



EUROPEAN ROMA AND TRAVELLERS FORUM
EVROPAKO FORUMO E ROMENGO THAJ E PHIRUTNENGO
FORUM EUROPÉEN DES ROMS ET DES GENS DU VOYAGE

Rudko Kawczynski

Open Letter

Dear Ambassadors,
Dear Member of the PACE,
Dear Members of the European Parliament,
Dear Representatives of European Medias,
Ladys and Gentleman,

For a long time I have been thinking wheatear I should have written such a letter before, but I am confident that the right time has come today. I think that the public deserve to know more about the current situation.

As you certainly know my second term of office as President of the ERTF has ended. Since then, I have been managing the reorganization of the ERTF until the new elections of the Executive Committee had taken place in November 2014.

Taken by surprise at the position voiced by the General Secretary of the Council of Europe, in which he has suggested several options to proceed with the partnership between the CoE and the ERTF, one of them is the termination of the partnership agreement with the ERTF, I am taking this opportunity to address you personally. It is disappointing that the SG did not find it necessary to discuss his proposal with the ERTF before his statement.

The fact that the origin of the ERTF resulted from an initiative of the Council of Europe is not mentioned in the least. Instead, what is now a more than 10-year history of successful cooperation of the ERTF and the Roma sector of the CoE, from 2001 to 2010, is not appreciated at all, let alone the latest positive results of its collaboration with the sectors of the CoE.

Here a discussion is being spurred on that has already been completed 10 years ago and that led to the founding of the ERTF. See CM Final Document/2004 179 of 3.November 2004. In this Final Document, the Recommendation of the Parliamentary Assembly 1557 (202) on the creation of a consultative forum of the Roma was examined, discussed and after almost three years of detailed examination (2001-2004), finally approved. The ERTF is a creation of the CoE under the direction of the then General Secretary Walter Schwimmer, the Finnish president Tarja Halonen and the France president Jacques Chirac.

Shortly after the speech of the Finnish President Tarja Halonen at the PACE meeting on 24. January 2001, where she proposed that;

„ serious consideration be given to a need to create for Roma some kind of consultative

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assembly to represent them on the pan-European level“.

2002 PACE approved Recommendation 1557 (2002) on the Legal Situation of the Roma in Europe (submitted by Csaba Tabajdi). Its text was adopted by the Assembly on 25 April 2002 (15th sitting). It reads in part:

“The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:
support the initiative of setting up a European Roma consultative forum, democratically established, that can articulate and transmit the voice of Romany individuals and communities and serve as an advisory body to the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and institutions of the European Union.”

19 November 2014 After more than three Years of deliberations and reviews, the ERTF was founded and registered at the Tribunal d’Instance of Strasbourg on 13. July 2004.

Today the ERTF is the largest and most representative independent Roma institution in Europe. With more than 1,500 member organisations, including the International Romani Union, the Roma National Congress, the International Roma Women Network, Roma political parties, and Member of national parliaments. Through the International Christian Roma Associations alone, the ERTF reaches more than one million Roma in the member states of the CoE.

The ERTF comprises by far the largest number of organised Roma representatives and initiatives in Europe.

The ERTF will continue to honor its mandate and raise its voice for the European Roma against antiziganism and discrimination, with or without a partnership agreement. These include applying the resolutions and recommendations of the CoE.

The termination of the partnership agreement would indicate a capitulation to deep-rooted prejudices and fears toward the Roma.

In the past three years, the ERTF has been able to significantly expand its collaboration with all sectors and institutions of the CoE. It has also signed additional partnership agreements with PACE, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, and others.

Furthermore, it has been possible to substantially improve its collaboration with the European Commission. We are currently negotiating with various committees of the European Parliament regarding regular collaboration. Representatives of the ERTF have entered the EU Parliament as a result of the new European elections and will broaden the cooperation of the EU Parliament and the ERTF.

ERTF ist working with the MigRoma research programme together with the University of Manchester, the University of Verona and Granada, the Fondation Maison des Sciences de l’Homme, and the Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities.

The research programme is financed by the European Commission and will cover the period 2013 to 2017. The goal of the research is that of finding methodologies for supporting the European Commission, the CoE, and other national and international institutions in developing future

programmes for Roma migrants, working up scientific backgrounds on the situation of the Roma, and preparing methods for improving the situation of the Roma in their countries of origin.

Jagland / Soros initiative ERI

Please permit me, at this point, to share with you my experiences with the CoE and, especially, those involving my work for the Soros Foundation.

In 1996, Georg Soros asked me to support his foundation by developing special programmes for Roma. A year later, in 1997, I began my work as Programme Director at the Open Society Institute in Budapest.

I established the Roma Programme, the European Roma Rights Center (ERRC), the Roma Information Office in Brussels (ERIO), and today's Roma Education Fund (REF).

These institutions were intended to be Roma led independent foundations, operating in line with the laws of the countries in which they were set up. But only a short time after they began their work, I was forced to recognise the fact that autonomy was out of the question. These organisations were – and are – controlled centrally by the Soros Foundation in the USA and are in no way Roma- organisations.

After it became clear that I was expected to participate in the radicalisation of the Roma in Europe, I refused to cooperate and quit my job. Since then the Soros „Roma-Programs“ has become some sort of recruiting offices for „young Roma intellectuals“ serving US- intelligence agencies demands.

Mastermind responsible for oversight of all of OSI's Roma programming is Mr. Robert Kushen. He is a Senior Advisor at the Open Society Foundations. Since 2008, Mr. Kushen has been the Managing Director of the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), a public interest legal advocacy organization dedicated to challenging discrimination and promoting equality of Roma throughout Europe. He began his career as a fellow at Human Rights Watch reporting on human rights abuses in the Soviet Union. Rob has a JD from Columbia Law School and a BA in Russian and Soviet Studies from Harvard College.

From 1991-1996, he served in the Office of the Legal Adviser of the U.S. Department of State, where he worked as counsel to the bureau on counterterrorism. 1996-99 and 2003-07, he served in a number of positions at the Open Society Institute, including Director of International Operations from 2004-07.

He has served as a member of OSI's Roma Advisory Board since 2004, which is responsible for oversight of all of OSI's Roma programming, and is presently the Chair of that Board. He is the Director of the Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation.

He is seconded to the position by the Open Society Foundations (“OSF”), where he also supports OSF's work on Roma issues. He also supports the work of a number of OSF's grantees, serving as Board Chair of the European Roma Rights Centre, Vice-Chair of the Roma Education Fund, Director of the Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat, Executive Director of the European Roma Rights Centre, These organisations were made into „Trojan horses“, so that they could infiltrate the European institutions as Roma organisations. But in reality there are in no way Roma- organisations.

Although it is generally known that the Soros Foundation uses methods like this, in Information Document SG/Inf(2014)39, the Secretary General listed, Soros organizations as possible „Roma-partners“ to the SRSG. These Soros branches, that function undemocratically and with a lack of transparency and representativity, are suggested as partners.

On 23 September 2010, the General Secretary of the Council of Europe, Thorbjørn Jagland, and the American oligarch Georg Soros met in New York to agree on special measures for working on Roma.

Additional meetings with Soros and his representatives took place for the purpose of developing a strategy to integrate the Soros Foundation in to the Council of Europe.

The final highlight, after the doors to the Council of Europe had already been opened to several Soros initiatives, was the presentation of a new Soros initiative the so-called „European Roma Institut“ (ERI). According to the Jagland/ Soros initiative, preparations will be completed by the end of this year for the establishment of this “European Roma Institute.” The initiators want this Institute to sign a partnership contract with the Council of Europe that will permit direct access to the politics of the Council of Europe for the Soros foundation.

According to the information available to us, one of the preconditions for financial support of the CoE by the Soros Foundation is the cessation of collaboration with the ERTF.

In preparation for this collaboration and as a sign of good will, the SG announced its “new” Roma initiative shortly after its meeting with Soros. The first step was to dismantle the existing structures within the Council of Europe (Coordinator, MG-S-ROM).

Since 2010, information about the ERTF has been systematically suppressed in all public appearances of the SG and his representatives.

Consultations with the ERTF were broken off. Reports of discussions regarding the work of the ERTF were skewed; and the financial support of the ERTF was questioned. Previously existing references to the special partnership agreement between the CoE and the ERTF were almost completely removed from public presences and Roma-related web-links of the CoE. The story of the creation of the ERTF was concealed and represented as an imposed collaboration between the CoE and „one of numerous Roma-organisations“ the ERTF.

Experience since the collapse of socialism and German reunification in 1990 has shown repeated efforts on the part of various powers to exploit the suffering of our people and to profit from their influence on nations and on European institutions.

In particular, the attention of many foundations is focused on subsidies and projects of the European Union. In recent years this has resulted in the growth of a awesome “helper industry.” It has paternalistically occupied key positions and set the tone of the discussion about the Roma. We have become the object of this “helper industry” that is not interested in any real improvement in the situation of the Roma in Europe but rather to make money out of the sufferings of our people.

Every project leads to a new project. Every conference leads to the demand for even more conferences, for even more training. One Platform for Roma affairs follows another, with no results at all. This industry monopolises the discussion. It devours millions of euros in order to come to the conclusion that it needs even more money for new placebos. In the meanwhile, millions of Roma are being displaced, are being driven from one country to another, and are losing their homes. This Roma policy is Part of the Problem, and in no way part of a solution.

The only people who profit from the current policy of the SRSG are the so-called helpers and their accomplices, experts, supporters and project leaders, who express their regrets in endless “Seminars on the Suffering of the Roma” that always have the same results: They need more money for their work.

It is obvious that one-sided financing like this by the Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues (SRSG) would result in a craze of placebo projects. A solid and professional Roma policy of the CoE would look very different.

It is incomprehensible to us that the restructuring of the CoE announced by the SG, through concentration on the core tasks of the CoE, such as human rights, democracy and civil society, would not be applicable to the work of the SRSG. In the Roma work, all task areas that do not expressly belong to the core areas of the CoE will be handled, and the CoE will be made into a kind of “International NGO” that will compete with the Roma organisations. on projects and funds With the Soros Foundation behind him, the Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues (SRSG) will probably not find it difficult to become a “well-financed NGO”....

The situation of the Roma in Europe has been deteriorating continuously for years, with forced migration, unemployment, lack of access to education, smear campaigns in the media, antiziganism, violence and discrimination.

The immigration of Roma refugees poses problems for many communities in the West that they can only solve in collaboration with the representatives of the Roma. In recent years, millions of EURO have thus disappeared into a black hole consisting of prejudices and corruption, without improving the situation of the Roma. In this situation, an even closer relationship with the ERTF is needed in order to work on solutions. Except for the SRSG, all sectors of the CoE see this the same way.

Please excuse the expression, but it is almost sarcasm when the SG emphasises in his information document dated 20. October 2014 (SG/Inf 2014,39) the fact that he has contact with 100 Roma organisations, knowing full well that almost 100% of them belong to the ERTF organisations and that the ERTF enabled the contact to just these Roma organisations and the Secretary General for Roma Issues (SRSG). Besides, the SRSG is not a Roma representation.

The situation is similar with the Roma mediators, who are portrayed as a special group without any links. After all, the SG must know that the contacts to the social workers, who are now built up as Roma mediators through the CoE, were actually produced through the ERTF. Even though we were not informed about the project at any time, we still helped the SG in the press conference for the Strasbourg Declaration and explained to the questioning journalists that we, the ERTF, would provide contacts to the Roma mediators being trained. We have kept this promise and, on 16. January 2012, began with the recruitment campaign. At the same time, we associated our name with the work of the ROMED project. Despite our support, we have not been consulted up to the present day.

Due to the restructuring of the ERTF back to its origins, the ERTF will no longer be dependent on financial support of the COE as of 2015. The previous structure of the representations through the development of umbrella organisations made no more sense, due to the lack of support from the member states of the CoE.

But let me compare some of the costs of the Initiative of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues (SRSG) and its employees in the so-called Roma Team with the expenses of the ERTF. Its disappointing that in this Roma Team of 15 experts only one is of Roma origin (a former ERRC employee now finance by the Finnish government on a short time contract).

Finances ERTF

As agreed, the ERTF received financial support of €155.000,— annually from 2010 to 2014. This support is earmarked for specific purposes and is to cover the costs of an annual meeting and two office meetings of the Executive Committee, including the translation costs in three languages and all other related expenses.

The planned non-cash contribution was first realised in 2009 with two employees. In 2004-2008, 50% of the non-cash contribution was withheld.

All of the support by members of the ERTF is provided on a volunteer basis. The Executive Committee of the ERTF has been working on a volunteer basis from 2004 to the present and receives neither salaries nor other benefits for its work for the ERTF. Since this year, Mr. Henry Scicluna, the former coordinator for Roma of the CoE, is working as volunteer Special Advisor for the ERTF in Strasbourg.

Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues (SRSG)

This year, the 10 employees of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues (SRSG) cost the CoE approx. €1,080,000.— (not including the office and administrative expenses).

An additional €1,100,000.-- are available to the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues (SRSG) for activities. This rough calculation does not include the other expected allocations of 500,000.— Also not included are the costs for 5 additional employees.

These 15 employees receive their salaries from the CoE and can fall back on the entire CoE infrastructure at no cost, so that they can spend their working hours procuring projects and fundraising. Project resources thus obtained are freely available to the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues (SRSG) and his team.

To prevent any suspicion of lack of transparency and conflict of interest, the funds that are obtained should be disclosed and the incoming and outgoing funds should be recorded specifically in the reports of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues (SRSG).

Even this incomplete record of the costs of the two CoE initiatives clearly shows how absurd the accusation is that the ERTFs support by the CoE is a drain on the CoE finances. To put it differently, in the 10 years of its existence, the ERTF cost the CoE less than the Initiative of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues (SRSG) did in a single year.

The Roma movement is a peaceful and Europe-wide networked structure. We are Europeans, we are citizens of the nations in which we live, and our shared objective is to work in a just, constitutional, peaceful, social and democratic Europe. For the good of all European citizens, men and women alike.

We will not permit ourselves to be exploited for the benefit of political parties, and we do not represent any state interests. We represent the interests of 15 million Roma in Europe including Turkey.

Ending the relationship between the Council of Europe and the ERTF would be a poor signal and would not benefit the credibility of this initiative of the SG and the CoE rather it will end up in an paternalistic and discriminatory approach to shut down the independent voice of the Roma and Europe.

Instead of considering an end to this relationship, we should work together to strengthen our collaboration. In any case, the ERTF will continue to safeguard the interests of the European Roma and, in the spirit of the founding of the ERTF, give a voice to the Roma in Europe. And a final question must be raised:

Who will benefit from the termination of the partnership, especially as only advantages result from this unique partnership agreement?

Cui bono?

Sincerely Yours,

Rudko Kawczynski
former President to the ERTF