or five Roma families. In justifying this step, Mayor József Mohácsi reckoned that the fencing was the only solution they had been able to come up with to screen this eyesore from tourists. The town currently does not have enough money to demolish the properties, which are owned by the local self-government, and resettle the Roma families involved, most of whom have taken them over as squatters. Local leaders claim that they were forced into taking urgent action because the brick works site lies right beside the main Keszthely—Hévíz thoroughfare, the most heavily used stretch of highway in the whole district, where foreign visitors are regularly surprised at the desolate appearance of the buildings and their environs. By building the fence, it was asserted, they had not shut the Roma families living there into a ghetto, nor had they banished them, simply hidden the sight behind a plank fence from the eyes of those passing down the highway. Mrs Gyula Horváth, chairperson of the local Gypsy minority self-government, stated that the families living in the brick works dwellings had not raised any complaint over the construction of the fence. She added that she personally also finds that the local authority was justified in taking this action because the filthy and untidy homes of the Roma families on the brick works land had for a long time been a poor advertisement for Keszthely and Hévíz, which are very dependent on the income earned from the foreign tourist trade.

“My God! There are so many of them that it’s a pity Hitler didn’t begin with them!” is one statement the deputy clerk for the town of Piliscsaba is alleged to have made in regard to the Romas, according to Mária Varga, a foster care officer. The chairman and deputy chairman of the local Gypsy minority self-government claim they also heard the statement. The deputy clerk has been working for the town’s self-government for five months and, with the chief clerk on sick leave, has had to attend all the chief’s duties as well. Others who are working for the self-government are also protesting; in a letter deliv-

ered to the town's mayor they maintain they cannot work together with the deputy clerk, and it has become virtually impossible for the office to function. The deputy clerk has rejected the charges and is seeking legal remedy. The employees' petition was the sole item under discussion at an extraordinary meeting of the Piliscsaba town administration on Friday. Gábor Laboda, the mayor of neighbouring Üröm and a Socialist Party parliamentary representative, has asked Piliscsaba's mayor by letter to investigate the matter. László Teleki, Under-Secretary of State for Gypsy Affairs in the Office of the Prime Minister, likewise considers that an investigation is essential and has therefore referred the case to Jenő Kaltenbach, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Minority Rights.

At its session on Tuesday, by unanimous decision, the National Assembly's Committee for Human Rights, Minorities and Religious Affairs agreed in principle to set up a parliamentary committee to look into the matter of compensating Roma individuals who were persecuted in Hungary during the Holocaust. With the Committee giving over the meeting agenda—at the original suggestion of the Roma Civic Grouping (RCG)—to informing itself about the situation with regard to compensation, the motion was put to the committee by Flórián Farkas (Fidesz). In line with the decision, the proposer of the motion will submit a detailed motion within the next two weeks. At the meeting, István Makai, the RCG's chairman, explained that, despite the good intentions of the German, Austrian and Swiss governments who were funding the programme, the compensation process was labyrinthine and lacked transparency. As he himself put it, although for Hungarian Romas the subject is “the most momentous issue of the period since the change in régime,” it nevertheless remains “a big black hole” for them. He threw out the idea that in Hungary, as in some other countries, a public foundation might be established to handle compensation-related tasks. Tibor Lázók, the RCG's legal adviser, complained that only those who had directly suffered wrong or had been slave or forced labourers were entitled to apply, whereas those who lost lives during the persecutions were excluded. Anikó Bakonyi, speaking for the Budapest office of the International Organisation for Migration, clarified that the compensation rules were set by German law and a court decision that had been reached in the USA. Erika Plankó, head of the main section in the Ministry of Justice, pointed out that in Hungary several hundred thousand individuals, including many Romas, had received compensation over the past ten years or so.

November

Over half of those who live in Gypsy households in Hungary belong to the bottom decile of income distribution in the population and are thus poor, in the most literal sense of the word, unable even to keep themselves adequately nourished. That was one of the facts that was to be heard at a conference organised by the Institute for Minority Research of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Comparable national surveys had previously been conducted only in 1971 and 1993. In the 1990 national census 143,000 individuals had characterised themselves as belonging to the Roma minority, whilst in the 2001 census 190,000 had likewise done so. Sociologist István Kemény pointed out that it would be a mistake to infer from that numerical growth that Romas were becoming more willing than before to declare their origin, because in the meantime there had been substantial growth in the actual Roma population, and if one looks at proportions, then in 2001, as in 1990, only around one third of the actual Roma population had declared themselves to be so. It emerges from the survey data that employment among working-age Romas barely exceeds 20%. Sociologist Béla Jánky reported that even fewer Romas than this—just 16% of men and 10% of women—are in a regular, officially reported job providing a guaranteed 40-hour week. About 70% of Gypsies who do have opportunities to work earn their money as unskilled or semi-skilled workers. Only 22% of Romas in employment have jobs as skilled ‘blue-collar’ workers, and a mere 8% earn a livelihood with non-manual work in ‘white-collar’ jobs (which for the purposes of the survey includes jobs in the uniformed services). The average net monthly pay for people in their main job was HUF 61,000 over the country as a whole, ranging from no more than HUF 48,000 in the Eastern counties to HUF 65,000 for workers in the Greater Budapest industrial conurbation and southern Transdanubia. On average, Roma men earned HUF 9,000 more than Roma women.

Just four or five people in Hungary decide who is a racist, asserted Sándor Fábry in a debate held by the Roma Civil Rights Foundation. Fábry—an inimitable figure in the light entertainment field, and not just in his own estimation—has again made a small but significant contribution to media history. In the most recent edition of his widely watched evening TV show his invited guests were exclusively Gypsies. A number of things

emerged from statements made by these guests; for instance, that Gypsies are great boasters (“If less than a thousand turn up for a wedding reception, that’s just pitiful!”), male chauvinists (“A Roma woman may only walk behind her husband, not beside him”), and put their sons on a pedestal (“Pure gold, of course. We had it made specifically for him”). Last but not least, one learned that a Gypsy voivode, or chief, is the lord of life and death (“For us Gypsies he’s like a tribal chief among the native American Indians”).

A Roma delegation has returned home from a pilgrimage to the Vatican. Government politicians who made statements over the course of the visit emphasised that the trip counted as a milestone in the cooperation between Hungary’s Gypsy inhabitants, government and the Roman Catholic church. Orbán Kolompár, chairman of the National Gypsy Minority Self-Government, categorised the pilgrimage as more productive than might have been expected. The Hungarian Gypsies and the government representatives who also made the trip to Roma—Katalin Lévai, Minister for Equal Opportunities, László Teleki, Under-Secretary of State for Gypsy Affairs in the Office of the Prime Minister, and Antal Heizer, Chairman of the National and Ethnic Minorities Office, who joined the delegation on Tuesday—proclaimed during the trip that they were confident their joint pilgrimage would contribute to the more complete integration of Romas into Hungarian society. Pope John Paul II received the 180-strong Hungarian delegation at his regular Wednesday audience. This was the largest delegation of European Gypsies ever to call to see the head of the Catholic church. During the audience the pope gave his Apostolic blessing to Hungary’s Gypsies and, at the request of the pilgrims, blessed the cross that will be erected next Whitsuntide at Csátka, the most important Roma pilgrimage site in Komárom-Esztergom County.

“This is the kind of integration effort that I personally have always stood for,” Ms Lévai remarked to reporters. She laid particular stress on the fact that Pope John Paul II preaches reconciliation, and she noted, “He was the first pope to bring together representatives of the major religions and to ask for forgiveness for the sins committed by Christians.” These were marvellous gestures that offered examples to be followed by each and every one of us. In response to a question as to why she had felt it was important to be personally involved in the pilgrimage, the minister said that she wanted to draw to the world’s attention the fact that Hungary has a very serious Roma problem for which

a rapid solution is required. “Hungary’s Romas are important to the country; let them be important to the whole world,” she added.

The lifespan of Hungarian Romas is 10-15 years shorter than that of non-Romas, and the Ministry of Health (MoH) is inquiring whether that is related to any factors to do with the level of provision of health care, it was announced. The MoH has provided funding for a survey carried out by the National Institute for Primary Care and the Delphoi Consulting Social Science Research Unit in which those who complete the questionnaire are asked for their opinion on a series of derogatory statements about Gypsies. These include: “One can never be too careful with Gypsies”; “Those who want to limit the role Gypsies have in public life should be able to spread their views freely”; “Those who call for violence to be used against Gypsies should be able to spread their views freely”; “Gypsies should be encouraged to emigrate.” Among statements that refer to stereotyped attributes are: “They are lazy, incapable of doing the work one should be able to expect”; “They can only blame themselves if others are hostile towards them”; “They are dirty, they don’t wash themselves enough.” The president of the Hungarian Association of District Nurses categorised the questions as outrageous and commented that it would have been better if they had been consulted in advance. In the opinion of Aladár Horváth, chairman of the Roma Civil Rights Foundation, the survey in itself is discriminative and prejudicial. “If they are only conducting investigations of this kind among Romas, then that in itself is discrimination and can only serve to reinforce prejudices,” he noted, adding that it was impermissible to identify the Roma population with grinding poverty. Some two thirds of Romas were integrated, perhaps some better than others, but nevertheless incorporated into Hungarian society, he noted. The National Gypsy Minority Self-Government expressed regret that the MoH had not asked them for their views before carrying out this Roma-related survey. Ferenc Babusik, head of the Delphoi Consulting Social Science Research Unit which compiled the questionnaire, stated that there was no deliberately provocative motive behind the questions. More than three decades of international practice had shown that negative biases were most readily quantifiable if their gist was expressed explicitly—and as prejudicially as possible, he noted.

“The police and Romas have an equal interest in seeing a reduction in prejudiced attitudes,” Police Commissioner László Salgó emphasised at a national conference for police

chiefs that was also attended by officers of the National Gypsy Minority Self-Government and László Teleki, Under-Secretary of State for Gypsy Affairs. This social tension can be a serious obstacle to the growth of democracy, which is why it has to be curbed. “The outcome of prejudiced attitudes is decided on the streets, in town and village, not here in this room,” the commissioner warned. In summing up what needed to be done, he stated that he was going to set the ball rolling next year with a national conference at which police liaison officers and Roma coordinators could jointly evaluate their experiences at working together, whilst the national conference for police chiefs would conduct an annual review of that cooperation. The police chiefs would support any local initiative, the commissioner added. Mr Teleki pointed out that prejudices can appear in any sphere of life, and everything had to be done to conquer them. The fact that the police and Gypsy representatives are forging real links at the local level, and not solely over problem cases, is a significant indicator. “The police have to become acquainted with the Gypsy population,” he emphasised. Orbán Kolompár, the NGMS chairman, pointed out that communication between the police and Gypsies was not working well. “Prejudices arise from there being no communication, little information. The media bears a big responsibility, however, for how it chooses to present conflicts,” he noted. It would be better if both sides were to shift the focus onto prevention. Cooperation between the police and Gypsy self-government bodies was necessary at both county and local level, with direct links being built up between the local police commander and the local Gypsy leader.

December

The Zala County Public Prosecutor’s Office has commenced criminal proceedings at Kaposvár Military Prosecutor’s Office on grounds of there being a well-founded suspicion of failure to render assistance in connection with the case of Attila Forgács, a prisoner who was found dead following a cell fire last Thursday in Zalaegerszeg Prison. This is the third set of proceedings into the case, an internal inquiry into which has been instituted by the National Headquarters of the Prison Service and criminal inquiries are being conducted by Zala County Police Headquarters. On 27th November, under as yet unexplained circumstances, fire broke out at Zalaegerszeg Prison in a solitary confinement cell known as ‘the rubber room’, which led to the death of 29-year-old Mr Forgács, who was being held in the cell at the time.

Social scientists at the Szolnok-based Lowlands Scientific Institute, which is affiliated to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences' Centre for Regional Research, have produced an analysis of the reasons for conflicts between Romas and non-Romas, and possibilities of alleviating them, in the three northern Lowlands towns of Jászládány, Mikepércs and Nagyhalász. According to the survey, the majority of those questioned in Jászládány agreed with proposition "Every Gypsy child has a right to be taught in the same school classes as non-Gypsies." In contradiction to that, though, are other findings which demonstrate that the driving forces of prejudice lie not far below the surface, with most people seeing conflict in the community as having an ethnic colouring. Jászládány's inhabitants consider that this could be reduced through a joint effort by the local self-government and the state, and they would even see the county self-government as having a major role in reconciliation efforts. Prejudice against Roma minority groups in Jászládány is strong, though it does not differ significantly in degree from that found nationally. For those questioned, all other ethnic groups were preferred to Romas on a so-called 'sympathy scale', and only groups that are 'stigmatised' on account of their lifestyle—alcoholics, drug addicts, skinheads—scored worse. In accordance with this, for instance, the majority of non-Romas would not want to work in the same workplace or live in the same street as Gypsies.

One possible line for reducing conflicts, the researchers believe, is by securely establishing equal rights policies. Among respondents it was particularly those of Roma descent who felt it was one of the jobs of the educational system to remedy social disadvantages. Most respondents—particularly those with university degrees—believe that experiences picked up at school can exert a positive influence in altering a family's cultural habits. According to Tibor Szarvák, differences could be lessened in a variety of ways; for instance, if settlements were able to institute income-generating programmes to provide subsidies that would allow at least some Romas to return to working land of their own in order to make a living. Currently, two thirds of working-age Romas in Jászládány are unemployed and, the survey suggests, see no chance of that situation improving in the near future. The researchers consider that it would help if Romas had the chance to become familiar with the benefits of information technology and the internet, given that there is a study which suggests barely one per cent of them use a computer.

“The biggest difficulty stems from the fact that there is no uniform set of criminal statistical criteria that realistically reflect reality on which one could uniformly adopt a position as to who should be considered a Gypsy. Differentiation based purely on the name is not satisfactory... That is why a differentiation that allows us to speak about offenders of Gypsy descent who are assimilating or who are unable to assimilate seems appropriate.” This is a passage that present and future teachers will be able to read in an anthology with the title *Roma Pedagogy: Theoretical and Practical Foundations*, edited by two members of the Pedagogy Department at the Károly Eszterházy College and published in 2000 by Okker Kiadó.

Next year will mark the start of the programme to demolish Hungary’s remaining run-down Gypsy colonies. It is planned that by the end of 2006 half of the 446 identified colonies will have been replaced by new dwellings, László Teleki, Under-Secretary of State for Gypsy Affairs, announced at a press conference in Salgótarján on Wednesday. Based on a sociological survey, that is the number of isolated Gypsy colonies that are located outside land in the public administrative domain and lack access to public utilities. He added that close to HUF 1 billion would be expended on the eight model programmes for clearance and rehabilitation of these settlements that are to commence in January 2004. From the latter half of the year it was expected that additional finance would be drawn in from domestic and international sources. Those who were going to be affected would be involved in the construction work, having been given 6-8 months training in advance. Following clearance and rehabilitation of these settlements, integration of the Roma families would be assisted by putting in place a mentor network to maintain daily contact with workplaces, educational establishments and social institutions.