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***Roma and other ethnic communities vulnerable to racial prejudices and discrimination in Croatia.***

**General remarks about Croatia**

According to the official data in Croatia are living 4,422,248 people (on July 2003). Also, the official data are saying that 89.6% of the populations are ethnic Croats and other 10.4% are belonging to the ethnic minorities, based on self-identification (Serb 4.5%; Bosniak 0.5 %, Hungarian 0.4, Slovene 0.3 %, Czech 0.2%, Roma 0.2%, Albanian 0.1%, Montenegrin 0.1%, others 4.1%- from the registration of 2001)<sup>1</sup>.

Republic of Croatia (Republika Hrvatska) is orientated on presidential/parliamentary democracy. The capital is Zagreb and the state has 20 counties (zupanije).

The Government (Council of ministers- Savet ministara) is named by the prime minister and approved by the House of Representatives in the Assembly (Sabor).

The main law bringing body is unicameral Assembly or Sabor (100-160 seats; members elected by the popular vote to serve four- years terms);

The main bodies in judicial branch are Supreme Court and Constitutional Court. The judges for the both courts appointed for eight-year terms by the Judicial Council of the Republic, which is elected by the House of Representatives ( Sabor).

The Constitution is the basic law on which are established the bases of the state. The Constitution guarantees to every citizen over 18 the right to vote and to be elected.

By adopting the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities in December 2002, “the Republic of Croatia completed the legal sources on the basis of which

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<sup>1</sup> ODIHR- EOM to Croatia, Parliamentary election November 2003, Briefing book for long-term observers, Political background, page 2.

members of national minorities can exercise their rights”<sup>2</sup>. On relation with a electoral participation of minorities, on article 19 of this Constitutional Act is staying the following:

*The Republic of Croatia shall guarantee members of national minorities the right to representation in the Croatian Parliament.*

*(2) Members of national minorities shall elect a minimum of five and a maximum of eight of their representatives in special electoral units, in compliance with the law regulating the election of representatives into the Croatian Parliament, whereby the acquired rights of national minorities may not be decreased.*

*(3) Members of national minorities who participate in the total population of the Republic of Croatia with more than 1.5% shall be guaranteed a minimum of one and a maximum of three representative seats for the members of that national minority, in compliance with the law regulating the election of representatives into the Croatian Parliament.*

*(4) Members of national minorities who participate in the total population of the Republic of Croatia with less than 1.5% shall have the right to elect a minimum of four representatives, members of national minorities, in compliance with the law regulating the election of representatives into the Croatian Parliament.*

In April 2003 the Croatian Parliament enacted amendments to the former parliamentary election law that create a new Law on Election of Representatives to the Croatian Parliament (the “Law” or “Parliamentary Election Law”).

The Parliamentary Election Law, 2003 retains a system of special representation for the minority voters. Review of the system established under the 1999 law was recommended by OSCE/ODIHR. While some of the issues raised by the ODIHR have been addressed, underlying issues about the minority voting system and its implementation remain. In addition, some new issues appear to have created through the

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<sup>2</sup> A collection of legislation of the Republic of Croatia, Narodne Novine, Zagreb, 2003, V.

2003 Amendments. The remaining issues include: Number and distribution of minority mandates; choice of ballot for minority voters; and issues of implementation through the voting system.

The new Law (created through the 2003 Amendments) creates eight (8) special mandates, distributed to the following groups or combinations of groups: Serbs (3); Hungarians (1); Italians (1); Czech and Slovaks together (1); Austrians, Bulgarians, Germans, Poles, Roma, Romanians, Ruthenians, Russians, Turks, Ukrainians, Vlachs and Jews together (1); Albanians, Bosnians, Montenegrins, Macedonians and Slovenians together (1).

For the first three groups, a deputy representative is elected together with the representative; for the latter three grouping, the candidates with the second-largest number of votes becomes the deputy. The last two groupings of smaller minorities seem arbitrary and could even result in tension among the affected ethnic groups. Such tensions could be exacerbated by any transfer of a mandate to the deputy representative of a grouping, if the deputy were of different national background than the original officeholder.

The possibility of minorities holding dual vote, one for the national minority list and the other for the relevant constituency of the Sabor, remains legally contested. The current Election Law provides that minority voters may choose either to vote for one list or the other. A recent Constitutional Court ruling supporting the provisions of the Election Law, and thereby excluding the possibility of a dual vote, has drawn expression of concern from minority non-governmental organizations. However, a further process by which the “Sabor” provides an “authentic interpretation” of the Law may yet finalize the issue prior to the election.

With a Constitutional Act on Rights of National Minorities, are determinate and provisions on relation with participation of national minorities in a bodies of local self-government and representative bodies of units of regional self- government. With these provisions according to the percent of minority participation in a total number of populations in unit of local self- government and unit of regional self-government, is provided a participation of minorities in representative and executive bodies. These

provision or participation of national minorities in local and regional self-government were verified with the Act on Amendments to the Act on Election on Members of representatives bodies of the Units of Local and Regional Self-Government, adopted on March 2003.

In a Constitutional Act on National Minorities, a special chapter is devoted to the issue of Councils and representatives of National minorities in the units of self-government. With the aim of promotion, preservation and protection of status of national minorities in the society, the members of national minorities are electing their representatives, for participation in public life and administration of the local affairs through Councils and representatives of national minorities in the unit of self-government.

The Council of National Minority shall be a non-profit legal person. It shall acquire the capacity of a legal person by the entry into the Register of Councils of National Minorities, which is kept by the Ministry competent for general administration affairs. The Council of National Minority shall be responsible for its commitments with its entire assets. The title of the Council of National Minority shall be in the Croatian language and Latin script, as well as in the language and script used by the national minority that founded the Council. The title of the Council of National Minority shall contain the sign of the national minority and the sign of the area for which it was elected. The Minister competent for general administrative affairs shall stipulate the content of the Register of Councils of National Minorities and the manner of its keeping by a Rule Book, as well as the form of requests for entry into the Register of Councils of National Minorities.

The Council of National Minority shall pass the working program, financial plan and annual financial statement, as well as the statute that regulates the issues of significance for the work of the Council. The President of the Council of National Minority shall represent and act on behalf of the Council of National Minority, convene the sessions of the Council and have the rights and obligations set forth by the Statute of the Council. The Council of National Minority shall pass the Statute, working program, financial plan and the annual financial statement by the majority of votes of all members. The statute,

financial plan and the annual financial statement of the Council of National Minority shall be published in the official gazette of the local or regional self-government unit for the area of which the Council was established.

Self-government units shall provide the funds for the work of The Council of National Minority, including the funds for the performance of administration tasks for their needs, and they may also provide the funds for the conduct of specific activities set forth in the working program of the Council of National Minority. The funds for the exercise of specific programs of the Council of National Minority may also be provided from the state budget of the Republic of Croatia.

The Council of National Minority in a self-government unit shall have the right to:

- Propose to the bodies of a self-government unit the measures for the improvement of the position of a national minority in the state or in an area thereof, including the submission of proposals of general acts which regulate the issues of significance for a national minority to the bodies which adopt them;
- Propose candidates for duties in state administrative bodies and bodies of self-government units;
- Be informed about each issue which the working bodies of the representative body of a self-government unit will discuss, and which pertains to the position of a national minority;
- Provide opinions and proposals with regard to the programs of radio and television stations at the local and regional level intended for national minorities or programs that deal with minority issues.

The authorities of a self-government unit shall be obliged, in the preparation of proposals of general acts, to request from the Council of National Minority established for its area an opinion and proposals with regard to the provisions which regulate the rights and freedoms of national minorities.

The candidates for the members of the Council of National Minority, that is, the candidates for minority representatives, may be proposed by the associations of national minorities or by at least 20 members of a national minority from the area of a municipality, that is, 30 members from the area of a town and 50 members from the area

of a county. The members of the Council of National Minority and minority representatives shall be elected directly, by secret ballot, for a four-year term, and the provisions of the Law, which regulate the election of the members of representative bodies of local self-government units, shall be appropriately applied to the election procedure and other issues related to their election.

Another important chapter of the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities in Republic of Croatia is for the “National Minorities Committee”. This Committee is being established in order for national minorities to participate in the public life of the Republic of Croatia and especially to discuss, propose, regulate and resolve issues related to the exercise and protection of rights and freedoms of national minorities. With that goal, the Committee shall co-operate with the competent state bodies and bodies of self-government units, councils of national minorities or minority representatives, associations of national minorities and legal persons performing the activities, through which minority rights and freedoms are exercised.

The National Minorities Committee have the right to:

- Propose to the bodies of state authorities to discuss certain issues of significance for a national minority, particularly the implementation of this Constitutional Law and special laws regulating minority rights and freedoms;
- Propose to the bodies of state authorities measures to improve the position of a national minority in the state or in an area thereof;
- Provide opinions and proposals about the programs of public radio stations and public television intended for national minorities and about the manner in which minority issues are being treated in the programs of public radio stations and public television and other media;
- Propose the undertaking of economic, social and other measures in the areas that are traditionally or in a significant number inhabited by members of national minorities in order to preserve their existence in those areas.
- Request and acquire from the bodies of state authorities and bodies of local and regional self-government the data and reports required for discussing the issues from its scope of activities;

- Invite and request the presence of representatives of bodies of state authorities and bodies of local and regional self-governments, which competence includes the issues from the scope of activities of the Council established by this Constitutional Law and the Statute of the Council.

The National Minorities Committee shall co-operate in the issues of interest for national minorities in the Republic of Croatia with the competent bodies of international organizations and institutions that deal with the issues of national minorities as well as with the competent bodies of parent countries of members of national minorities in the Republic of Croatia.

The National Minorities Committee shall allocate the funds provided from the state budget for the needs of national minorities. The beneficiaries of the funds shall submit annual reports to the Committee on the expenditure of the funds that were allocated to them from the state budget, of which the Committee shall inform the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the Croatian Parliament.

#### General remarks about the Roma and other ethnic communities vulnerable to racial prejudices and discrimination in Croatia

The Roma are a national minority, which, according to the 2001 census makes up 0.21% of the population in Croatia that is there are 9,463 of them. However, according to estimates, a significantly larger number of Roma live in the Republic of Croatia, between 30,000 and 40,000. The difference between the determined and the estimated number of the Roma is to the largest degree the consequence of the decision by the Roma themselves to declare themselves during the census as members of some other nationality, not as Roma, but also because of unresolved issues related to their status<sup>3</sup>. For the parliamentary election 2003, as Roma in a minority-voting list were declared more than 10.000 citizens<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> The Government of R. of Croatia, The national program for the Roma, Zagreb, 2003, 3.

<sup>4</sup> As told to us Mr. Nazif Memedov, independent candidate for MP in a 2003 parliamentary elections. But the final results of elections say that for the Roma candidates and the candidates that were on coalition with some Roma organization voted total of 719 persons.

However, it is difficult to establish the exact number of Roma who are living in the Republic of Croatia today and their territorial distribution for several reasons, and therefore the results of the official census are only an indication of the real situation. The number of Roma in the Republic of Croatia, according to the censuses from 1948 to 2001 is shown in Table 1.

**TABLE 1: THE NUMBER OF ROMA ACCORDING TO THE CENSUSES FROM 1948 TO 2001**

<b>YEAR OF THE CENSUS</b>	1948.	1953.	1961.	1971.	1981.	1991.	2001.
<b>NUMBER OF THE ROMA</b>	<b>405</b>	<b>1 261</b>	<b>313</b>	<b>1. 257</b>	<b>3. 858</b>	<b>6. 695</b>	<b>9. 463</b>

According to the last, 2001 census, 9,463 Roma were registered in Croatia. However, as has already been mentioned, it is estimated that between 30,000 and 40,000 Roma live in the Republic of Croatia. According to the results of the research "The Structure of the Romany Families and the Perception of the Content of Parenthood in Them" conducted by the State Institute for the Protection of Family, Motherhood and the Youth in 2002, 51% of the Roma in Croatia are indigenous, 17% have moved within Croatia, while others are the newcomers. The immigration by the Roma from other parts of the former Yugoslavia, especially from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Kosovo has been very intensive during the last ten years.

Table 2 gives a comparative presentation of the number of Roma by counties, covered by the 1991 and 2001 censuses mentioned. The data show the almost 50% increase in the total number of Roma in Croatia and a significant increase of the number

of Roma in particular counties in 2001 compared with 1991, while the number of Roma has decreased in some counties (mostly in those affected by the war).

TABLE 2: THE NUMBER OF ROMA BY COUNTIES, ACCORDING TO THE 1991 AND 2001 CENSUSES

The Data from the National Bureau of Statistics

<b>No.</b>	<b><u>C O U N T Y</u></b>	<b>1991.</b>	<b>2001.</b>
1.	ZAGREB COUNTY	128	231
2.	KRAPINA-ZAGORJE COUNTY	2	4
3.	SISAK-MOSLAVINA COUNTY	315	708
4.	KARLOVAC COUNTY	16	7
5.	VARAŽDIN COUNTY	333	448
6.	KOPRIVNICA-KRIŽEVCI COUNTY	204	125
7.	BJELOVAR-BILOGORA COUNTY	144	140
8.	PRIMORJE AND GORSKI KOTAR COUNTY	504	589
9.	LIKA-SENJ COUNTY	49	10
10.	VIROVITICA-PODRAVINA COUNTY	86	4
11.	POŽEGA-SLAVONIA COUNTY	0	7
12.	SLAVNOSKI BROD-POSAVINA COUNTY	223	586
13.	ZADAR COUNTY	7	4
14.	OSJEK-BARANYA COUNTY	782	977
15.	ŠIBENIK-KNIN COUNTY	42	8

16.	VUKOVAR-SRIJEM COUNTY	265	167
17.	SPLIT-DALMATIA COUNTY	39	11
18.	DUBROVNIK AND NERETVA COUNTY	5	4
19.	ISTRIA COUNTY	637	600
20.	MEĐIMURJE COUNTY	1.920	2.887
21.	THE CITY OF ZAGREB	994	1.946
<b>22.</b>	<b>TOTAL- CROATIA</b>	<b>6.695</b>	<b>9.463</b>

Table 3 shows municipalities and towns by counties, that is a city borough for the City of Zagreb, in which more than 100 Roma live according to the data from the 2001 census mentioned.

**TABLE 3 : Municipalities, towns by counties and the city borough of the City of Zagreb in which more than one hundred Roma live.**

<b>No.</b>	<b>County</b>	<b>Municipality/Town</b>	<b>Number of Roma</b>
1.	Zagreb County	Velika Gorica	130
2.	Sisak-Moslavina County	Novska	120
		Sisak	436
3.	Varaždin County	Petrijanec	366
4.	Primorje-Gorski kotar County	Rijeka	489
5.	Slavnoski Brod-Posavina County	Slavonski Brod	582
6.	Osijek-Baranya County	Beli Manastir	153
		Belišće	160
		Darda	210
		Osijek	124

7.	Vukovar-Srijem County	Vinkovci	114
8.	Istria County	Pula	301
9.		Vodnjan	195
10.	Međimurje County	Čakovec	1.105
		Kotoriba	156
		Mala Subotica	430
		Nedelišće	541
		Podturen	173
		Selnica	162
		Orehovica	237
11.	The City of Zagreb	Trnje	163
		Pešćenica-Žitnjak	751
		Gornja Dubrava	200
		Donja Dubrava	126
		Sesvete	343
<b>12.</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>8.347</b>

According to the historians the Roma were mentioned on the territory of Croatia for the first time in Dubrovnik in 1362 in a trading document, even that some of scholars are saying that the mentioned persons Vlaho and Vitani, which declared themselves in a documents as “Egyptians” weren’t Roma. Ten or so years later (1373) the Roma are also mentioned in Zagreb, where they were tradesmen, tailors and butchers. In Dubrovnik the Roma (*Jeđupi*) lived in Gruž and already at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> and in the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries they had formed national associations dealing with traditional crafts and music. In the Middle Ages the Roma population was tied to the towns. In 1497 there was a priest called Dominik Ciganin working in Pula, and in 1500 the Roma were mentioned in the suburbs of Šibenik. There is very little information on the actual number and position of the Roma in Croatia during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Gypsy “šipuški” musicians were mentioned in Croatia in 1671. In Međimurje Roma were mentioned in 1688 when in Legrad (which at that time came under the administration of Međimurje) the child of the “Gypsy” Duke

Ivan was christened, and in the 18<sup>th</sup> century the feudal rulers of Međimurje permitted the immigration of the Roma *Koritars*.

Large Roma groups came to Croatia during the 19<sup>th</sup> century from Romania. They belonged to the Roma *Koritar* group and settled in the area of Međimurje and Podravina. They spoke *ljimba d'bjas*, a Romanian dialect (vlax dialect) and with the Kalderaši and Lovars who were already present formed the heart of today's Roma population in Croatia<sup>5</sup>.

Until 1918 this territory was in the frame of Austro-Hungarian Empire. After that period Croatia was a part of Yugoslavia. At the time of Second World War, the fascistic movement "Ustasi" led by Ante Pavelic created the marionette state in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. For the "Ustas" the Roma, Jews and orthodox Christians were "the evil". The Roma with Islam religion were protected by the Muslim governments from Middle East, which were in good conditions with Germany. Until 1943 a great number of Croatian Roma were put in the concentration camps: Jasenovac, Stara Gradiska, Strug and Tenie. In the period from 1941-1945, around 26 000 of Roma were killed.

In a time of Tito's Yugoslavia a large part of people from so-called "passive areas in a country" (Kosovo, Macedonia, Bosnia) emigrated in Croatia, among them and a large number of Roma and related groups.

The Croatia is independent country from 1991. At the time of the war from 1991-1995, a big number of Roma didn't succeed to escape from Baranja. The Serbs accused the Roma with catholic religion for the collaboration with Croats. In 1993 the Croats, which were returned from the front, took the Roma from the quart Dubac in Zagreb, and with terror were migrated in the other places in the state. The first Roma Society in Croatia is established in 1991, with seat in Virovitica. In 1994 the newspaper "the Voice of Roma" started with publishing.

The Roma associations are in Rieka, Zagreb (Croatian Roma Union, and a few gender NGOs), than in Jagodnjak, Pula, Bjelovar and other cities. On 29-30 July 2001, the national Conference of Croatian Roma NGOs on the National Strategy for Roma was

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<sup>5</sup> The Government of R. of Croatia, The national program for the Roma, Zagreb, 2003, 7.

held. The purpose of this meeting was to focus the various aspects of the Roma national strategy that should be approved by the Croatian Government. This Roma national strategy will contain the special policy of the Government to the Roma in fields of citizenships, employment, health, social welfare, education and housing.

In October 2003, a National Program for Roma in Croatia, was adopted and started with implementation by the Government of R. of Croatia.

Bearing in mind the different ways and times of emigration of Roma in Croatia, different background, traditional cultures and different believing (religious), they *not homogenous*.

The question of identity between the Roma and other ethnic communities  
vulnerable to racial prejudices and discrimination in Croatia

Heterogeneity among the different Roma groups in Croatia has its big influence and consequences in an antagonism between them. About the permanent fights between the different Roma groups and NGOs we will speak later. Because the question of identity is one of the most delicate question in Balkans, especially among the Roma and so called “related groups”, in this analyses I will give theoretical aspect of ethnic identity.

To identify is mean to recognize, to adopt, to determinate. A term identity at first is formulated in a psycho- analyze theory and is understudied as a widest base for some individual feelings of belonging.

According to the theory of Abraham Maslow for a “hierarchy of needs”, needs in “Identity” group are putted after the needs from a group “Security”. So, according to Maslow is existing a following hierarchy of needs started from a lowest to highest level: 1. **Security** (survivor, safety, food, home/accommodation, employment). 2. **Identity** (recognition, respect, adopting, free of demand, affirmation of culture and language); 3. **Community** (belonging, relations, inter-action, equality, recognition of differences, common life and ownership); 4. **Vitality** (profession that you fulfill, realization of all potential, high education, strengthens).

Collective identities are formed when the members of a group will accept the common collective norms and they are asking for a historical and cultural frames of references that determinate their position in a society. Identities have to go through two important processes of socialization of identities: a) Adaptation of social- cultural norms (identification), and b) Separation and critical evaluation of given standards (constitution of identity).

In practice are existing many form of collective identities: Cultural, religious, ideological/ political, regional, ethnical, professional, generation identity etc.

For a reason to exist and to be oriented, a human being has to have some theoretical-pragmatic knowledge for the surrounding and for her/himself. So, she/he has to sign and to named objects and phenomena, to valuated them from a position of human knowledge and logic. A sign (symbol) is a feel pointed and attracted spiritual creation, with a function to show and to point an object or phenomena in a human world, which is presented in material form- system of signs. Collective symbols have an important place on keeping and developing of collective identities.

E. Erickson gives a formulation for an ethnic identity in 1968, which tried to determinate mechanisms through an individual is identifying with a group, and he concluded that identity is a characteristic that is rooted in personality of an individual. But, a process of ethnical identification is going through the socialization.

“Ethnos” as a term is differently defined and used as a concept. The older definitions said that ethnos is a static cultural category with objective parameters of belonging- customs, language, cloths, territory, religion. In newest definitions of a term “ethnos” is related with a term “ethnic identity”, and a point is putted on manifestation of ethnicity through inter-groups contacts. In generally, with entering of term ethnical identity is putted a subjective dimension in an “ethnos”. But, researching of an ethnic identity has to include subjective and objective parameters of “ethnicity”.

A term ethnical distance is devoted to the subjective feeling of a closeness (proximity) that is building one person or group of people opposite to other person or group. Ethnical distance, as researching of a level of social closeness (or distances) is talking for psychological barriers that makes the social inter-action to be easy or to be

hard. The barriers or distance may be building on a base of any criteria that for a group is important in one situation.

Ethnic borders are artificial barriers in communication between the groups and may be created in different fields of communication. Ethnic borders are established and kept parallel to the contacts. If one group is keeping his identity parallel or between the contacts, that group must have good definite criteria for signalization of belonging. The members of a group have to be high stereotyped as a condition to communicate with other groups. Cultural characteristics that are making self-determination or the others are determinate them, have to be stable as a condition for a differences to be kept through inter-action and inter-touches.

One of important characteristics of ethnic identity are its dynamic and contextually. A group is demanding its identity as an answer of one social situation. It is keeping through the signs and symbols, to which they are giving their explanation and importance.

In a base, ethnic group is a subjective believing in a common origin. The sources of ethnicity shouldn't be search in a possessing of this and that characteristics, but in a producing, keeping and deepening of differences. According to M. Weber **an ethnical identity is building on a base of differences**. An attraction among the people, that accounting themselves as a members of a same kind, can't be separated from the hostility to the people that are accounting as a foreigners. A conciseness for a belonging can't be realized through isolation, but with inter-action of differences, that the people demand to establish their ethnic borders.

F. Barth point to the ethnic borders as the aspect of ethnicity that representing the essence of a problem. The "object" that is transporting through the time, is not a cultural arsenal, but a border of one group. The inside contains may be change, but the border are eternal. Ethnic border are implicating inter-ethnic relations: ethnic identity is formed and keeps through the touching with other groups.

According to B. Anderson, a nation, but and any other group, especially ethnic group, is imagined (but not invented) community. Imagined is because one member of a big group, never will know all the members of a group, but they exist in her/his conciseness and she/he is taking one kind of relation to them. This kind of relation is

based on a feeling for a strong horizontal friendship. Communities are making the differences according to how they are “imagined”.

Existing of “**others**” is a non-neglected element of ethnical identification: without the “others” is not possible to feel and to understand “**we**”. A history is not a problem of a past, but an answer of the requests of a present times; an anthropologist is not caring what is really happened, he is not like a historian to make a difference between the “real and “invented” traditions, but he want to discover on which way one historical contain is used in a actual process of construction of identity.

*Identity and identification, especially an ethnic identity, before the all, are processes and relations, not a state (condition). A process of identification, very often is beginning from inside, and is going to outside, is developing as a self-conciseness that is manifested in a touch with the “others”, and is requesting a recognition of the group (ethnic) out-siding.*

Bearing in mind all these theoretical aspects of the identity, we will try to explain the diversity and differences among the Roma and related groups in Balkans and Croatia.

Diversity among the Roma with different place of origin and different religious in Croatia, has a great influence in an efforts to establish a unity among them. So-called “aborigine Roma” are not on good relation with so-called “emigrant Roma” from Macedonia, Kosovo and Bosnia that emigrated in Croatia in time of Yugoslavian state. Roma with catholic religion are not on good relation with Muslim Roma. This cultural, religious and origin diversity had a judgment role in a, for Roma, non-success parliamentary election in 2003, because any Roma candidate didn’t collect enough votes to be elected as MP, but from other side Mr. Nikola Mak from the German community, was elected with only 265 votes.

A big community in Croatia is so-called **Banyash** community. This community is placed in North Croatia, mainly in the region of Megjmurje and Slavonia. The Banyash in Croatia, are a part of a bigger Banyash (Rudara) community that is living in Balkan Peninsula. Also they are known as: Bunyash, Boyash, Bajaš, Lingurara, Gurbetsi (in

Greece), Moeso-Romanians. Etymological note: Beášh < Banyáš, a translation of Rudar (Latin *balnea* > *bañ*~ "ore" = slave *rud*~ "ore" + suffix indicating an occupation *-ar* = *-aš*). They are Romanian-speaking people (their dialect originates probably from eastern Banat and southern Serbia) who are often lumped together with Roms, being regarded as "Gypsies" by the uneducated of central Europe, although they are unconnected with them. Neither the Beášh nor the Roma accept this confusion of identity. The Beášh are most numerous in Romania (almost half a million are identifiable there although the majority have been absorbed into the local population), then in Hungary (where they number around 20,000) and a further few thousand are scattered throughout Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, Slovakia, Bulgaria (Varna area) and even Greece. A substantial group emigrated to Colombia, settling near Cali. The Beášh have never had an itinerant lifestyle. It is in Serbia that ancient practices (trances, demonology and magic) associated with this community are still most in evidence, while in southern Romania they celebrate a type of potlatch [gift-giving festival], known as *Gurban*, on 23 April. Their origin is still unknown but the most likely theory seems to be that of descent from an ancient dark-skinned tribe native to Moesia Superior (now southern Serbia) which expanded into neighbouring, maybe countries upon the invasion of Slavic tribes and/or later. They are overtly ostracised and in Romania are among the most under-developed sections of the population, along with certain Moldovan and Rromani groups. Their situation in other countries gives equal cause for concern.

In Hungary they have been the object of ethno-political manipulation designed to justify various types of ideology, projects and schemes directed towards either the Roma or Romania. It is also in Hungary, however, that they seem to have made most progress in seeking political recognition. There are several folklore books about them but they have neither literature nor art of their own, apart from the work of a few naïve painters in Hungary. That said, a remarkable Beášh language translation of Sándor Petőfi's Hungarian epic "János the Valiant" was published in Pécs in 2001.

The Banyash in Croatia are accepting the Roma identity, and they want to be recognized as a particular language group of Roma in Croatia, by the state. The reason why the Croatian Banyash are accepting the Roma identity, oppositely from the other Banyash in Hungaria, Romania, Serbia and Bugaria, is another issue for deep scientific

research of the identity! But, from other side, our opinion is Banyash in Croatia, don't want deeply to develop the cooperation and relation with other Roma groups in Croatia, except is case of necessary cooperation for getting of a finances by the state and the various foundations. They are tolerant people and open for any kind of cooperation. In 2002 among the Banyash appeared a case of racial Segregation in a Croatian Primary Schools. Around 60 parents of Banyash pupils in Megjumurje signed a petition and filed an action with Croatian court challenging their segregation into separate Roma-only classes in what are otherwise "regular" primary schools. This case arrived in European Court of Human Rights, too. Among the Banyash in Croatia, existing a lot of different NGOs, and one political party ("Stranka Roma"). The Banyash in Croatia are developing the cooperation with Banyash from other states (Hungary, Romania etc.) and is not excluded a possibility under the influence of that cooperation very soon to start to be identifying as a particular non-Roma community.

Another big community, of so-called "Roma related groups" is the Ashkalies. Among this group, which is living in area of Rijeka, Pula, and a small number in Zagreb, a process of identifying as a particular non-Roma community already started. A process that started in Kosovo, has its consequences now in this part of Croatia. Ashaklies in Croatia emigrated during the time of Tito's Yugoslavia, from Kosovo. The mostly of them until now were declared or accounted by the majority population as Roma. In November 2004 in Rijeka was held a constitutional assembly of the Organization of Ashkalies. But, also there is a number of people that want to be declared as Egyptians. Mr. Dzemail Mutishi in a newspaper "Profil" an additional of "Novi list" from Rijeka issued on 19 April 2003 said that they are feeling themselves as "Egyptians". Also, on our visit to him in Rijeka he said that the preparation for establishing of an Organization of Egyptians in Croatia is on a way. Mr. Dzemail Mutishi is one of a few people that are keeping the relations with Roma NGOs, yet. Other people especially from the new Ashaklie organization, don't want to have any relation or contacts with Roma NGOs in Croatia and Rijeka. Our efforts to establish any contacts between the leaders of Roma NGOs and the Ashkalies ones hadn't a success. Ashkalies said that they are not Roma, their former cooperation with Roma has wrong use, was usurp and manipulated by the Roma and now they will continue as particular community.

Ashkali are the comparatively “newest” minority, having entered the international stage after the Kosovo crisis. The existence of Ashkali was well known to the small circle of scholars in Gypsy studies. The scholars usually determine them as Albanian speaking Gypsies/Roms. The Ashkalie by themselves according to the local conditions gravitated to the Albanians or to the Roms, declaring most often Albanian or Romani identity, but always preserve their own community distinction (from the Roms and from the Egyptians too). The Ashkali in Kosovo have never been counted and/or estimated, they have never been included in censuses. Many of them (also in unknown numbers) moved from Kosovo to the other parts of ex-Yugoslavia and to Western Europe.

The presence of international forces and organisations in Kosovo and their attempt to ensure the representation of all minorities in the Kosovo Transitional Council speeds the process of manifestation of own, separate, non-Romani and Non Egyptian and non-Albanian identity of the Ashkali. The Ashkali insisted to receive also place in the governing bodies. Over a relatively short period of time the Ashkali succeeded to establish their own organizations, such as the political party (Democratic Party of Albanian Ashkali in Kosovo with President Sabit Rahmani) and the non-governmental organisation “Democratic Hope”, headed by Agim Hyseni. In Vojvodina in Novi Sad is established a NGO “Matica Ashkalija”, led by Abedin Toplica. The Ashkalies in Rijeka are branch organization of the last mentioned NGO.

The Ashkalie quickly created their own explanation of their ethno-genesis and history, to construct their identity. There are many oral versions and contra versions about the legends of this community’s arrival in Kosovo, based until now mainly on folklore and quasi scientific evidence, the basic purpose of which is for the Ashkali to distinguish themselves from Roms and Egyptians.

According to their explanation, the Ashkali come originally from Iran and arrived in the Balkans in the 4th century. Therefore, they were the second oldest people here. When they came, only the Illyrians were there and they (Ashkali) adopted the language of the Illyrians and the Illyrians adopted the religion of the Ashkali, i.e. Islam. (in 4<sup>th</sup> century a Islam religion didn’t exist, it appeared in 7<sup>th</sup> century)

According to another legend about their origins, Ashkalies are colonist from ancient Rome, who came from Italy to Albania. This is why the Ashkalis speak the

Albanian language. According to this version, the word "Hashkalija" comes from the Albanian sentence: "hajt shko n Itali" ("go back to Italy").

Another version about their origin also emerged, which had its arguments in the Bible. According to it the Ashkali originated in the town Askalon in Palestine, i.e. generally speaking, just like any other Balkan nation the Ashkali derived their origin from most ancient times and relate it to the world civilisations and religions.

Roma in Kosovo in most cases considered Ashkalis (as well as Egyptians) to be Albanian speaking Roms, who do not want to confess their origin and are looking for new identities. According to the Egyptians the Ashkalis are Egyptians, who hid their identity and the the word "Ashkali" according them comes from the charcoal called "Eshka" or "Ashka" that Ashkali blacksmiths used to build their fires. The process of making of charcoal for blacksmiths was very difficult, and only certain professional persons were able to do it - these professionals got the ethno-name "Ashka makers" or "Ashkali".

My personal opinion, as ethnologist, about the Ashkalies and their origin is that they are with Balkan's Egyptian origin, and emigrated in a Balkan from the ancient time, for which we have a lot of historical, archeological and ethnographical data. Ashkalie is one of the ethno-names for Egyptians in Kosovo (only in Kosovo Polje/Fush Kosove, but not and in a Dukagjin/Metohija). A question of identity is not always a question of ethnic origin. An identity is result of a social, political, cultural and circumstances in society. After entering of a international administration and forces in Kosovo, this part of population is feeling themselves the most comfortable to be declared as Ashkalie, particularly from Roma and Egyptians community.

However the situation in Rijeka will be developed, the Ashkalie community applied to the municipality of Rijeka, to be recognized as a particular minority, and to start the procedure for establishing Council of Ashkalie Minority in Rijeka.

### **Roma organizations and representatives in an institutional system**

The Roma are very frequently perceived by the public and experts as a marginal social group. Their marginal feature has several dimensions.

The laws and regulations of the Republic of Croatia in force, especially the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities of December 2002, enable the Roma to participate in the process of political decision-making, as members of one of the national minorities in Croatia.

The elections for national minorities councils held in May 2003 demonstrated the high awareness of the Roma of the need to participate in elections. For example, the turnout of the Roma voters in the municipalities was over 38%<sup>6</sup>, which is a higher percentage than the turnout of many other national minorities. The Council members elected are mostly men. However, further work on the inclusion of the Roma in the decision-making process at higher levels of governance is still ahead of us, as well as activities aimed at the greater participation of women in these processes.

According to the National program for the Roma, by the Government of R. of Croatia, the following measures should be taken in an issue of inclusion of a Roma in a political and social life:

1. Encouragement of the establishment of minority Roma councils at local and regional levels and ensuring representation of the Roma in the representative bodies at these levels, as well as the realization of the possibility of electing a Roma Member of the Croatian Parliament.

2. Proposal of amendments to the laws and regulations in force, with a view to enabling the participation of representatives of the Roma as external co-workers and advisors in the proceedings for the exercise of the rights of the Roma in the bodies of local and regional self-government.

3. Enabling Roma representatives, especially women and young people, to take part in decision-making processes, exercise of their rights and greater inclusion in social life.

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<sup>6</sup> The Government of R. of Croatia, The national program for the Roma, Zagreb, 2003, 13.

We are expecting the evaluation meeting about the implementation of The National Program for the Roma, that should be hold at the end of February 2005, about the results of these taken measures.

But, on our request we got the following data of the Roma representatives:

Elected Roma in representative bodies in a local-self governments are only two, and they are in a Medjumurska county (Banyash) in a municipalities of Mala Subotica - Mr. Juraj Orshush and in municipality of Pribislavec- Mr. Zhejko Balog. These **two persons** were elected on a legal way in local elections, and they participating in municipality work. But, as we understood Mr. Zhejko Balog, delivered a resignation, and now have to be elected another person.

Roma Councils of National Minority are established in following regions, cities and municipalities<sup>7</sup>:

1. Zagreb district - President of a Roma Council- Nazif Memedi
2. Sisacko-Moslovačka županija (county, region)- President of a Roma Council - Stanoje Nikolic
  - a) City of Novska- President of a Roma Council - Ibrahim Punoskovic
  - b) City of Sisak- President of a Roma Council - Bozho Nikolic
3. Osijecko-Baranjska županija (county, region)- President of a Roma Council - Nadica Balog
  - a) City of Belisce- President of a Roma Council- Dushko Mitrovic
  - b) City of Beli Manastir- President of a Roma Council - Dushko Kostic.

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<sup>7</sup> According to the information that we good from the Office for National Minorities of Government of R. of Croatia.

- c) Municipality of Darda- President of a Roma Council - Branko Djurdjevic
  - d) Municipality of Petlovac- President of a Roma Council - Zoran Mitrovic
4. Vukovarska- Srejska zupanija (county, region)- President of a Roma Council - Sulejman Gushani.
5. Primorsko-Goranska zupanija (county, region)- President of a Roma Council - Naser Sokoli
- a) City of Rijeka- President of a Roma Council - Suriya Mehmeti
6. Istarska zupanija (county, region)- President of a Roma Council - Alija Jonuzi
- a) City of Pula- President of a Roma Council - Mario Horvat
  - b) City of Vodnjan- President of a Roma Council - Redzep Hadza
7. Medzumurska zupanija (county, region)- President of a Roma Council - Milan Ignac
- a) City of Cakovec- President of a Roma Council - Mladen Selimovic
  - b) City of Mursko Sredishce- President of a Roma Council have to be elected.
  - c) Municipality of Mala Subotica- President of a Roma Council - Juraj Orshosh
  - d) Municipality of Nedelishce- President of a Roma Council have to be elected.
  - e) Municipality of Orehovica- President of a Roma Council - Stjepan Orshush
  - f) Municipality of Podturen- President of a Roma Council - Josip Balog

- g) Municipality of Pribislavec- President of a Roma Council - Zeljko Balog
8. Varazhdinska zupanija (county, region)- no established Roma Council
- a) Municipality of Petrijanec- President of a Roma Council - Eduard Orshosh.
9. Bjelovarska-bilogorska zhupanija (county, region)- no established Roma Council
- a) City of Bjelovar- President of a Roma Council - Slagjana Dzurdzevic
10. Brodsko-posavska zupanija (county, region)- no established Roma Council
- a) City of Slavonski Brod- President of a Roma Council - Robert Radic

According to this information of the Governmental Office for National Minorities in Croatia are established 26 Roma Councils in regional and local self-governments. But, our opinion is that the members of the Roma Councils don't know well their rights and duties, and the most of them need an education and trainings. Another big problem is an educational level and structure of the Roma National Councils. The most of the members of the Councils and the presidents of the Councils are with finished primary school education, and a small number are with finished secondary school education. During my mission in Croatia I didn't meet any Roma representative, member or president o Roma National Council with finished high education. As consequence of this situation is that only a few Roma National Councils are responsible in their work<sup>8</sup>. Only a few Roma Councils have a Program and Action Plan that is functioning. Program and Actions plans only exist to be in an archive for registration. In some of municipalities the members of the Roma Councils are not invited in a sessions of the local a or regional representatives

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<sup>8</sup> Mr. Fari Ibraimoski, a first president of a Union of Roma Association in Croatia, lives in Rijeka

bodies, even that with a Constitutional Act is determinate that the representatives of the National Councils have to be present in all sessions of the representatives bodies Mr. Elvis Kralj from Cakovec, informed us that the Roma Council made an official demand with request a president to be present in all sessions of local representatives bodies, but until now is not practiced.

Some members of Roma Councils are saying that a future of these councils is not a shine, because “they have only a advisory character and the members are working on voluntary base”<sup>9</sup>. They don’t have any influence on a work of local or regional representatives bodies, especially when is worked for a budgets of municipalities, and the projects that should be taken on infrastructure of Roma settlements, especially in a Megjmurje region.

Opposite to Megjmurje region, a municipality of Rijeka has a good cooperation with Roma National Council, as told to us Mr. Surija Memeti president of a Roma Council in Rijeka. They are always invited in sessions of representatives’ body and other organs and commissions of local and regional self-government, their projects are well accepted and some of them are very successfully implemented, especially in a field of improving of infrastructure of Roma settlements and on field of social and humanitarian aid of Roma people in Rijeka district. But, as I saw from the photo-documentation in office of Roma National Council in Rijeka, on so many projects and activities always are present only a few people, which the most of them are on family relation, and I’m afraid about the phenomena of nepotism among this but and other Roma Councils. About the closed circle in a “Council of Surija Memeti” my attention was point and by Mr. Fari Ibraimoski<sup>10</sup>, Mrs. Sandra Pavelic<sup>11</sup> and Mr. Dzemail Mutisi<sup>12</sup>.

Almost all Roma people that I meet are supposition that the local and regional self-government are making a lot of manipulation and usurpation with money that are predicted for the activities and project with local Roma communities. Bearing in mind that the most of the presidents of Roma National Councils are the persons with a low education, the most of them are not aware that are an object of manipulation. They are

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<sup>9</sup> Mr. Frans Horvat, president of the Association of Roma-Banyash in Cakovec.

<sup>10</sup> A first president of a Union of Roma Association in Croatia, from Rijeka

<sup>11</sup> Roma Woman organization in Rijeka

<sup>12</sup> Old man and activists in Roma organization for many years. His revolt for a work of Mr. Surija Memeti may to be feeling an one interview from a local newspaper.

satisfied with taking of some money from a projects financed by the local and regional self-governments, and at the same blind about the situation in their environment related with the budget for Roma people.

A Roma representative in a Committee for National Minority is Mr. Nazif Memedi. The Government of Republic of Croatia delegates him in this Committee, and his mandate started from 2004. Even that Mr. Nazif Memedi and his family on one way were my “logistic officers in a mission” I didn’t have enough time to discuss with him about his work in Committee for National Minority, because he was to much busy with delivering of humanitarian aid in packages, provided by the Government. Bearing in mind that a Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia and at the same a President of the Commission for Monitoring the Implementation of the National Program for Roma, Mrs. Jadranka Kosor, was a candidate for a President of Croatia on these elections, we may to understand why Mr. Nazif Memedi was so busy on delivering of humanitarian aid in packages to the Roma families, during the election campaign, provided by the Government.

According to the adopted National Program for Roma, on a proposal by the Office for National Minorities, the Government of the Republic of Croatia established a Commission for Monitoring the Implementation of the National Program for Roma. This Commission is composed by:

- the Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia, President of the Commission (at the moment is Mrs. Jadranka Kosor).
- one representative of the Ministry of the Interior
- one representative of the Ministry Foreign Affairs
- one representative of the Ministry Justice, Administration and Local Self-government
- one representative of the Ministry for European Integration
- one representative of the Ministry Health
- one representative of the Ministry Education and Sport,
- one representative of the Ministry Labour and Social Welfare

- one representative of the Ministry Culture
- one representative of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Urban Planning
- one representative of the State Institute for the Protection of the Family, Motherhood and Youth
- one representative of the Office for National Minorities of the Government of the Republic of Croatia
- one representative of the Office for Human Rights of the Government of the Republic of Croatia
- one representative of Međimurje County
- one representative of the City of Zagreb
- one representative of non-governmental organisations in the field of human rights
- seven representatives from Romany councils, at the local and regional levels, and of Romany associations.

The seven Roma representatives are: Memedi Ramiza, Nadica Balog, Surija Memeti, Bozho Nikolic, Elvis Kralj, Alija Mesic and Robert Radic. From these Roma representatives only Mr. Alija Mesic has some serious remarks on the implementation of National Program for Roma. His written demand is why the National Program for Roma is not published in “Narodne Novine” official newspaper of R. of Croatia, or better to say only some parts (details) are published. He is supposition that with not published of the National Program for Roma in an official newspaper of R. of Croatia the Government and the ministries are only accepting but with any obligation for complete implementation of the Program. The other remarks of Mr. Alija Mesic are that the Ministry of Science, Education and Sport is ignoring the all activities for Roma to have high educated children and experts, as well as even that to the people from the settlement “Plinarsko naselje” is promised a “roof up to their head”, until now is not solved their housing question, by they are living the tent, bunkers etc. At the end of his demand Mr. Mesic is saying: “Why and to whom this Roma National Program is serving “ when there are not results in improving the social life and living conditions of Roma nationality?”

Анд Мр. Елвис Кралј хас some ремаркс он тхе Национал Програм фор Рома. Хе ис царинг фор тхе сцхоолинг оф тхе цхилдрен. Ас хе саид њитх а Национал Програм ис предицтед то маке “литтле сцхоолс” анд ин Мејјумурје унтил ноњ ис нот анс. Хе ис ангрс анд ин то тхе Оффице фор Национал Миноритиес он тхе метходологс оф дистрибутинг тхе монес, анд хе ис садинг тхе Рома анд ассоциатион фром Загреб хаве муцх море привилегес тхат тхе Рома анд ассоциатион фром Мејјумурје анд отхер регионс њхере тхе Басасх ливинг. Бут, ас информ ус Мрс. Милена Клајнер ин Мејјумурје унтил ноњ аре легализед 12 Рома сеттлементс њитх импровинг оф инфраструктуре. А монес тхат њере гивен то тхе Цитс оф Загреб фор импровинг оф инфраструктуре њере ретурнед анд ноњ аре дистрибутед ин Долна Дубрава ин а регион оф Мејјумурје..

### **Political participation and elections among the Roma**

In Croatia among the Roma exists only one political party “Stranka Roma” with seat in Bjelovar and the president is Mr. Stevo Gjorgjevic- Kum. This party has its branch office in Zagreb with Mr. Cana Kasum as representative. But, this political party hasn't any elected representative in local or regional self-government or in a parliament. This political party I think that don't have and any influence among the Roma, because no one don't take it serious form the Roma people that I meet. I had a possibility to meet Mr. Cana Kasum in Zagreb, and according to his word the Roma people don't have enough political conciseness to be built as a serious political factor in Croatia. But this party has and some in-side misunderstandings, and now Mr. Cana Kasum want to create a new Roma party in Croatia, with seat in Zagreb and with branch offices around the Croatia. I wishing all the best in this new initiative, but first at all he needs to aware the Roma people that they really need a serious political subject in Croatia, and to make a unity among, at least, one big part of Roma in Croatia. I think that in a moment these two conditions are very hard to achieve.

So, Roma NGOs are much more powerful and with a bigger influence among the population than the mentioned political party. This is a consequence of social and

political conditions in Croatia, where Roma NGOs are working on solving of everyday problems on very pragmatically way, and a concurrency about who will win the project for financing by the Government or by the domestic and international foundations, is on a stage. For that reasons almost all NGOs activists became a professional NGO workers, and you can't find anybody who will work a hard or a big activity on voluntary way. From other side on establishing of a serious political subject, at the begging is necessary to find a large number of voluntary activists.

In this context, Roma NGOs have to start to thinking for improving of the situation of participation of Roma in a political life in Croatia. They have to start to work on developing of a conciseness for smart using of Roma votes. First, at all the Roma NGOs have to start immediately with a campaign for registration of the Roma in a minority voting list to used their right to vote for a Roma candidates on parliamentary elections. Unfortunately, for parliamentary election in 2003 only more than 700 Roma around Croatia used a right to vote for the Roma candidates or for the candidates that were supported by the Roma electorate in a minority-voting list. This fact is speaking for a catastrophic information campaign of all Roma subjects, including the political parties, candidates, Roma and non-Roma NGOs, about the new possibilities of the election Law to vote for the "minority" list and they weren't registered in a voting list as Roma. The last deadline for registering in a voting list, for the last parliamentary elections was 8- day before E-day.

The second think that NGOs have to do is an education of Roma for the electoral process. Because the level of high-educated people among the Roma in Croatia is very low, the leaders or the people that want to be involved in a politic life must be educated for the politician. For that reason I'm proposing the Roma NGOs in Croatia to cooperate with organization "Human Rights Project" from Sofia, Bulgaria and with Miss. Ludmila Zhivkova, who is a project coordinator of the Project "Political Academy for Roma", to exchange the experiences and to help them on this issue. Because the Roma in Bulgaria before few years were surfaced with a similar problem of educated Roma politicians, a Human Rights Project is realizing a mentioned project, which mainly is financed by the State strategy program for Roma community named **"Framework program for equal integration of Roma in Bulgarian society"**.

An issue of participation of Roma in an electoral administration and domestic Roma observers in Croatia, is on worse situation, too. In a former parliamentary election of 2003 and in a last presidential election of 2005, no one from the Roma minority participated in an electoral administration, even in polling station of the areas where the majority of the inhabitants are Roma. The only organization in Croatia, that are observing the elections is an organization “Gong”. They have their observers in all polling stations in Croatia. Some Roma NGOs are collaborating with organization “GONG”, and they are observing the elections in E-day in a polling stations where the most of Roma are living. On this issue organization of Women from the Baranjasko-Osjecka Zhupanija (County, region) with a president Nadica Balog, engage around 15 domestic Roma observers. This observes were trained by the organization GONG for observing the elections in E-day. In a future, these 15 domestic Roma observers have to be trained to observe the whole election process among the Roma settlement. For this issue I proposing the “Guidelines to assist national minority participation in the electoral process” issued by OSCE/ODIHR translated in Croatian or Roma language to be distributed to all Roma NGOs that want to observe the election among the Roma.

An issue of domestic Roma observers in a polling station where Roma are voting in a considerable number is a very important, for the parliamentary elections and a possibility for voting in a “minority” ballots, especially in election unit No.XII where the Roma minority have to elect one common MP together with Austrians, Bulgarians, Germans, Poles, Romanians, Ruthenians, Russians, Russians, Turks, Ukrainians, Vlachs and Jews in Croatia. In a last parliamentary election Mr. Nikola Mak (from the German community), from this “minority list” became a member of a parliament with total number of only 265 votes. Even, that nobody demands any violation of the electoral procedure or voting right for the election in 2003, in future is not excluded that some manipulation especially among the Roma electorate may to appear. For reason a good trained Roma observers will be very necessary for the next parliamentary elections.

For the next parliamentary election a unity and possibility to make any coalition between different Roma groups is with a crucial importance. The non-understandable antagonism between the Roma with different origin, reached with many insult words and appellations for “the other”, resulted to the dividing of the Roma votes into the 4

candidates and losing of the opportunity to have their member in a parliament, in a elections of 2003. Unfortunately, after one year I saw again the same antagonism between the different Roma groups. There is no change to find any common base and language for starting of cooperation between them. On discussion with Mrs. Milena Klajner from the Governmental office for National Minorities, responsible for Roma issues, the solution of this problem is on a long-term, in an education of some Roma students for leaders of communities and groups, who will take the leader role for a few years. As, a short- term solution I seeing if any from the International Roma authorities will take the responsibility and to create, let say “artificial and official unity” that will be respected by the majority of the Roma in Croatia. I’m saying International Roma authorities because the common element for all Roma groups in Croatia is a respect to the International Roma organizations and authorities. An excellent opportunity is the election for Croatian representatives in a European Roma &Travelers Forum (ERTF). Almost all of Roma organizations at the moment are interested to participate, as a member in ERTF and all of them will come in meeting or congress for election of representatives. But, for that meeting is necessary to work on a good preparation and to provide a participation of almost all Roma organization in Croatia. In this process of preparation we need any International Roma authority.

But, I’m afraid that the representatives of Ashkalies will not entering in any kind of collaboration with Roma for political participation. We can’t use a word “coalitions” because for that we need two political subjects, but they do not exist in moment. With the community of Banyash collaboration with Roma representatives is on way, and is not broken. I don’t believe that will be break at the near future, because the Banyash organization in Croatia their future are seeing in framework of Roma identity. Opposite to them the Ashaklies want to develop their identity and future independently from the Roma, they will not enter in any collaboration, and I don’t believe that will participate in activities for ERTF.

On a last presidential election, for the first round I didn’t saw any special campaign for the Roma people by the candidates. A Humanitarian aid was delivered to the Roma people very close to the E-day, like in a many other countries. According to my

observation a large number Roma people that I ask didn't want to vote in a first round. With abstinence from voting, on one way, they want to demand their protest against their terrible social life. But, of course nobody don't know that they protesting on that way, and why they are not voting. Officially will staying that they didn't want to vote! It is their citizen right. Roma NGOs maybe can help to them to articulate their political position and to explain to the public "why they don't want to vote", but no NGO did anything on that way. Bearing in mind that these were presidential election maybe is understandable why the Roma NGOs and other activists were passive, that is so strange in comparison with other elections.

An election for local and regional self-governments in Croatia should be hold this spring, maybe in April in Croatia. Even that these local elections are very important for the Roma, my opinion is that they are not prepared to be a serious political factor. Maybe some individual will succeed to be elected in representatives' bodies of local and regional self-governments, by standing on the list of a mainstream political parties, but they will not be with a big influence, because I didn't find any Roma person with good negotiation skills. But, even and somebody will negotiate a good position, among the Roma in any region is not built a constituency- a group of Roma people that will give electoral support for a person or a party.

But, even that and this elections will be without a big success for a Roma in Croatia, it will be a good opportunity for Roma political activists to exercise a strategic political work, for the next elections. One smart folk sentence is saying: "Even the longest way is starting with a first step". However, for the "first step" in strategic political access never is "to late".