

1. A CHRONOLOGICAL DIGEST OF EVENTS AFFECTING THE ROMA OF HUNGARY IN 2004¹

January

Judit Berki the ex-director of the Office for Roma Affairs, whose department was removed from the Office of the Prime Minister and placed under the Governmental Department for Equal Opportunity under a new name “Directorate for Roma Affairs” did not accept the leadership of the new office, which she had been offered. She explained her decision with the following words” in this new structure, in this new body I do not think that I would have a chance to represent the Roma affairs in the long run in any significant way.”

At the annual press conference of National Roma Minority Self-Government (OCÖ) it has been announced that one of the most important goals of the 2003-2006 program of the National Roma Minority Self-Government (OCÖ) is the establishment of an institutional network- based on the regions and counties. The National Roma Minority Self-Government (OCÖ) also emphasized that within this institutional network it is necessary to operate programs which help the municipal Roma minority self-governments and the local civil organizations learn the techniques which allow them to benefit from the opportunities available since the joining of the EU and which make them capable of organizing as many successful professional and cultural events as possible. In the network offices 127 Roma unemployed – most of them with secondary or high school education – shall be employed. Furthermore a new course lasting for several months shall be set up for the employees where they will be able to acquire the necessary information about the domestic and the European legal and social institutional background related to their daily work, – mainly the handling of social and employment issues.

Several names have come up as potential candidates for the post of the Minister of Equal Opportunities – who is a minister without a ministry – one is Kinga Göncz, the sec-

1 The selection is based on the biggest daily „Népszabadság”, and the archives of the internet sites Romapage and Rom.net

retary of the ESzCsM (Ministry of Health, Social and Family Affairs), another is Viktória Mohácsi ministerial deputy of the Ministry of Education, a third one is Krisztina Morvai, a famous criminal lawyer who has distinguished herself in the fight against aggression within the family. The post of the Minister of Equal Opportunities will become vacant if Katalin Lévai, the present minister, wins a seat on the list of Hungarian Socialist Party and becomes a member of the European Parliament after the elections in June. According to our sources the socialists are in favour of Kinga Göncz, while the liberals (SzDSz) would prefer one of the other two persons on the post – however the candidate needs to have the support of both parties. Viktória Mohácsi is the third on the list of the Liberal Party for the European Parliament, whereas Ms Morvai, who is considered a radical fighter for women's rights, has had several conflicts with the Socialists. Governmental circles imagine the change in the Minister's person to take place in May, or in July, or in September depending on whether this change entails the reformation of the Government as well.

“Stinking gypsies, we will kill you and burn down your house” – witnesses have stated that these were the words shouted when 6 men attacked the inhabitants of the gypsy neighborhood in a village named 'Osi' in County Fejér. The attackers broke the arm of an elderly man and hit a woman on her head – the mother of several children – with an iron tool so that she suffered serious injuries. They smashed the windows and doors of the houses in the neighborhood and also damaged several cars there. The Head of Department of the Police Station in Várpalota explained that some cables valued half a million forints have been stolen from the yard of one of the attackers and the owner thought that it was the Roma who did it. The injured Roma passionately denied that they had anything to do with the case, and the investigation on the sight – carried out by the local police supports the statements of the Roma. The police – arriving at the scene – arrested the attackers and placed them custody in Székesfehérvár and Várpalota. However the Municipal Court at Várpalota decided to release the 6 young men – two living in Os and four in Várpalota who are accused with vandalism and disturbance of peace. The ethnicity-related motivation of the attackers was not considered said the Chief of Police at Várpalota, because a few days ago the same men had attacked a non-Roma family as well demanding from them the stolen cables.

After the accessions at least 100 000 Eastern-European Roma will travel to the United Kingdom, which is the only sizable member of the European Union that opens its job market and social security system to the migrants from the new member states without restriction from the moment of the accession – says The Sunday Times. The most popular British Sunday paper claims that there is 1.7 million Roma living in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and the other accession countries, and that the migrants arriving from the member states will enjoy the same health care system, educational opportunities and pension schemes as the British themselves. (Actually only those citizens of the European Union are eligible for such services and benefits whose residence in Great Britain is legal and who have a legal income.) The Sunday Times also mentioned that according to the local Roma leaders from the Czech Republic alone 100 000 Roma will leave for Britain attracted by the opportunities provided by the British welfare system. The British Government opens the door to migrants arguing that it is a key factor to attract workforce into the country, nevertheless even the agents of the government have started to recognize the danger of “an explosion of welfare tourism” – claims the article. According to the newspaper the British Secretary of State has requested the International Migration Organization to launch a campaign on the “dark side” of life in Britain among the quarter million Roma of the Czech Republic. The Ministry of Interior Affairs has acknowledged this statement but also emphasized that it does not expect more than 5-13 thousand immigrants per year from the new member states.

The Act on Equal Opportunities has come into effect this year, but the administrative office which is to deal with the cases launched on the bases of the new Act will only start its operations next year. Then a penalty of up to 6 million forints can be imposed on the law breaker if a complaint is found to be sound. The money is not awarded to the person who suffered disadvantage on account of his or her sex, ethnicity, color, religion, age, sexual orientation, or political affiliation. The injured person's infringed rights are remedied while the penalty paid by the wrongful party is used for the implementation of the equal opportunities program. In case of discrimination not only private parties, but also civil organizations are allowed to file a claim.

The eradication of gipsy slums is the most important goal of the government this year said Laszlo Teleki. There are 460 gipsy settlements in the country which are record-

ed as having no infrastructure or public utilities at all. According to the Secretary who is responsible for Roma Affairs within the Office of the Prime Minister the Roma population of such settlements is between 150 to 200 thousand persons. The Secretary has also noted that the 2004 budget provided 1 thousand million forints for the purpose of demolishing such slums and building new apartment houses. Furthermore the office also plans to use sources provided by the European Union and money is due to arrive for this project from three different programs of the National Developmental Scheme (– out of the scheme's five programs now in operation). In the opinion of László Teleki the demolishing operations must start in at least 40-50 percent of the slums by the year 2006, however it will require another 10-12 years till the liquidation of the last slum can start. The Secretary of the Government pointed out that the Public Fund for the Hungarian Roma has scholarship scheme for accomplished Roma students from class 5 of the primary school (from age 10) onwards and that in 2002 the Government has raised the public contribution to this scheme from the annual 300 million forints to 700 million. As a consequence of this measure the percentage of Roma students in secondary education has grown with at least 30-40 percent, but the number of Roma students in higher education has also increased. In the first 6 months of the year 2002 eleven thousand Roma students received a scholarship, today this number is 21.500 – added the Secretary.

“Cigánybáró” – Baron of the Gypsies' – the novel of Mór Jókai has been published in the 'beás' language for the first time in Hungary. The translation was done by social-pedagogue Terezia Kalányos and the 1000 copies of the 160 pages long book were published by Publisher Czupi in Nagykanizsa. Gyula Czupi in an interview stated that “the purpose of this publication was far from being profit-oriented, the primary reason was to fulfill a cultural mission, to demonstrate how the Beás language – the language most commonly used by the Roma of our region – could serve as a vehicle for literature.”

February

There is a settlement out of shacks near Kiskunmajsa called Marispusztá where 50 families are living in catastrophic circumstances. Six families have moved into old wagons which were originally used for the carriage of animals. The wagons are not bigger than

13-14 square meters, their walls are made out of 1 inch wide wooden planks and there is no electricity inside. One of the wagons – inhabited by 9 persons, including a 1 month old baby – has already caught fire several times. Only a fortnight has passed since the last fire, when the baby had to be rescued from the burning wooden shack. The shacks are heated with stoves and if people want to wash they use basins where the women clean themselves first and then come the men. While waiting for their turn the men have either to stand in the cold outside or go visit their neighbors. The whole settlement has one single public well. Everyone takes water from there. At night they sleep with their clothes on and several times the water in the dishes got frozen during the night. The Roma at the settlement of Marispuszta have told us that many of their children had already been taken into state-care because of the unbearable circumstances and their poor state of health.

According to the judgment of the Local Trial Court of Salgótarján a company has rejected three women at their job interviews on the bases of their Roma origins. The company has to pay 150 thousand forints to each of the candidates if the decision becomes final and non-appealable. The judge found it proven that the women were discriminated against on the bases of their ethnicity and this was why not even a probation period was granted them. This was why the court decided to grant the women as damages the amount of the minimum wages due for the probation period prescribed by law. The lawyer of the plaintiffs nevertheless criticized the decision pointing out that it is unclear why the court did not impose damages on the company on grounds that it injured the human dignity of the three women and thereby caused non-pecuniary damage.

The Government is negotiating about the acceptance of a new mid-range set of measures concerning the Roma. László Teleki the Secretary for Roma Affairs noted that the program is putting an emphasis on Roma education, the amelioration of living conditions and on acquiring equal opportunities. The Secretary of the Government does not agree with the statement that the significant increase in the amount of Roma scholarships is the single significant step ahead. As an example he referred to the Roma Public Fund and the Roma Cultural Fund, which were both established on the initiative of the government. All the ministries are required to make public the sums that they make available for Roma programs within a set period of time. The ministries are required to report on the implementation of

the programs from time to time to the Committee for the Coordination of Roma Affairs within the Ministerial Departments and supervision shall be carried out by a new body to be established in the near future. The new body will be comprised of independent professionals. The liquidation of the Roma shackle-settlements is to be financed out of the loan taken from the European Union, which the government has guaranteed.

Two years ago the municipal government of Kecskemét decided to liquidate the barrack apartments of the town. Last year they put aside 91 million forints for the purpose of demolishing two shackle-settlements. The shackles in Wéber Ede street were pulled down the previous year. From the average 1.5 million forints sum paid to each of the twenty Roma families for moving out most families could only pay for an accommodation out of town, those who decided to stay in town had to put up with living in garages on the edge of town. The inhabitants of another barrack-settlement, which is to be liquidated this year have already agreed with the municipality on the form of compensation: – five families are moving into apartment rented from the municipalities which possess utilities commensurate with their previous lodgings, while the other 15 families have chosen financial compensation, which has now been increased to 3 million forints. Most of these families have moved into the smaller villages nearby, but some bought flats in the poorer somewhat ghetto-like suburbs. The local Roma representative finds that the consequence of the measures is that the Roma are forced out of town and what is worse some families end up among poorer conditions than where they have left from. Next year the municipality is planning to liquidate another two Roma ghettos – one in Szultán the other in Nándorfehérvári street – which presently serve as the home for 30 Roma families.

According to a survey done by “TÁRKI” last year the migration of the Roma within the country accelerated: – the number of Roma living in mid-Hungary and in small settlements with a population under 1000 persons – mostly located on the Northern part of the Great Hungarian Plane and in Northern Hungary – has grown significantly. Simultaneously a decrease of the Roma population has been reported by the municipalities of the 'Dunántúl' (Transdanubia) Region. Migration is the number one explanation for the phenomenon. According to the research done by “TÁRKI”, the collected data leads to the conclusion that lately at the industrial sites of the mid-and-Western part of the Transdanubia region Roma

have been very seldom employed. Previously, some of the larger companies – for instance the IBM at Székesfehérvár – have employed Roma as blue-collar workers and for this opportunity it was worthwhile for the Roma to settle in the region, but recently these companies have organized their operations on a different bases. Therefore the Transdanubia Region offers scarce employment opportunities while the living costs there are rather high. The situation of the Roma has also been made difficult by prejudice – the ill-famous case of the fate of the Roma living on Radio Street at Székesfehérvár is enough example to illustrate this. Most Roma try to seek opportunities in Budapest or in the agglomeration around the city. This also explains why their numbers have been growing in the Mid-Hungarian Region of the country. They mostly rely on by-jobs, predominantly on construction sites. For a while this strategy might be working, as a large number of new housing is being constructed in the Budapest agglomeration, which is giving work – albeit illegal and temporary – to many people. The migration of the Roma has severe consequences for the Northern part of the Great Hungarian Plane and for Northern Hungary, which already struggle with great problems. The Roma settling there practically give up the endeavor of trying to find a job. In the mountainous Northern area, between the Bükk and the Zempléni Mountains, in the Cserehát, a ghetto-like micro-region has developed, which is unprecedented in Hungarian history. In this area non-Roma villages are on a continuous decline while the number of the Roma is on a constant increase. It is a mystery how these Roma make a living in the area as there are no employment opportunities whatsoever in the near or even in the mid-far distance.

István Hiller has appointed Katalin Kállay as Ministerial Agent for Roma Affairs. She will be responsible for maintaining communication with organizations representing the interests of the Roma, with Roma self-governments and other governmental organizations. Further duties include representing the Ministry in the preparatory process for governmental decisions concerning Roma issues and to coordinate the different Roma related tasks within the competence of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage.

March

In accordance with the agreement between the National Roma Minority Self-Government and the authorities a so-called minority coordinator officer has been set to work four years

ago within the local police headquarters of the county of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén. The officer's duties include development of the staff's tolerance and conflict-resolution skills, support for the education of Roma youth to become members of the police corps, cooperation in the area of prevention, and lecturing in primary schools. Concerning the success of orienting Roma youth towards becoming members of the police force the following results are to be mentioned: since 1996, when the program for aiding Roma secondary school students to become policemen started in the county, 15 students received support and 8 of them has joined the police force. The candidates have to fulfill strict conditions. In exchange they receive full board, aid for clothing and books and further stipends are also available as set in their studentship contracts. It is also a gesture on part of the police that they have started the teaching of the minority language for their staff. The Roma in Borsod-Abaúj-County belong to the so-called romungro group, who speak Hungarian as their mother tongue, therefore it makes no sense to make it mandatory for the entire police staff to learn the minority language here. According to our sources 17 policemen have started to learn the language so far of whom 12 has already passed their language exam.

A Roma man died among questionable circumstances at the VI.-VII. District Police Station in Budapest. The man was suspected of truculence and taken into custody. At the station-house a brawl broke out and the Roma man's teeth got broken. The police took the man to a dentist, but he did not diagnose anything besides the broken teeth. The man was then taken back to the detention-room where he shortly died. An investigation is now conducted in the case.

The local government of Szombathely has initiated the removal of five Roma families from a 24 apartment block-house, which had been renovated six years ago by the local government for the purpose of housing families in need. The low -comfort apartments of István Gyorffy street are almost entirely occupied by Roma families, some of which allegedly are not getting on with each other. "We are trying to solve the neuralgic issues that have been a burden on the shoulders of the well-meaning Roma families living in the block " – said the president of the social committee of the local government of Szombathely at a press conference given together with the representatives of the local minority self-government. He announced that the local government supports the estab-

ishment of a Roma civil corps, which would deal with “discipline issues” related to accommodation in the areas, where the number of Roma residents is high. The president of the accommodation committee in his reply to a question from the MTI (Hungarian Information Agency) stated that: “the establishment of the apartment-house in Gyorffy street had nothing to do with intentions to create a ghetto, the local government had no such intention, the present situation evolved as a consequence of apartment swaps between the tenants.” Some of the tenants in Gyorffy street do not consider themselves to be Romas. Nonetheless the representative of the local minority self-government voiced his doubts by stating that “when I visit those apartments they do consider themselves to be Romas”. He also noted that the apartments were in poor condition despite the renovations, so much so, that a law-suit had been started against the company owned by the municipality, which was assigned to maintain the building.

During the celebrations on the International Day Against Racism on the 21st of March, the Civil Rights Awards created by the Roma Civil Rights Fund had been granted. The following persons were distinguished for their assertion of the human rights of the Roma:

Dezso Szegedi – an actor honored with Jászai Mari Award, Attila Balogh poet and journalist, István Szikinger constitutional lawyer, attorney of the Roma Civil Rights Fund, Tibor Bóos lawyer, Sándor Máté president of the Roma Minority Self-Government in Opály, Angéla Kóczé sociologist, director of the European Roma Information Office operating under the European Council, and Szilvia Varró journalist, correspondent of the daily paper „Népszabadság”.

The percentage of students deemed handicapped is extraordinarily high in Hungary. Viktória Mohácsi the Agent of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage in Charge of Roma Affairs pointed out at her press conference that: – while in the European Union 2.5 percent of the children are declared handicapped in Hungary this ratio is 5.3 percent (which equals approximately 49 thousand students). She claimed that about 2500-2800 students per year enter the system as “proto-handicapped”, which is to say that they are not handicapped. The ratio of Roma students declared handicapped is significant (according to data from 1993, which was the last time when registration could be done according to ethnicity, 42 percent of the handicapped children were Roma.) According to the report of

the Minority Ombudsman there were schools, where the only reason given on a child's folio of survey was "Roma origin".

"In an estimated 600 institutions from the 3500 elementary schools in our country Roma children study in segregated classes"- announced Viktória Mohácsi, who is responsible for the integration of children with detrimental background and Roma children. 70 percent of Roma children attend segregated classes, which is not only problematic because of racist separation but also because in these classes the standard of education is significantly lower especially considering foreign languages and informatics. Governmental support for the integration of Roma children, which amounts to 60000 forints per year per child, and is available since the 2003/2004 academic year, can only be applied for by schools, which undertake to liquidate segregated classes by year 2008.

The association called Independent Roma Roundtable is preparing to demonstrate against the planned introduction of the minority elector registry. The demonstration is to take place in Komárom on the 8 of April, the international day of the Roma. The information was announced by Vilmos Kövesi the deputy president of the National Roma Minority Self-Government and the leader of the Independent Roma Roundtable. According to the proposal of the government in the future only those persons may participate in the minority self-government elections, who register themselves, that is, whose name are on the minority elector registry. The argument goes that this is the only way to avoid abuses of the system, which put the minority communities at a disadvantage. Presently all four parties in Parliament seem to be in support of the government's proposal. Some of the biggest minority communities, such as the German community, also agree with the government's proposal. On the other hand Aladár Horváth the previous president of the

National Roma Minority Self-Government, who has been removed from the post among disputable circumstances, voiced his misgivings about the proposal and so does Vilmos Kövesi the actual president. At some point the National Roma Minority Self-Government had decided to accept the proposal, but according to Kövesi that decision did not express the "real and homogenous opinion of the representatives." The Roma association sent its written protestation to the Prime Minister, to the Chair of the House of Parliament and to the four parties in Parliament.

April

Ágnes Tölgyesi created a 100 minute research film-essay investigating the causes of a matter, which has been the preoccupation of many professionals in the field of politics, sociology, economics and education for a long time. The film examines the causes that lead to the well-known phenomenon that Roma children do not do well at school and often fail to integrate and achieve success in mainstream society. The director endeavors to present answers to these questions through the follow up of individual lives. The austere images show us adverse family circumstances, the damaging effects of unemployment and an unassuming, ambition-less upbringing coupled with shortcomings in the continuous transmission of the ethnic-cultural heritage. It is unfortunate that the situation is so poor, as these kids who are still joyous despite their multiple disadvantageous conditions wish for happiness just as much as their more fortunate peers with stable backgrounds. Often these kids are the only hope of their parents suffering from exclusion.

The Hungarian State Audit Office filed its accusation against an unknown offender because money disappeared from the National Roma Minority Self-Government probably as a result of financial offences. The present data reveals that the deficit amounting to 60 million forints accumulated between 1999 and 2003, during this period auditing rules were violated and costs were illegally reimbursed several times – states the Audit Office.

A cleansing, disinfecting, lime-wash was organized for the Roma inhabitants of 6 villages in Borsod by the Association of Roma Women in Public. With the half million forints support of the Ministry of Social Affairs 350 sacks of slaked lime were distributed in the villages of Szendro, Rakaca, Tormanádaska, Bódvalenke, Bódvaszilas and Martonyi. Related to this action an open-air public health forum was also held at Szendro, where Blanka Kozma announced to the public that their plans include checking the chimneys and stove-pipes of all the houses in the near future and if necessary the association would help get rid of rats as well. A local garbage picking contest was also organized for the occasion, where many children and adults cleaned not only their own yards but also the public spaces from rubbish. The officer of the National Public Health and Medical Officer Service from Edelény pointed out that if everybody keeps the their portal clean

then the whole village will be cleaner. The mayor promised that if this action is successful, the municipality will help maintain cleanliness and order.

The editors of Romaweb within the Governmental Office for Equal Opportunities sought lodging in Debrecen for their course in April. The organizer of the event asked for a price offer from the owner of a smaller hostel on phone. Once the owner heard the name Romaweb he/she inquired whether there would be persons of minority ethnicity among the participants as well. The organizer said “yes”, to which the owner's answer was: “unfortunately in this case we cannot offer you a place”. Following this incident the Legal Defence Bureau for National and Ethnic Minorities (NEKI) decided to test the hostel employing two Roma and two non-Roma couples. On April 9 two young Roma couples sought lodging in the hostel, where they were told that the house is full and were sent away. The Roma couples also inquired whether they could hold a course for the members of the Roma self-government later on at the place. The owner replied that the hostel was full until September therefore they could not be of help. Five- ten minutes later the two non-Roma couples arrived, where offered a choice of rooms for the night. Having spent the night in the hostel, the following morning the couples also asked whether they could hold a conference there in the middle of May. The owner was uncertain about availability and suggested to speak later on the phone. A week later when the couple rang back they received a price offer and managed to set the time as well. On the phone the owner stated that they did have free capacity and asked about the ethnicity of the would-be participants. When the test person announced that the participants would be Hungarian the owner of the hostel asked back “But they will not be gypsies, will they?” The owner added that he only poses this question to be sure, because only recently gypsies wanted to organize a conference there.

May

At the drafting of the Charter of the European Roma Forum the President of the Hungarian National Roma Minority Self-Government (OCÖ) Orbán Kolompár did not accept that the Hungarian Roma should be able to send only three delegates to the Forum's plenary session. At the negotiations in Strasbourg the President of OCÖ represented the principle that each member state should be able to delegate representatives to the plenary session in proportion

with the number of Roma living in the given country, thus Hungary should be allowed to send five persons. The establishment of a European Forum was initiated by Finland with the intention to form a representative body for the Roma living in Europe which would fit into the Union's decision making and executive structure.

As reported by one of the national dailies Árpád Urbán a socialist MP said at the plenary session of the Parliament during the discussion of the bill on abuse within the family that “unfortunately abuse within the family predominantly happens in Roma families”. When questioned by the Roma Press Center later Urbán replied that his statement was taken out of context and its meaning thereby changed. According to Ildikó Lendvai the Chair of the Socialist Fraction Urbán had been misunderstood as neither he nor the Socialist Party cherishes any such thought. Nonetheless the minutes of the plenary session confirms that Urbán, who outside Parliament is the director of a school in Nógrád County, opined that proportionately there was more abuse within Roma families than within the ethnic Hungarian ones. According the minutes the MP said: “unfortunately we notice abuse within the family in schools, especially in those schools where there are many Roma students like in Nógrád, where the ratio of Roma pupils is 34%. This is not to say that only Roma children suffer from such abuse, but unfortunately among their families this problem occurs proportionately more often than elsewhere.” When questioned by the Roma Press Center the MP could not name any research which would support his statement, he simply referred to his own personal experience. He mentioned that he knew three or four Roma students in his own school who, according to his perception, showed signs of having suffered family abuse.

The elementary school of Tiszabo is one of the poorest educational institutions of the country. The 350 students of whom only one is non-Roma attend a 120 years old building, which is too small so some children have to go to school in the afternoon. Seemingly the school does have water-lavatories, but practically the facility cannot be used as the pipes are too old and obstruction is an everyday phenomenon. Classrooms are damp and the ceilings full of cracks. Experts from the University of Szeged and the Hungarian Academy of Science recently carried out a survey about 20 elementary schools of the country, which are mostly attended by Roma children. The main aim of their study was to investigate the skills, the gen-

eral knowledge and social background the children had when entering school. The study revealed the students at Tiszbo were the most backward in the whole country – most of the 7 year old children had the intellectual capacity and vocabulary of a 3 year old. At Tiszabo the roads are muddy, there are hardly any stores, the village is poor, so there is nothing that would attract a professional pedagogue with a degree to settle there.

The municipality of Szombathely found a very particular way to support Zsutinasz Fund – a fund for supporting Roma in disadvantage – they have given a 150 meters long piece of railtrack as a gift to the Fund. “The municipality achieves two things simultaneously – on the one hand we get work done, which needs to be done anyway, on the other we help Roma in adverse conditions” – pointed out the Director of the Department of Town Development and Maintenance of Szombathely. The tracks are to be removed by unemployed Roma and then sold to MÉH (a company dealing with recyclable waste) according to the plans of the Fund. The organization estimates to gain a couple of hundred thousand forints on the transaction, which is to be given to Roma in need.

Several Roma parties and civil organizations demand the dissolution of the National Roma Minority Self-Government (OCÖ) and call for welfare and developmental measures on part of the government in a public letter addressed to Péter Medgyessy the Prime Minister. The leaders of OCÖ proved their inadequacy during the last 1.5 years declared István Makai, President of the Roma Civil Union. He added that they call for urgent governmental measures, which foster the start of a real integration process for the Roma.

June

Heves County also needs to establish a Roma Intellectual Resource Center in order to be able to apply to funds for development. László Teleki, the Secretary responsible for Roma Affairs within the Office of the Prime Minister, organized a forum in Verpelét for the minority leaders of Heves. The participants inquired about the followings:

– when would money be available for the dissolution of Roma shackle settlements, when would some of the Roma Self-governments receive computers, what could be done to prevent illegal employment of the Roma as agricultural workers, how

could they get aid for the schooling of children. László Teleki informed the participants that for the dissolution of Roma shackle settlements the Ministry of Finance, the Governmental Office for Equal Opportunities and his Office together had applied for loan from the European Developmental Bank. For the 10 500 million forint loan governmental guarantee is required, which in turn requires a governmental resolution. The resolution has to contain the names of the settlements and the schedule, according to which the government plans to dissolve them, until 2006. Hungary has passed the first phase of the competition. Concerning employment László Teleki gave the following response: – those employers who employ Roma employees may apply for grants from the Public Fund for the Roma in Hungary on condition that they undertake to employ their Roma employees for 18 months and at least another 25 percent of their Roma employees for another 18 months. The available fund for this purpose amounts to 200 million forints. Businesses and self-governments win funding based on competition. In the field of education progress has been made in the area of scholarships for Roma students – said Teleki. This year the government provides 970 million forints to support the studies of 21500 students. Scholarship is given from age 10 till the end of university education on condition that the applicant reaches an average mark of 3.5 (out of 5). Teleki thinks that the 5 operating programs of the National Plan for Development provide almost unlimited financial opportunities for the Roma.

One of the most important causes of the Roma population's disadvantage is that they were the most heavily struck by the dissolution of state owned workplaces during the transition period. 13-14 percent of the 580 thousand people living in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County is Roma, thus in this county it is especially important to implement employment-policy, developmental and equal opportunity programs. The above is a very short summary of the forum held in Nyíregyháza coordinating professionals, where László Teleki the Secretary Responsible for Roma Affairs within the Office of the Prime Minister was also present.

Almost 30 percent of the adult Roma population did not finish elementary school and hardly more than 10 percent completed secondary school reveals a survey , which was carried out by Delphoi Consulting with the lead of Ferenc Babusik psychologist. The

chances of getting into higher education hardly changed during the past decades. It is hopeful nonetheless that among the younger generations more and more Roma attend secondary schools, which give a 'baccalaureate' and thus enable the students to enter higher education. Success at school largely depends on the financial circumstances of the family, which in turn depends to a great extent on the place of residence. Previous studies had also shown that those Roma who live in mixed environment are much better qualified than those who live separately in ghetto-like quarters or villages. On the other hand the chances of getting employment depend mostly on qualifications. A vicious circle – the professionals who did the survey simply call it 'the trap of poverty'.

The Roma population of Hungary at the time the survey was carried out counted approximately 600 thousand persons. About half of these live in segregated environment and about 170 thousand live in shackle-towns and amid ghetto-like circumstances. Only a quarter of the adult Roma population is employed, and only 5 percent of them is getting education, the ratio of the inactive is 70 percent. Compared with the Hungarian average there are much less pensioners in the Roma population while the unemployed, the mothers on child-care leave and the persons on disabled-pension constitute the three biggest subgroups of the inactive.

The average income from wages amounts to 60 000 forints, which is barely more than the minimum wages. The recent study has confirmed the conclusion of an earlier study that contrary to the public belief, it is not worthwhile financially for a Roma family to try and purely rely on the income, which they get as child care support instead of the earnings from labor. It is obvious that those families do best, where both parents are working and the number of children is not high.

It also proves to be a myth fuelled by prejudice that “gypsies have a lot of kids”. It is true that among the adults above 35 there is a significant group – between 14-27 percent, depending on the age-group, who raise 4 children, but it is also true that there are just as many gypsy families with only 1 or 2 or 3 children.

Despite the low income level 70 percent of the Roma households have no public utility debts, which is in contrast with the public image that the Roma keep accumulating public utility debts. On the other hand it is a common view among the Roma that they voluntarily take in their elderly and care for them with feeling. The survey belies this image and reveals that 40 percent of the elderly Roma live alone in abandonment.

The research also investigated whether it is really true that cohesion within Roma groups is strong – as the public saying goes. – Can the Roma rely on each other in need, or for instance if they need to borrow some money? The investigation concluded that the traditional communities, which used to work as a social network have now become a thing of the past. The present Roma population in Hungary suffers from alienation as much as the non-Roma. If someone among them can rely on the support of others it is a consequence of individual achievement rather than social relations working independently of a given person's skill.

The Ombudsman for the rights of minorities launched an investigation against the elementary school in Bagi. The students in the classes for impaired children – who happen to be all Roma – do not have their lunches in the canteen where all the other children eat, but are kept in their classrooms for lunch and served cold food (while the others eat warm). Kaltenbach (the Ombudsman) also pointed out the anomalies of the system, which allows schools to receive public money on the bases of having Roma students on various titles and then ascribes no restrictions over the spending of the money.

The Supreme Court has granted 100 thousand forints in damages per person to six Roma families coming from Zámoly, who received refugee status in France. According to the final judgement the municipality demolished the houses of the six families illegally as the families were not given the opportunity to appeal against the decision on demolishing.

July

In Hungary everybody can decide freely whether they consider themselves to be a member of an ethnic minority or not, the state will not inquire about anyone's ethnicity. On this bases the question is – how will the Roma receive the aid addressed to them. Minister István Csillag announced that the ministry will organize a competition to support Roma businesses this year as well. The full sum available is 200 million forints, out of which one applicant may not get more than 3 million.

The intention is clear, but the question remains what is the guarantee that the money will end up in the hands of Roma? The laws in effect prohibit the keeping of any regis-

tration on the ethnicity of citizens, and only the individual is entitled to decide whether he/she considers himself/herself to belong to an ethnic minority. Accordingly the arbiters of a competition have no such right, and the Ministry of Economic Affairs may not require any document certifying the ethnicity of the applicants. At the same time the announcement of the Ministry requires the applicants to have a recommendation from a local minority self-government, which has to contain answers to the following questions:

“In what way did the given venture so far contribute to the economic and social integration of the local Roma community?” and “Has the business so far employed Roma employees?”

The same principle is applicable when scholarships are granted to Roma youth. Secretary of Government László Teleki thinks that this procedure does not lead to corruption as the recommendation itself does not automatically mean that the applicant will receive the grant, for this other professional conditions also have to be met. Jeno Kaltenbach on the other hand calls for much stricter vigilance in tracking down those who try to access the support addressed to the Roma without good reason. He confirmed once again his own earlier views that a solution need be found whereby ethnicity could be registered without infringing upon privacy rights.

The sitting strike at Rakaca continues, which was started by one of the members of the local minority self-government, who resigned in May, and her husband. The demonstration aims at calling the attention of the MP's on the unconstitutional regulatory hiatus in the various acts on minorities and elections, as these infringe upon their political and minority rights.

We would like to see concrete results concerning the social integration of the Roma – said Orbán Kolompár after the professional body of the National Roma Minority Self-Government (OCÖ) discussed the integration plans of the various ministries. As Kolompár pointed out the plans are rather general, it is not clear how their implementation should be carried out, so they decided to start negotiations with all the ministries concerned. They would like to have the goals laid out in the program of the National Roma Minority Self-Government to be included in the action-plans of the adequate ministries.

The Presidency of the National Roma Minority Self-Government held its recent meeting on the 8th of July 2004, at which István Csillag Minister of Economic Affairs was also present. The minister and Orbán Kolompár the President of the National Roma Minority Self-Government (OCÖ) had a personal meeting before the meeting of the Presidency. István Csillag announced that the Ministry is prepared to conclude a cooperation agreement between the Ministry and the National Roma Minority Self-Government. The proposed document would include the programs elaborated by the Ministry for the Roma small and medium sized entrepreneurs and the amounts of money available for these. The Presidency of the National Roma Minority Self-Government and the Minister of Economic Affairs agreed that the cooperation agreement should be concluded this summer. The Ministry of Economic Affairs shall give a more dominant role to the Roma referent working in the Ministry whose role is foster communications between the National Roma Minority Self-Government and the Ministry. István Csillag confirmed once again before the Presidency of the National Roma Minority Self-Government that the integration of the Hungarian Roma is a number one goal of the Government.

August

The Public Fund for the Hungarian National and Ethnic Minorities plays an important role in the multi-channel support system of minorities in Hungary. It decided about the placement of 3 thousand million forints between 1999 and 2003. 95 percent of the money came from state funding nonetheless the real value of the sums provided for the Fund decreased yearly. Before April 2003 the Minister of Justice was responsible for the organization within the Government was, since then this task was transmitted to the Secretary responsible for Roma Affairs within the Office of the Prime Minister. The State Audit Office during its recent control found that the Ministry of Justice did not conclude any agreements between 1999 and 2002 with the Public Fund on the use of the annual funding provided from the budget and did not require any accounts concerning the use of the funding subsequently either. The applications were evaluated and decided upon by the Curator Board in accordance with the law, but there was no system whatsoever to hold accountable the recipients of the 2.8 thousand million forints. According to the State Audit Office, this happened because the Curator Board of the Fund wanted to save money

on operative costs and the costs of checking accounts. 44 percent of the funding went to minority papers, 41 was spent on programs with specific goals, 14 percent on scholarships and fellowships. Mainly in this latest category 7300 private persons received funding as well. From the entire sum 25 percent was distributed to Roma, 20 percent to German, 11 percent to Slovak and 10 percent to Croatian applicants. The fate of approximately 400 million forints could not be followed up as most of the documentation on the scholarships and fellowships was liquidated on the bases of regulation on the maintenance of documents, which violates the law, and only the payment receipts were available. Furthermore the Director of the Fund the did not make available for checking the other documents either on grounds that this would infringe personality rights, namely the protection of data revealing ones ethnicity. The State Audit Office pointed out that the destruction of the accounts is sufficient bases to suspect a violation of the laws on auditing and therefore they have initiated to hold the Director of the Fund accountable, who is legally responsible for the destruction. The Director was not entitled to give his approval to the flawed regulation on the handling of documents, as this was in the competence of the Curator Board. The State Audit Office also raised its objection to the practice of the Curator Board that it declared to have a quorum on at least at a quarter of its meetings based on the number of board members reduced by the number of members resigned from the Board, instead of the number stipulated in the Deed of Foundation.

Thanks to the intervention of the National Roma Minority Self-Government an evacuation was prevented in Lajosmizse. In the county of Bács-Kiskun, in Lajosmizse several streets of new houses have been built from loan after the transitions. However in the recent year most of the owners became unemployed. Repayment of the loans has become more and more burdensome. The financing bank -OTP – started to collect the instalments from the guarantors, and after a while started enforcement proceedings against the borrowers. The representative of the minority self-government of Lajosmizse claims that in more than 20 cases the property was sold under their market value at public auctions, thus the self-government initiated an investigation with the Minister of Interior Affairs. They find it more than suspicious that in each case the seller is the same person as the buyer.

The mayor of Lajosmizse opined in the case that it is not a Roma issue, but a conflict between bank and its borrowers. He agrees that the prices were low, but in his perception the

market conditions, the state of the buildings and their environment highly influenced the price. He added that the municipality provides free legal advice to those concerned. He also expressed his regrets that many borrowers did not take advantage of this service. The owner of a farm near Lajosmizse, who is publicly considered to be 'the' buyer of all the properties put up for auction, informed the paper that he had merely bought 3 or 4 properties recently, and that it was not his fault if there were no other offers. To our inquiry of his plans with the newly acquired property he did not wish to answer.

The group of around eighty, which assembled in front of the Police Headquarters of Kecskemét, to commemorate the death of Richard Jakab, a 19 year old Roma boy who died while subjected to police measures, was smaller than expected. The vigil in candle-light organized by the Roma Association for Civil Rights and the Roma Minority Self-Government of Kecskemét was disturbed by an incident. A middle-aged man appeared on the spot carrying sign-boards with captions such as: “We had enough of hysteria” and “The defender of public order is to be praised”. The participants first tried to send the man away, however he failed to leave and a brawl broke out. The assembled took the boards from the man and tore them into pieces. The man – who according to our sources – was a private person from Budapest, ran across the street but few minutes later the mother of the boy and two other women followed him and took him down on the ground. They beat him and kicked him and broke his glasses – the man suffered minor injuries on his face. A few civilians together with some of the journalists managed to free the man, who subsequently left the site by car. Aladár Horváth, the President of the Roma Association for Civil Rights told us on the spot that the Roma present were convinced the man deliberately provoked them and tried to humiliate them in their mourning. Referring to the case of Richard Jakab he added: “We know that the law applies to all of us, but people should not die when its implemented.”

The 19 year old Richard Jakab was under warrant of caption, when a policeman outside service recognized him in a shop and tried to capture him. The boy fled, the policeman followed him, caught him in the street and took him to the ground. Within minutes the boy had a fainting-fit, the policeman and the ambulance arriving at the scene tried to help him, but the youngster died on the spot. According to the expert medical opinion the death on the 25th of July during police arrest was caused by inherited heart atony, which

affected all the other organs as well.

The National Roma Minority Self-Government (OCÖ) initiated talks with the Presidents of the four parties in Parliament in order to draw their attention to the necessity of modifying the laws on minorities this year. “The present Act on Minority Elections is unconstitutional and we are apprehensive that it will not be possible to hold minority elections in 2006 under the present law. The consequence would be that the approximately 1000 Roma self-governments, which now albeit meagre conditions represent the interests of the Roma fairly effectively, would cease to operate.” -said Orbán Kolompár. He called it a “political nonsense” that the modification of the law would fail to occur in the absence of cooperation between the parties.

The police expects the decrease of conflicts between members of the police force and the Roma from the first course on conflict resolution and Roma language education, which has just terminated at the Police Headquarters of Pest County. The participants of the first course on 'Romology' univocally stated that the information acquired on Gypsy culture, language knowledge and the techniques for conflict prevention could be very well used in their everyday practice. Ignác István the Chief Officer of the Police Headquarters of Pest County said at the professional conference brought together for the evaluation of the course that: the motivation behind the course was to do something about the ever increasing conflicts between members of the police force and the Roma, which has also been a topic for outrage in the press recently. The course was supported by the county assembly as well. Every tenth policeman in Pest County participated in the course. No education has ever been held for such a great number of policemen in this subject. Apart from a few mid-range officers, most of the participants were patrols of the county.

A chapel has been built at Csatka, in Komárom-Esztergom County, the most popular place of pilgrimage for the Roma, where on Sunday a cross blessed by the Pope will be placed – announced the President of the National Roma Minority Self-Government (OCÖ). The chapel took 1,5 month to build and was partially financed from Roma donations . said Orbán Kolompár. The money for the building material

came partly from the budget of the National Roma Minority Self-Government, partly from other support. The President could not name the full expense, but only the building material was 6 million forints. On Sunday – the pilgrim day of Mary – the chapel will be opened among festivities.

September

The appointment of a Governmental Agent Responsible for Roma Affairs and a new Office for the Integration of the Roma was proposed by the participants at the meeting held in the headquarters of the National Roma Minority Self-Government. The meeting with the leaders of civil associations was initiated by Orbán Kolompár, the President of the National Roma Minority Self-Government (OCÖ). Several of the well-known Roma politicians were missing from the meeting for various reasons, the names include: Flórián Farkas (Lungo Drom), Aladár Horváth (Roma Association for Civil Rights) and Jeno Zsigó (Roma Parliament). The 20 participants at the meeting thought that the proposition for governmental restructuring needs to be discussed in a wider circle of the Roma public. The majority in the end decided to support the proposition for the appointment of a Governmental Agent Responsible for Roma Affairs and the new Governmental Office in principle and elaborate the details of the proposition later with the participation of the leaders of the civil associations and the members of the National Roma Minority Self-Government.

There is little cohesion between the programs for the Roma elaborated by the various ministries – said Kinga Göncz, the Minister for Equal Opportunities in the interval of the meeting of the intergovernmental committee responsible for the coordination of Roma affairs. The Minister pointed out the necessity of following up the fate of the budgetary funds assigned for Roma purposes. – Is the money implemented usefully, does it get to those in need? These issues will be examined by the Roma monitoring Office established within the Ministry for Equal Opportunities. László Teleki, the Secretary responsible for Roma Affairs within the Office of the Prime Minister said that last year the ministries spent 16,7 thousand million forints on the Roma integration programs, which is 5 thousand million more than was planned. Among the ministries, the Ministry of Labor spent the most – 8,5 thousand million forints.

At the meeting of the National Roma Minority Self-Government the appointment of a Governmental Agent Responsible for Roma Affairs was proposed by the majority. Nonetheless so far there is no sign that the government has considered the proposal seriously. Kinga Göncz says it is more important to achieve a “common thinking” of the ministries. It is also doubtful whether the Council for Roma Affairs constituted by PM Peter Medgyessy from Roma and non-Roma experts will survive.

The mortification rate of the Roma in Hajdú-Bihar County is extremely high. The sociologists carrying out a survey in the county hardly met any Roma above the age of 70 and found that for a 100 children there are only 11 people above the age of 60. The survey was done by the Sociology Department of the University of Debrecen for the request of the Assembly of Hajdú-Bihar County. Professor Csaba Béres told us that 200 families were interviewed in the ten 10 villages, where the ratio of Roma inhabitants is the highest in the county. He added that according to estimates there are 50 000 people in the county, who lifestyle is that of the Roma, but the survey was only based on those 11 000, who identified themselves as Roma during the census. If we take the whole population of Hajdú-Bihar County there are 30 children for a 100 adults, this ratio for the Roma population is 69 percent. The results of the survey also press for instant measures in the field of education, as it revealed that 10 percent of the Roma is analphabet – the ratio of the women being double of the men. While 86 percent of the whole population completed elementary school this ratio for the Roma population is 56,8 percent. The situation concerning secondary education is even worse, while 34 percent of the whole population completed secondary school this ratio for the Roma is 1,9 percent. The ratio for higher education is 10,8 and 0,5 percent.

It was not one of the lavatories on the corridors, but in the lavatory attached to the room for parturition, where a woman from Kunhegyes gave birth to her child – said the Director of the Gábor Kátai Hospital in Karcag. The woman subsequently submitted a written complaint concerning her treatment. L. Ildikó, who was giving birth to her fifth child earlier said, that probably as a result of her Roma origin, the doctor of the institution did not treat her properly. Despite her labor-pains the doctor abandoned her and left her with an older nurse with the words” You will have to do the sawing up aswell.” The Director told us that the insti-

tution had already been accused of having separate rooms for Roma women and that the doctors generally were less polite with the Roma, however the Director managed to defy these claims at the time. He also added that according to the preliminary investigations there was no medical malpractice in this case either. The mother in labor-pains got clyster according to the usual practice, then the heartbeat of the embryo was checked, the pains were checked and the mother also got infusion. It was after these that she went to the lavatory adjacent to the child-birth room and there gave birth to her child. The Director said they suppose that the mother had started the birth herself and they had launched an investigation to check upon this. They will also investigate whether the claim of the mother that the doctor assigned the sawing up to the nurse was true. It is possible that our colleague was joking, but the investigations will have to bring the facts to light.

Ferenc Gyurcsány candidate for PM, included a sentence in the Lovari language into his exposition in Parliament on Wednesday before the debate on the program of the government began. “Zhanav ke jekh Ungriko them si: le romengo thaj gazhengo them”- were the words with which Ferenc Gyurcsány finished his speech after having described the intentions of his Government to continue their predecessor's attempts and ascertain the integration of the Roma in the fields of education, labor, health-care and culture.

Reacting to the interruptions by other MP's Gyurcsány continued his speech saying that “There are people here who understand what I am saying. There are people here, who understand me if in no other way, than with their hearts. There is one Hungary, the Common Hungary of the Roma and the Hungarian, and I am proud of this, Sir Fellow-Representative”. The speech was followed by loud clapping, nevertheless Bálint Magyar The Minister of Education later denounced someone, who was heard to shout at the quoted part of the speech – ” This is the Hungarian Prliament!”

No Hungarian Prime Minister or candidate for becoming a Prime Minister has ever uttered a word in the Roma language in Parliament – asserted the Press Office of the Parliament to the MTI. However Roma words have been used previously, by Aladár Horváth – MP in the Liberal Party – during the debate of the budget in 1991. Orbán Kolompár, the President of the National Roma Minority Self-Government (OCÖ) thanked Gyurcsány in a telegram for the gesture. János Dógi, President of the Association of Roma Organizations in Hungary also declared that it was an important gesture that the PM-

candidate spoke in the Lovari language. “This is an important signal, all my respect is his for this.” At the same time Flórián Farkas the representative of FIDESZ thought Gyurcsány's step was no more than a PR trick “The Roma in Hungarian are Hungarian, why does he look down on the m so much?” – said he. He also claimed that the Medgyessy Government during its two years made it impossible for the National Roma Minority Self-Government (OCÖ) to operate properly. In his opinion the Roma policy of the government is a “Romanized Roma policy”, which is offensive to the Hungarian Roma.

Disciplining the Roma is one of the goals of an Ethics textbook published this year for the use of students in the 7th and 8th grade of elementary school. The publication claims that the Roma cannot always resist crime and it also suggests to the Roma parents to that they should not try and live from unemployment benefit, which is a burden to society.

The textbook titled “Ethics” – published by Apáczai Csere János Publishers appeared in the bookshops this year. Among its statements we find things like – Roma women used to tell the future to credulous people in market-places and that the Roma if they do not have enough money they are tempted by crime, and “unfortunately several of them cannot resist temptation”. The authors of the textbook state that the Roma live in dire parts of towns and villages not only as a result of prejudice but as a result of their own mentality, as well. To ameliorate the condition of the Roma the book circumscribes tasks for the state, for the Roma parents and their children. According to these it is the task of a Roma family that if they get an apartment or loan “they should appreciate that and use the opportunity without abusing it”. If Roma adults get work they should “be understanding and use the opportunity and work instead of trying to make ends meet out of unemployment benefit to the burden of society and the taxpayers”. The publication also advises that Roma children should be brought up to “take good care of the schoolbooks, shoes and clothes they get, and should be aware that they can only become respected members of the country they live and work in, if they acquire a thorough basic education.”

October

The new government has initiated negotiations about the parliamentary representation of the minorities. In case of success the parties will pay their debt dating from 1993, as

minorities have a right to parliamentary representation according to the law. This is stated in the Act on Minorities, which was adopted more than 10 years ago, in 1993 with overwhelming majority. Minorities still have no representation since then. The last Socialist -Liberal coalition in 1998 was close to having adopted a bill on the issue, but in the end the failed with a few votes. Under the Fidesz government the Parliament did not even have the issue on its agenda. The Medgyessy Cabinet promised to correct the omission. The Gyurcsány Cabinet is more cautious “We shall initiate negotiations to achieve the political consensus necessary for the adoption of a bill on minority representation.”

So far it is unclear what kind of representation the minorities would get. Orbán Kolompár favours a solution whereby each of the 13 ethnic minorities would set up a list and the first candidate on each list would get into Parliament. This solution seems agreeable for all the minorities but then the number of MP's would increase by 13 persons. It is doubtful that the parties in Parliament, which constantly emphasize the necessity of reducing the number of MP's would accept such a proposal. It is also possible that minority representatives would participate in law-making without the right to vote or with a limited right to vote. If the parties chose to have full representative rights but the increase of the House with 13 members is too much, then rotation could be applied – minority representatives would replace each other according to pre-determined periods and only 3-4 of them would have the right to vote at any one time.

The National Roma Minority Self-Government (OCÖ) plans to start its national radio channel in the first semester of the following year state the President of the organization having conducted talks with the leader of the media authority. Nevertheless György Kovács the President of the National Radio and Television Commission (ORTT) announced that as far as he knew there was no free frequency available. “We need to have the whole conception ready by the end of November” – said Orbán Kolompár, adding that they will start negotiations about financing once the conception is ready.

It would be unacceptable for the representatives of the biggest Hungarian minority if the Hungarian television transmitted its minority programs on satellite – announced the National Roma Minority Self-Government (OCÖ). „ Only those solutions are acceptable for us which make it possible to receive the programs by antenna ” -said the President

Kolompár. He also pointed out that most of the Roma live on the edge of towns and villages among poor conditions where no satellite infrastructure is available.

The Hungarian Roma society is in a crisis, in a chaotic situation pointed out The President of the National Roma Minority Self-Government (OCÖ) Orbán Kolompár at a conference on the legal defence of the Roma. The biggest danger for many is dislodgement. “We keep financing and financing and see no result”- he said referring to Roma civil societies which get funding from several sources but then do not do any valid rights protection and avoid the real sensitive issues.

A court decision abolished the decision of the APEH (the Hungarian Tax Authority), which rejected the submission of the National Roma Minority Self-Government (OCÖ) to reclaim VAT. However the procedure against Vilmos Kövesi for forging documents and for the use of public funding without a lawful title is still pending. The above -mentioned court decision will probably affect Kövesi's case as well.

Financial detectives have long been after the businesses of the vice-president of the National Roma Minority Self-Government (OCÖ). In Zala county an inquest has been initiated also for the forging of documents and for the use of public funding without lawful title. The case had to do with a dredging-machine that the politician bought with governmental support. The machine bought for 3 million HUF was registered in the books at the value of 8 million HUF. Kövesi explained the discrepancy by stating that he spent a lot of money on the machine and completely renovated it. He also claimed that there was political motivation in the background of the inquest and the goal was to blacken his name.

The directorship of the Free Democrats (SZDSZ) univocally proposed Viktória Mohácsi, the ministerial deputy of the Ministry of Education to the recently vacated place of the party in the European Parliament. Viktória Mohácsi was the third name on the Free democrats list for the European elections and she is a dedicated liberal politician, whose expertise in human rights and minority protection is a field having priority in the program of the Free Democrats. She is young, she speaks several languages, the party opines that she will be very welcome in the liberal fraction of the European Parliament.

“The Hungarian Socialist Party made a very big mistake when it did not delegate any Roma representatives into the European Parliament”- said Zita Gurmai at a meeting called “The Roma Way to Europe” organized by the Committee for European Integration and Roma Issues of the Hungarian Socialist Party. In her opinion it would have been important for the bigger party in Government to have a Roma delegate in the EP. The only Hungarian Roma delegate in the EP is Lívía Jaróka, who was voted for on the list of the FIDESZ (Association of Young Democrats). Zita Gurmai brought up the issue talking about the disadvantage of Roma women in society, who suffer double discrimination, once as women and a second time as an ethnic minority.

November

Gipsy men and women have tidied up the deserted Jewish Cemetery in Tápiószele with a couple of weeks work. The cemetery opened in the middle of October was renovated in the frame of the Integrated Roma Employment Program. The program for the development of human resources was launched under the motto of equal opportunities, and is managed out of the 400 Million forints budget of the Employment Centre of Pest County at eight locations. The settlement, which has an unemployment rate of 15-20 percent, now gave the Roma not only an opportunity to work and thereby better integrate into society but also renders the Roma self-esteem. The directors of the program said that the Roma employed in the program were also motivated by feelings of solidarity as the Holocaust was common suffering for the two groups.

At Tápiószele so far 93 persons opted for education provided by the program. Education for many meant learning to read and write functionally, but 34 of them acquired professional training as well, and out of this latter group 25 people are already employed. The list includes shop-assistants, drivers, au-pairs, masons and private security guards as well.

“Next March the National Roma Museum and Roma Library will be able to open its gates” – said Orbán Kolompár. The two establishments will be operating in the main building of the National Roma Minority Self-Government (OCÖ) in Dohány street. The general assembly of the National Roma Minority Self-Government (OCÖ) in

February decided on the establishment of four institutions: – the National Roma Museum, the Roma Library, the Roma College and a nationwide Roma radio station. In his opinion the National Roma Museum and the Roma Library could be set up from 15-20 Million forints.

The negotiations have started – the funding will partially come from the Bureau for National and Ethnic Minorities (NEKI), but we are also seeking support from the Ministry of Culture – added Kolompár. The President of the National Roma Minority Self-Government (OCÖ) referred also to the agreement with the Hungarian Cultural Institute according to which the Institute shall lend to the OCÖ an about 3000 volume library for use and will also grant the Roma self-government the works of 194 Roma artists, which now lie in the storage room of the Institute.

The Hungarian MP's in the European Parliament have assured each other of their will to cooperate and made a declaration to the press that deeds speak louder than words, nevertheless they clearly seem to be representing the interests of the Hungarian Roma in two different “corridors” of the EP.

The establishment of one of the bodies involved – the interfraction Committee for Roma Affairs – was initiated by the Socialist MP Katalin Lévai. This group includes the liberal István Szent-Iványi and Edit Bauer the representative of the Hungarian Popular Party in Slovakia as well. Their administration is operated by the Roma Information Center. Twenty-four Roma public figures from Hungary – including Orbán Kolompár the President of the National Roma Minority Self-Government (OCÖ), have recently been invited by this group to Bruxelles in order to be better informed. At the same time it strikes one's eye that Lívía Járóka from FIDESZ, who has been the single Hungarian Roma MP in the European Parliament – at least until Viktória Mohácsi from SZDSZ turned up – does not participate in the workings of this group. She declared that she was not interested in “etnobusiness” but wanted to engage in real work instead. Therefore she decided to join as vice-president the inter-party group against racism and for multi-colored society, which was founded yesterday. The curious point of the case is that the predecessor of this group had been established five years ago, and largely consists of MP's on the left. Its President is Claude Moraes – a British Euro-MP of Indian origin, one of its Vice presidents is Kósáné Kovács Magda (MSZP) and among its members is Désir Har-

lem – founding member of SOS Racisme, a well-known organization in Europe. Járóka is not at all discouraged by this, she has a lot to do – presently she concentrates on the atrocities committed by public servants against the Roma population in Romania, on account of the approaching Romanian accession as well as on the issue of the alleged forced sterilization of Roma women in the Check Republic.

It is not possible to hold another minority self-government election according to the present rules in Hungary. The parties must amend the law or else the minority self-government system will cease to exist – sates the representatives of the minorities at their press conference. Previously the parties have seemed to come to an agreement on the amendment of the law , which requires a two-third majority. Then FIDESZ declared that it does not support the introduction of the minority elector register. (According to the plans of the Government only those could participate in minority elections whose name is on the register.) Orbán Kolompár the President of the National Roma Minority Self-Government (OCÖ) stressed that the existence of minority self-governments is especially important for the Roma community, lacking these the Roma would have no forum to stand up for their interests.

Proceedings have been initiated in the capital and in ten counties so far on account of the abuses committed related to the compensation of the Roma. The Chief Prosecutor stated that they have initiated inspections in 13 cases and in four the accusations have been made as well.

The Austrian Reconciliation Fund wanted to compensate the Roma citizens, who had been subjected to forced labor and sent to labor camps during the World War II. In the lack of genuine documents the compensations was supposed to take place on the bases of confidence – as Péter Polt the Chief Prosecutor put it. The person applying for compensation had to prove with the signature of two witnesses that the facts recounted in the complaint were true and the application had to be certified by the president of the local Roma minority self-government or by one of its representatives. The contents of the applications were not subject to any discovery process either by the Hungarian Jewish Heritage Public Fund, which cooperated in the process, nor by the Austrian Reconciliation Fund. Suspicions were raised when instead of the 2000 applications,

which was the estimated number, 10 000 applications arrived. The swindlers usually took advantage of old, poorly educated persons, not necessarily Romas, and offered their help in acquiring compensation. The Austrian Fund transmitted 8 000 Million Forints, out of which one applicant was supposed to get 1 Million Forints on average. The majority of the money went to the “organizers”, while the actual applicants got only an insignificant percentage of the sum. The illegally acquired gains are significant – recently two suspects have been arrested, who received 16-17 Million Forints. Presently investigations have been launched in two to three hundred cases, but numbers are likely to grow. There is no data revealing how many of the applicants had actually been victims. There are around 100 suspected and accused persons – among them some minority self-government representatives as well.

The town Dombóvár won 80 Million Forints from PHARE for the purpose of developing the conditions of the local Roma. The money was used to give work to 80 persons in need, who now prepare the plots where apartments for the socially handicapped will be built. A consortium has been recently formed in Dombóvár to carry out the project called “Road to New Opportunities”, which won the PHARE competition titled “Struggle against segregation from the world of labor”. The consortium consists of the local self-government, the local minority self-government, the Family Service of the Welfare Services Fund and the Social Services Kht. (Ltd.) The President of the Roma Minority Self-Government, who at the same time is the executive of the Project stated that from the 80 Million Forints 80 local persons would be employed for 8 months and 25 persons for another 8 months and get the official minimum wages. Building sites will be prepared on the bushy area near the market place, for apartments. With the help of professionals they will build roads and pavements and will supply the new plots with public utilities. Then the foundation for 7 buildings will be laid, which would be ready by next year. A tender for construction companies will be announced for the building of the houses, but unskilled work will be carried out by the laborers paid from the PHARE money. Simultaneously another 17 plots will be prepared for the building of another set of houses. The plots would be given to socially disadvantaged families. The plots provided with public utilities together with the foundation of the house will be given for a nominal price – for 1 Forint – to those who undertake to build.

The National Roma Minority Self-Government (OCÖ) does not perform the tasks it undertook therefore we call for the dissolution of this organizations announced István Makai – the President of the Roma Civil Association (RPT) at a press conference. “The OCÖ has duties to carry out, and according to the law if these duties are not fulfilled, if the will of the voters is not realized, the operation of the organization becomes unconstitutional” – said István Makai. In addition he said: “we will question the 4500 electors in letter whether they agree or disagree with the proposed dissolution of the OCÖ.” If the majority of the electors agree with the proposal, we shall submit it to Parliament and the Government via the Minister of Interior Affairs. According to Makai OCÖ and its leaders did not fulfill their tasks in 2002. “OCÖ operates on an all or nothing bases, it wants everything and does nothing” -he stated.

December

Discrimination against the Roma is widespread all across Europe and it is not only the problem of the 10 members, which accessed the Union in May – states the report of a European center dealing with the phenomena of racism and xenophobia. The report observes that for many people the accession of the Eastern and Central-Eastern European countries served as a trigger to think about the problem of the Roma, the Sinti, the Gypsy or the “travelers”. This, despite the fact that in many of the original 15 members discrimination against the Roma occurred, only these cases have not won the attention of the public yet. The report published in Vienna points out that the 8 Million Roma living in Europe face discrimination mostly regarding getting work and accommodation and in education. Most of them live in poverty and can hardly get education, work, accommodation and public services and many of them live on the periphery of society. The surveys show that they are the ones whom the majority society would least accept as their neighbors. The report draws the attention to countries where Roma children are taught in special schools or special classes (for example: Austria, Belgium, Germany) or where they are taught in a normal school but in a separate class (for example Denmark). The center does not offer any solution to the problem but it concludes that European countries now tend to accept the idea that it is better to mix people with different cultural backgrounds in a single class than to separate them.

An independent motion has been submitted to Parliament by dr. János Horváth – the MP of FIDESZ. The Honorary Professor of the University of Economics, Budapest, proposes to Parliament to request the Government to have a series of stamps made by the Hungarian Mail Rt., on which the faces of Roma persons would be printed, who made significant contributions to Hungarian culture. In his proposal written on the 21st of November the MP names Nagyidai Stojka Ferenc poet and the author of a root dictionary, Dankó Pista song-writer, Rácz Aladár musician, and two band-leaders: Czinka Panna and Bihari János, who would be worthy to have their portraits on stamps, furthermore he also recommends to have a stamp made of a historical painting depicting a Gipsy voivode or a group of Gypsies. The initiation aims at keeping alive cultural memories and also depicting the cultural heritage, but it could also serve as an example to other European countries on the road to the acknowledgment of the civil and human rights of the Roma. One of the committees of Parliament will discuss the proposal in the near future.

In the last couple of years almost 20 Million Forints have been fraudulently acquired by a man from Szeged from the Public Fund for the Hungarian Roma. The man also intended to put his hands on another 30 millions. The branch in Csongrád County of the National Police Investigation Office discovered that the man cooperated with students and other agents to submit applications from the Capital and from an other 11 counties.

When applications for scholarships are submitted to the public Fund a recommendation is required from a Roma organization. The man acquired recommendations from the National Roma Minority Self-Government. (OCÖ) György Lakatos the employee of OCÖ responsible for applications recounted that the man had visited him, introduced himself as the President of the Student Association of the University of Szeged and had asked for recommendations for about 300 applications. “The recommendations had already been written, I was only asked to put a stamp and my signature on them, which I did” – admitted Lakatos.

The suspicion that not only Romas have applied for grants delays payments. 30 thousand students are waiting for their money. The Public Fund now requires another application from those entitled and until the new set of applications do not arrive, no money will be paid. Furthermore the new application form orders the Roma organizations to certify that the ethnicity of the applicant is Roma with an eye to their criminal

responsibility in the case of cheating. Most self-governments refuse to write such certificates referring to the law on the protection of personal data. Their concerns are well-founded. According to the law it is prohibited to keep registers on the ethnic origin of the citizens and only the individual is entitled to decide whether he/she belongs to a certain ethnicity or not.

Ferenc Gyurcsány gave the opening speech at the second National Roma Day at the celebration held in the hall for the upper house in the Parliament building. We desire to have a country where there is no place for anti-semitism, racism and prejudice neither in their open nor in their covert forms. Our society cannot be indifferent to the problems of the Roma as they are our brothers and sisters- stated the PM. Orbán Kolompár the President of the National Roma Self Government opined that in the last 15 years the programs for the employment of the Roma have not achieved their goal. The case of the Roma is like the case of a patient before heart attack – stated Kolompár, it needs urgent and quick measures. It is also not indifferent whether a professional doctor or a non-skilled nurse handles the patient. The Roma have become a determinant factor in interior politics, but parties should bear in mind that the Roma need to eat and not only vote – said Kolompár.

The Hungarian capital shall be the regional centre of the educational program of the International Roma Decade – an initiation started by eight countries – announced the Ministry of Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunity. The Ministry called it a diplomatic success that out of the eight countries Hungary won the opportunity to establish the first regional centre under the Program. The centre will be able to distribute 8 thousand millions Forints among the applicants for the various Roma educational projects. Outside Hungary Bulgaria, the Check Republic, Slovakia, Macedonia, Romania, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro participate in the program, which is to promote the social integration of the Roma between 2005 and 2015.

Viktor Orbán, president of FIDESZ-MPSZ was the chairman of the committee for the integration of the Roma within the European People's Party, which held its first meeting on Tuesday in Bruxelles. The assembly of the committee was proposed by Orbán him-

self, based on the observation that with the accession of the new members the Roma have become the biggest minority of the European Union, therefore their issue needs to be addressed at the level of the Union as well. The committee is led by Viktor Orbán, while the task of coordination was assigned to Lívía Járóka, who until the recent past was the only Roma member of the EP. Orbán and Járóka at their common press conference both emphasized that the work is to be carried out in a year and its goal is to prepare plans, which outline more efficient ways to employ the present funding accessible within the framework of the EU to ameliorate the conditions of the Roma. Orbán stressed that the Roma were not only the biggest minority within the EU, but also the poorest and the most quickly increasing group as well (their estimated number, since the accession is 7-9 million persons, which is bigger than the population of Sweden.) Their integration is not simply the task of the various member states but a European issue as well.

(Ernő Kállai)