

The Roma minority in the Czech Republic: scapegoats of modern history?

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In this paper I am focusing on the situation of Roma minority in the Czech Republic concerned with the high levels of social exclusion in many aspects of their lives. Among the main aims of the paper is to show that the current situation of Roma in the Czech Republic is not the question of mentality like the majority prefers to think, but the social pre-conditions, historical “heritage” and the changing economic situation in the country. Personally I am involved in the projects on communities’ inclusion on local and international levels both in the non-governmental and academic spheres; the Roma integration programs have been part of my professional activities. Such interdisciplinary approach can contribute from my point of view to more objective outcomes and more humane papers.

Keywords: *social exclusion, scapegoat, anti-gypsyism, Roma people, Czech Republic*

Introduction

These days Europe represents the Union of 27 member countries, vast lands and a common space where Europeans can practice their rights and move freely. For the rest of the World and for Europe itself this is a place of peace, stability, and rising standard of living. Europe promotes values like human rights, democracy and freedom but under this surface there still exists discrimination, nationalism and xenophobia – these altogether building the real picture of Europe today.

The rise in the levels of intolerance inside the communities towards some particular ethnic or other groups can be explained by the economic crisis in almost all the member states of the European Union and the aftermaths. However, such a situation is not something brand new and has been known throughout the history of mankind. Whenever a crisis situation or a natural disaster (famine, plague or invasion) emerges – the “scapegoat”, the weakest element of the community, is blamed and punished for the sins, crimes and sufferings of others, so the majority could feel more united and safe.

In his book Tom Douglas¹ develops and explains in details the *scapegoat* concept from religious to family contexts, showing to the reader that the blaming itself and the wish to transfer the blame have been always among

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¹ Tom Douglas, *Scapegoats: Transferring Blame*, New York 1995.