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***Were the lessons learned? Analyzing the pre-accession funding for Roma inclusion***  
Working Paper

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## **Introduction**

The potential accession of the Western Balkans and Turkey as European Union (EU) members has opened opportunities for the EU and governments to address the situation of Roma, the region's 'most disadvantaged ethnic group' (EC 2011). The Commission has long stressed improvement in the treatment of the Roma in those countries as a key political condition for the enlargement. The 2010-2011 Enlargement Package (which assesses progress towards accession by candidate and potential candidate countries) highlighted the increased risk to Roma as a 'particularly vulnerable minority' from the effects of the economic crisis, widespread discrimination and the continuing repercussions of the wars in the former Yugoslavia. DG Enlargement in particular has encouraged the contending countries to work on reducing poverty and social exclusion, in line with the Europe 2020 Strategy and Decade of Roma Inclusion Priorities. It recommended that the countries consider 'setting explicit and ambitious targets on employment, education, and poverty reduction of disadvantaged communities' placing a special emphasis on disadvantaged Roma population' (EC 2010). In order to induce acquiescence of national and local authorities the Commission promised to benchmark and disperse funds from its Instrument for pre-Accession (IPA) while pledging to improve and better coordinate their use on Roma and to orientate them towards more strategic and result-oriented policies (EC 2011). The Commission also encouraged the aspiring candidates to take under consideration the experiences of the new member states when designing and implementing their own strategies, in order to learn from 'good practices' and achievements (DG Enlargement 2012).

The endorsement of IPA as the 'most potent' policy instrument for facilitating integration of Roma and elevation of their living standards appears rather surprising, considering a dramatic lack of impact the EU funding has thus far generated in member states with large Roma population. Even more perplexing is Commission's confidence that the potential candidates could benefit from existing practices and attempt to incorporate them into their own domestic plans and strategies. Although good practices can surely be found, they are largely confined to small, highly contextual interventions that have largely failed to spawn large systemic changes (Harvey 2008; Guy 2012). It appears that after more than a decade of sustained EU funding for Roma programmes, both before and after enlargement, the situation of most Romani communities has remained basically unaltered and in certain areas has even deteriorated (Popkostadinova 2011). As expressed by the Roma Decade representative "*the huge subsidies could be a strong weapon in the fight against Roma-exclusion, but EU funds barely reach their target groups, and rarely provide opportunities to induce policy change*"<sup>1</sup>. According to the Commission's Roma Task Force<sup>2</sup> findings, 'strong and proportionate measures are still not yet in place to tackle the social and economic problems of a large part of the EU's Roma population'. Thus it seems rather sardonic that the candidates should fashion their interventions on existing models and practices. Amidst growing frustration, a call for critical alterations of existing approaches penetrates all major debates and deliberations on EU funding and its usefulness in facilitating Roma integration. However, in the system of governance characterized by deep running path-dependencies and power asymmetries groundbreaking transformations are difficult to envision. A bureaucratic amalgamation guiding EU

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<sup>1</sup> Interview: Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation 2013

<sup>2</sup> The Commission Roma Task Force was created on 7 September 2010 to streamline, assess and benchmark the use (including the effectiveness) of EU funds by all Member States for Roma integration.

financial transfers can at best withstand incremental changes and adjustments of existing procedures. Nevertheless, the urgency of Roma predicament requires concrete discussion about possible ways to improve the existing system of transfers. Even though sweeping transformation might not be feasible, there is still room for enhancement. The search for insightful proposals, however, should not relay examples from few good practices but rather should engage in an in-depth analysis of 'what went wrong' and 'why'.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the experiences of two new EU member states – Bulgaria and Slovakia – in designing and implementing Phare provisions. The attention to PHARE programmes is important as they continue to constitute the 'prototype' of the current IPA assistance. Although a number of new regulations have been introduced (mainly the 'sectoral approach') the basic modus operandi remains the same. The examination is also relevant, given the mounting evidence that deep rooted problems experienced in the past have not been fully resolved, and there is a danger that same mistakes will be repeated (Guy 2012). The existing evaluation reports on PHARE contributions, while useful in orientating our knowledge about the situation, are largely based on overly-generalized concepts which have rarely been operationalized (EC 2004; EMS 2002; MRGI; OSI 2008; ERRC 2012). Inadequate examination of causal relationships leaves the area open for speculation and conflicting notions about on-the-ground practices. To overcome these pitfalls, the paper develops an analytical framework with which to understand the variety of performance of PHARE funding programs in the area of Roma-inclusion. Building on policy implementation scholarship the analytical lens focuses on the role of programme's content (the diagnostic and prescriptive dimension) in structuring the final project outputs. The underlying conviction is that the failure of a poorly fashioned program is too often blamed upon the implementer, under mistaken presumption that success is a product of the program's adaptability in the field rather than its underlying strategy (Linder and Peters 1987).

The paper argues that the shortcomings of Phare projects have been caused by the separation of Roma issues from the mainstream socio-economic conditions. The disconnection was consolidated by the conceptualization of 'Roma exclusion' in terms of 'distance' or separation from a core of society which consist of people who are integrated into the sets of relationships and groups that are considered 'normal'. Central to it was an idea that Roma predicament should be solved through 'specific' interventions aimed at changing the behaviour of individual or the entire communities. As such the systemic inequalities and power asymmetries were largely overlooked or at best treated in a superficial manner. Thus Roma issues were addressed by measures designed in separation from mainstream reforms and strategies that targeted people's behaviour rather than institutional structures. This modus operandi severely hindered the opportunity to influence policy change and in many instances has actually reinforced segregation and disenfranchisement of Roma communities. The findings challenge the common perceptions that Roma-inclusion strategies benefit from 'distinct approach' that recognizes 'specific context of this minority group'. In fact it is shown that projects aligned with national approaches and targeted Roma 'indirectly' were more effective in generating systemic or policy change. Thus instead of urging potential candidates to come up with specific Roma-inclusion strategies, the EU should perhaps encourage them to re-think their governance structures and institutional capabilities.

In order to gather and analyse experiences from pre-accession programmes in Slovakia and Bulgaria, questionnaire was created and sent out to key policy-makers, experts and the main implementors of PHARE projects. The questions placed special emphasis on determining the knowledge of policy-makers and project delivers about Roma exclusion and their perceptions about compatibility of national social-inclusion objectives and Phare projects targeted at Roma communities. Semi-structured interviews were used to unveil existence of obstacle and/or favourable conditions for scaling-up and mainstreaming PHARE interventions. The text analysis of projects' fiches and PHARE strategies was triangulated with data collected through survey and interviews. The period covered in this paper is 1998-2006, over which time a total of 16 projects with a total budget of close to 90 million Euros (from PHARE and national co-financing) were targeted at Roma communities. Although Slovakia acceded three

years before Bulgaria, the accelerated usage of funds for Roma integration commenced in similar time span<sup>3</sup>. Before presenting empirical findings, the paper engages in a short discussion of implementation theory and sets up the analytical framework. Two case studies of PHARE projects implemented in Bulgaria and Slovakia are presented followed by a discussion on 'lessons learned' and critical assessment of how these lessons could or should be incorporated into the new IPA regime.

### **Implementation Theory**

Mounting criticism of overly-contextual approach to policy analysis has prompted scholarly efforts to introduce some conceptual integration to the analysis of policy implementation. Sabatier and Mazmanian convincingly argued that "many of the case studies which form the bulk of the implementation literature become so immersed in the details of program implementation that they lose sight of the macro-level and political variables which structure the entire process" (1980:538). They developed a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding 'the ability of the state to favorably structure the implementation process' (1980:541) thus shedding light on often neglected impact of policy content on implementation outputs. The ideas about the manner in which statutory characteristics affect subsequent events have been further developed by scholars critical of a rational-choice approach to policy-making. This wide strand of literature brings analytical focus to interests and values, which tend to underlie policy formulation (Kingdon 1984; Béland 2005; Bleich 2002; Daly 2000; Hall 1993; Lascombes and Le Gale's 2007). John Kingdon compellingly argued that formulation of strategies does not follow a rational comprehensive model whereby policy-makers define their goals clearly and canvass many (or all) alternatives that might achieve these goals. Instead he asserts that formulation is often driven by political ideologies, institutional values or external pressures which dictate what needs to be done (1984:93). In this light it is quite probable that proposed goals, objectives and measures could be ill suited to address problems experienced on the ground or in the most extreme cases, exacerbate the existing conditions. In this perspective implementation failure is a 'by-product' of choices made during policy formulation – when measures are selected based on normative convictions rather than throughout assessment of needs.

For the purpose of this paper it is useful to conceptualize policy content in terms of diagnostic and perspective dimensions. The diagnostic dimension refers to how the current or past state of affairs is assessed and how identified problems are articulated. An important aspect to keep in mind here is the underlying understanding or perception about what causes a given problem to emerge or to persevere. As mentioned above such perceptions are often built on ideological supposition or political interests rather than outputs of 'objective' statistical data (Kingdon 1984). This is especially viable in politicized policy area where technical know-how is highly contested or where target group is not strongly organized or does not have access to decision-making processes (Matland 1995; Goetz 2009). In such scenarios a phenomena of 'framing' often takes place, this concept implies that articulated problems are not simple descriptions of reality but specific representations in terms that give meaning to reality, and shape the understanding of reality (Zito 2011). Its basic premise refutes that notion that different individuals can observe the same social and natural phenomena and necessarily arrive at the same conclusions. Given that Roma minorities do not constitute a strong interest group in any given country or region, their needs and expectations are often ignored or freely interpreted by policy-makers far removed from Roma communities. It has been widely argued that the reality of 'Roma' people does not necessarily determine the political perceptions of

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<sup>3</sup> Slovakia acceded in 2004 while Bulgaria followed in 2007. It must be noted that PHARE addressed the problem of Roma integration only in the late nineties, as a result of the acceleration of accession negotiations. The move to start, for the first time, national PHARE projects concerned with Roma integration has happened in parallel, in the same year, in the two countries examined, which is an indication that the main driver behind the decision to act was not a changed situation of the Roma minority, or the product of national political developments. It seems to have resulted from a political change in the EU that aimed to increase political pressure on candidate countries to fully comply with the Copenhagen criteria.

Roma or the content of public policies supposedly aimed at Roma inclusion or empowerment (Kovats 2013). Thus by examining a diagnostic dimension of Roma- inclusion strategies one can demonstrate empirically how problems are constructed and infer existence of potential biases or faulty assumptions<sup>4</sup>.

The prescriptive dimension refers to the adoption of policy tools aimed at elevating the defined problem. It is paramount to examine whether presented measures internalize initial problem definitions, as it should not be assumed that the process of choosing policy tools is a rational, politically neutral and/or transparent (Lascoumes and Le Gale's 2007). Policy makers are prone to propose activities they are already competent at or are used to, but which do not necessarily align with an overall programme purpose. Moreover, measures tend to be chosen on the premise of being more acceptable to the general public (and the electorate), more in line with mainstream value system or more feasible to execute<sup>5</sup>. It has also been observed that policy tools are chosen to apes certain pressures (i.e. EC regulations) rather than remedy domestic conditions (see Vermeersch 2002). When the realization between diagnosis and prescription remains implicit or is not scrutinized itself there is a danger that the theoretical assumptions underlying policy proposal are used uncritically to justify an essentially normative preference. This, as argued by Kooiman, will almost automatically lead to disappointments and/or unintended outcomes (Kooiman 2003). A scrutiny of measures chosen to address Roma exclusion may unveil pervasive inconsistencies and incongruities that imperil the effectiveness of policy outputs and in some critical cases might even contribute to further aggravation of on-the-ground experiences. Lack of input from those affected by exclusion compounded with the absence of evidence-based policies, lack of clear indicators and politicization of Roma poverty and identity severely undermines the choice of appropriate policy instruments. Thus Roma are expected to comply with measures that internalize very limited and static interpretations of their interests (Vermeersch 2002).

In both countries the PHARE programme's political role was strong enough to encourage (or force) national governments to address Roma exclusion, even if it was complex, difficult to solve, and in a number of cases also unpopular with the voters (Heil, Hojsik, Kostka 2013). The programme aspiration was to strengthen institutional capacities, aid the transposition of anti-discrimination legislation and contribute to the development of infrastructure and inclusive services in all major policy areas (education, employment, housing and health). Roma population was to benefit from improvement in public provisions and enhancement of overall socio-economic governance. The proposed interventions directed at Roma internalized aspiration to address the 'multidimensional' aspects of Roma exclusion, in line with EU recommendations (DG Enlargement 2004) and the newly drafted National Framework Programmes for the Integration of the Roma. Between 1999 and 2006 Bulgaria and Slovakia each implemented eight PHARE projects targeted at Roma integration<sup>6</sup> covering a multitude of different policy areas, including education, urban development, employment, social and healthcare as well as anti-discrimination. Two areas however, predominated; education related activities and infrastructure development, which together attracted more than 60% of the total PHARE assistance<sup>7</sup>. At the same time, Roma were seldom

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<sup>4</sup> This exercise becomes possible given the acceleration of research on Roma living standards. It must be noted that thus far the links between academia and policy-makers continue to be weak.

<sup>5</sup> Here the participation of social actors in policy formulation process becomes paramount. Limited input from the communities or local authorities might lead to proposition of measures that fail to reach intended group because of inadequate understanding of problems experienced on the ground. The importance of partnership deserves a separate analysis, the purpose of this work however is to analyze the way established policies structures implementation outputs, and not to outline the optimal way of formulating policies.

<sup>6</sup> The last PHARE project in Slovakia was implemented in 2003 but was extended to the first Structural Funds implementation period. For the list of all the projects see annex 1

<sup>7</sup> The predominant weighting of infrastructure is a consequence of the fact that one very large project – the largest single project in the sector – was for infrastructure development in Slovakia (16.7 million Euros).

featured in governmental policies and, as a result the PHARE initiatives were perceived to be separate and additional to mainstream functions of the various ministers. The framing of Roma exclusion in terms of individual endowments rather than structural inequalities, only exaggerated that separation what in turn hampered mainstreaming efforts and policy change.

### **Diagnostic Dimension: Bulgaria and Slovakia**

Although the overarching PHARE priorities aimed to generate institutional changes and enhance cohesive socio-economic development, in both countries Roma issues were conceptualized largely outside the mainstream debate on the needed national reforms. In general proposed inclusion programs problematized exclusion of Roma by conceiving it as a product of specific 'community characteristics' (i.e. large family size, sub-optimal living conditions, gender inequality, and criminality) and inadequate 'individual endowment' (i.e. lack of education, low skills, low motivation and language barriers). In this frame the impact of broader economic and political dimensions of exclusion was diluted, generating implicit understanding that it is the Roma who must adapt to the system and not vice versa. More importantly it de-coupled Roma poverty and exclusion from that of other nationals, and linked it to cultural traits and individual choices rather than deep-seeded discrimination. As one of the Roma activists from Presov formulated it "*the debate about ethnic dimension of poverty took a wrong turn...instead of talking about how to address structural discrimination and negative stereotypes we began to ponder how Roma could be inserted into the system*". The majority of proposed inclusion initiatives did not problematize structural inequalities, and even though few scattered references were made to territorial dimension of poverty (i.e. lack of foreign investment and decline of heavy industry in certain regions) and discriminatory attitudes of the majority towards the Roma, these accounts were articulated in a very superficial manner without elaborating on causal relationships. Instead Roma 'inability' to perform and adapt to changing environment was coined as a leading cause of exclusion in all major policy areas. Nowhere was this more visible than in programs targeted at inclusive education.

Educational programs in both Bulgaria and Slovakia defined the 'problem' in terms of 'high dropout rates'<sup>8</sup>, 'low performance', 'adult illiteracy' and 'low participation in pre-school education'. The situation was attributed to children's low command of mainstream language, lack of skills needed for successful learning of reading, writing and calculating and lack of parental support<sup>9</sup>. The causes of adult illiteracy were linked to the process of 'discontinuing education' which in turn were ascribed to cultural traits (especially in reference to gender inequality within the communities and engagement of youth in employment activities). These diagnostic pronouncements were rarely supported by research or statistical data and failed to highlight structural factors underlying the inability of Roma children to access education. Issues related to draconian cuts in social benefits for education, including abolition of cash transfers and curtailment of food vouchers and availability of free textbooks, were totally omitted, as was the rapidly increasing poverty and unemployment among the Roma. The omission was particularly problematic given that all the above factors were positively correlated with growing school absenteeism and higher drop-out rates (Danova 2001). The assessments also appeared oblivious to the high levels of institutional discrimination largely responsible for persistent school and classroom segregation, and growing reluctance of Roma parents to keep children enrolled in formal education<sup>10</sup>. Although projects implemented in 2002 made references to economic and social barriers preventing Roma children from taking part in school education, they still fell silent on the need for a wider educational and social assistance reforms.

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<sup>8</sup> Interestingly no distinction was made between elementary and secondary education, despite evidence that dropout rates were much more pronounced after the completion of the first six grades (see WB 2002).

<sup>9</sup> This in turn was attributed to low attainment of education by parents and their alleged 'lack of understanding of educational benefits' (Education Program for Roma Children 1999:5)

<sup>10</sup> In fact, segregation as a 'problem' was never articulated in any of the PHARE schemes

Overt focus on behaviour, culture and language skills, continued to dominate even the most ambitious proposals. Numerous survey respondents who worked on the projects confirmed that 'teaching' Romani children and their parents to value education was a priority *"we needed to change Roma attitudes towards the education and calm their fears; the first step was to overcome language barriers and to introduce aspects of Romani culture in the educational curriculum"* (survey Bulgaria). *"The idea of transitory classes was accepted because Romani children could not perform on the same level as the non-Roma... they usually did not possess the needed cognitive and language skills and did not received parental support at home"* (survey Slovakia). Respondents also insisted that bringing Roma children into kindergartens was important for developing their potential. Interestingly however only few mentioned 'inadequate access to services' as a problem of non-attendance (despite mounting evidence of inadequate early childhood education and care provisions from the state – including infrastructure, teachers training and equipment). Instead the issue was pinned on parents' unawareness about the benefits of early child care and lack of interest in enrolling their children<sup>11</sup>.

It appears that the aims of PHARE assistance were not established in response to well assessed needs of Romani children or evaluation of educational structures and processes. One of the project architects bluntly stated that deep-rooted structural inequalities were beyond the projects scope and responsibility; *"we did not have enough money or time to collect exact data on Roma communities, we were expected to deliver a workable project so we came up with what we thought would work (...) the priority was to help Roma stay in school...improving the socio-economic situation or facilitating education reforms did not fit in our responsibility ... that was in the hands of other Ministries"*(Bulgaria). In turn both Ministries of Education maintained that all what was needed were 'infrastructural development' and 'greater school autonomy'. The Bulgarian Education Modernization Project introduced to restructure the education system at all levels failed to account for school segregation and economic factors preventing school attendance<sup>12</sup>. Slovakian education reforms introduced in 2000 also fell silent on persistent segregation and placement of Romani children in special schools for children with mental disabilities (Potter 2009). Macro-level reforms (i.e. recognition of teacher's assistant as 'state job category', provision of cash transfers, transportation or after-school activities) were not envisioned as a pre-requisite for generating conditions allowing for the formation of integrated education system<sup>13</sup>. In the words of Bulgarian NGO leader *"We aimed to work around the system, trying to negotiate with schools and local authorities to change their attitudes and practices ... however the greatest obstacle was that they were convinced that everything is working properly, it was the Roma children who needed to change and become better students ...segregation was pinned on the inability of Roma students to perform in 'normal' environment"*.

Presenting Roma-exclusion as a result of community's characteristics also underlined the assessment of Roma living conditions. In Bulgaria the prognostic analysis of the situation (also lacking any reference to empirical research) paid extensive attention to issues related to 'garbage accumulation' and 'unsanitary living conditions' while neglecting issues concerning social housing provision and new legislation to cut government spending on 'construction, management and refurbishment of social buildings'<sup>14</sup>. In turn Slovakia determined to invest in

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<sup>11</sup> The study conducted by Roma Education Fund in the framework of A Good Start Project, clearly demonstrated that mothers were actually very interested in enrolling their children in pre-school programs.

<sup>12</sup> The reform was a grand failure, however the template was used later on to design new strategies and interventions

<sup>13</sup> Slovakia did eventually introduce teacher's assistants as an official job category, however their employment, wages and responsibilities were dependent upon the decisions of school directors and municipalities.

<sup>14</sup> Since mid-1990s Bulgarian government has engaged in a trend of selling the social dwellings to the tenants. Between 1985 and 2001 the share of publicly owned housing fell by more than 15 percent. Given that Roma families were often unable to buy-out a flat they occupied, they were forced to move to other locations (usually with substandard conditions). This largely facilitated rapid ghettoization of Roma communities, whereby Roma families were moved to buildings of no interest to private

infrastructure and social housing did not mention issues concerning spatial segregation the absence of legal specifications of 'social housing' and unclear property ownership regulations (especially pertaining to the segregated Roma settlements in rural areas). The living conditions of Roma – though not properly examined – were referred to as 'inadequate' or 'substandard'. The causes of the experienced problems were not comprehensively articulated, however frequent references to factors such as 'large family size' and 'traditional attitudes' created a strong sense that problems were steaming from the inability of Roma communities to adapt to the mainstream environment. As one 'concerned' Mayor from Eastern Slovakia expressed "*they like to live in garbage ... they throw everything on the street, they bring in rubbish and live in it... they are raised to live like that and we cannot change it*" (Skalica 2012). The project managers communicated that the general presumption of people working on the project was that if Roma could be thought to take better care of their dwellings, the situation would automatically improve. Thus the proposed ideas about 'sustainable community development' did not internalize any statements linking the living conditions inside Roma communities to broader socio-economic factors (i.e. unemployment or cuts in welfare benefits). A closer look at the proposals demonstrates that PHARE funds were to be created in order to 'strengthened' the existing budgetary allocations for development of Roma communities, despite a common knowledge that such allocations were not in place (EC 2004). Moreover, Roma issues were not mentioned in the debates about the involvement of local authorities in co-financing mainstream agricultural and infrastructural PHARE projects. As one project manager expressed "*It was clear that Roma issues were delegated to separate category ... clean-up initiatives instead of building a sewage systems or buying agricultural land... local authorities would actually tell us that we have our own funds why do we need more from their budget*" (Kosice 2013).

Persistent attention to Roma behaviour as a factor facilitating exclusion protruded from the assessments of national employment and health conditions. Although PHARE social inclusion initiatives were also targeted at other vulnerable groups (including other ethnic minorities, disabled people and youth) only Roma 'vulnerability' was presented as a product of behavioral factors such as inadequate working habits, lack of motivation or substandard hygiene standards. Public employment services and health institutions were considered unable to fully cater to Roma population, however the reason was not identified in terms of low administrative capacity, low labour demand or poverty, but rather as Roma 'inability (or unwillingness) to abide by the existing procedures and protocols. In an interview, a Slovak project manager claimed that "*Roma have difficulties following regulations, they miss appointments or do not show up at all ... it is best to hire mediators who can teach and help them interact with public services and assume the expected responsibilities*". The interviewee, however was not able to reference any study or research supporting his opinion, instead he claimed that "*this is a well known fact*". In Bulgaria structured unemployment as an issue was all together omitted, with only small reference made to the 'lack of foreign investment'<sup>15</sup>. Although in both countries health initiatives were more sensitive to 'persistent inequalities' in accessing social opportunities and services, they pinned exclusion on factors steaming from spatial isolation (lack of public services in the proximity of Roma communities) rather than from more structural factors such as discrimination or budgetary cuts in social provisions. Despite the fact that nation-wide assessment of Roma health risk was not conducted, prognostics tended to refer to Roma cultural habits as a leading cause of deteriorating health. Bulgarian health initiatives stated that "*Roma health risks steam from inadequate hygiene and eating habits*" making also a puzzling reference to "high rates of smoking and alcohol abuse"<sup>16</sup>. Slovakian

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capital. Currently the percentage of municipal owned houses is less than 3 percent (see SHARE at: <http://www.socialhousingaction.com/social%20housing%20in%20Bulgaria.htm>)

<sup>15</sup> From the document it is difficult to infer whether increase in foreign investment would be beneficial for the entire economy or for Roma integration measures.

<sup>16</sup> This is puzzling since no research was made on cigarette or alcohol intake among Roma, and there are no existing indicators that such intake is higher among Roma than non-Roma.

program for improving access to health for Roma minorities insisted that the root of the problem is lack of education (including sexual education) and 'broken communication channels between medical professionals and Roma population'. Despite the fact that all the above factors could be extended to the entire population, such efforts were never made, and both countries acknowledged Roma as a separate target group. *"It was set in stone that Roma don't know how to take care of their own health, and they need to be though how to do it ... somehow it was understood that Roma are dealing with some specific illnesses ...yet funny enough references to tuberculosis, infections and malnutrition – illnesses experienced by people living in segregated communities – were never addressed"* (NGO Eastern Slovakia)

In short both countries provided a diagnostic of Roma exclusion based largely on political perceptions rather than in-depth empirical examination of the 'problem'. Although the scope and scale of the exclusion was acknowledged, including its multidimensional dimension, the causes were explained in terms of individual propensities while structural dimensions received very scarce critical attention. Few critics have questioned the value of post-communist economic development in facilitating social-cohesion and equality. Even less consideration was given to governance issues related to institutional provisions, budgetary allocations, and partnership. This oversight has created a false impression that Romani communities' welfare is not optimized because of the substandard qualifications and skills of individuals considered indispensable for partaking in socio-economic activities. Consequently it was conceived that improvement in personal development would automatically lead to the processes of inclusion. As such integration strategies relied solely on the instrumentalist approach, limited to training activities, and improvements in living conditions. Meanwhile, question such as; how best to respond to the needs of minorities and those with special needs?; how inclusion projects should be organized in terms of the content, knowledge, skills, and values of the target group?; remained largely outside of the scope of proposed changes. The ubiquity of this understanding has revealed the extent to which large numbers of stakeholders, including many who claim to be committed to substantive structural change, accept legitimacy of the mainstream institutional settings. This in turn generated a system of measures which were aimed at providing quick 'fix-up' solutions rather than long-term inclusion strategies. Perhaps indirectly some of these measures actually contributed to further isolation of Roma issues from mainstream policy-making schemes.

### **Prescriptive Dimension**

In both countries the prescriptive dimension aimed to elevate the perceived problem with innovative pilot projects. The proposed initiatives aimed at targeting the 'multidimensionality' of exclusion in a 'comprehensive and meaningful manner'. However, the innovative and multidimensional aspect was soon abandoned in favour of 'demand-driven' and fragmented initiatives targeted at all policy areas – including education, employment, health anti-discrimination and culture. Despite the variety of projects introduced, one common denominator could be inferred - the isolation of measures targeted at Roma-inclusion from wider socio-economic reforms and programmes. Moreover it became clear that problems elaborated in the prognostic section were not always reflected in the proposed solutions. The most obvious example was the scarcity of employment placement initiatives despite a strong awareness of severe unemployment rates among the Roma population. Also the fact that only two initiatives (one in each country) aimed to develop data collection and monitoring mechanisms, despite the acknowledgment of pervasive lack of data on Roma socio-economic conditions. Finally despite a strong preoccupation with 'ethnic dimension of poverty' and specificity of Roma exclusion, the measures appeared largely untailored to face such challenges. Instead choices were made to dispense a variety of training initiatives supplemented by small-scale project based infrastructural developments, the link between the two being extremely weak. Few anti-discrimination measures were outlined, but these catered more to promotion of cultural activities than generation of legislative changes and development of monitoring instruments. In Slovakia

anti-discrimination was addressed through various training activities, introduced in an ad-hoc and fragmented manner (Heil, Hojsik, Kostka 2013).

According to the survey respondents the PHARE inclusion measures prioritize delivery of aid projects to Romani children (usually in form of language programs and training of school mediators) and the socially-excluded (through vocational training and literacy courses for adults), as well as enhancement of Roma awareness about labour opportunities and access to public services. Training initiatives for Roma population (in the area of education, employment and health) became the most popular tool used for tackling exclusion. Roma were defined as the main target group with little efforts made to acknowledge the heterogeneity of this minority group (not only cultural but also socio-economic). Soon most of the stakeholders in one way or another were involved in designing and implementing activities aimed at enhancing skills and knowledge of Roma population. Often these proposals did not outline grounds for the choice of particular training theme or provide an explanation of how it will contribute to Roma inclusion. The belligerent faith in the benefits of training is well captured in the statement made by one of the architects of PHARE training initiatives *"you cannot go wrong with training ... everybody benefits from a new set of skills and knowledge ...especially those who are under-educated...only through training can we motivate the vulnerable groups give them a sense of pride"*. This normative thinking was so widely spread that most of the project managers did not feel it was needed to introduce recruitment mechanisms or benchmark money for proper impact assessment and monitoring activities. There was also a widely shared conviction that implementing training activities in localities with large Roma population would automatically generate popular interest. This assumption proved to be largely mistaken, as one Roma activist pointed out *"...because Roma were never really consulted about their needs or expectations, there was little bottom up interest in the proposed activities ...moreover employment training did not guaranteed job placement ... people got quickly disillusioned because upon completion of the training their situation really didn't change ...everybody could tell that only the trainers got something out of it ... and the truth is we saw maybe one or two Roma in that position"* (Slovakia). The lack of demand, was attributed by project managers to Roma being uninterested in socio-economic advancement rather than to design of the training themselves. One respondent noted *"we were not able to induce interest among the Roma ... although we still managed to provide several thousand people with literacy and numeracy trainings, the number was much lower than expected"* (Bulgaria). Similar statements were provided by respondents from Slovakia working on employment and health training projects. Roma activists and NGO managers on the other hand were in agreement that most measures were not tailored to address exclusion of minorities *"they copied and passed projects used to enhance skills of those people who already held a job ... in areas dealing with dramatic rise in unemployment and widely spread discrimination projects design in headquarters of Bratislava business industry are simply a waste of money"* (Slovakia). The lack of agreement on the relevance and effectiveness of the delivered programs was the product of prevalence of normative thinking that did not account for the need of ex-ante and post-ante evaluations or monitoring activities (Heil, Hojsik, Kostka 2013).

Criticisms of Roma participation overshadowed the performance of measures providing training for public employees (including teachers and doctors). All the introduced social inclusion projects had a training component (i.e. training of educational mediators, health advisers, etc.) largely focused on enabling public employees to 'interact with the members of the Roma minority more effectively, and strengthening their awareness of Roma issues'. However none of the institutions or line ministries received state budgets to incorporate the newly gained expertise in their daily activities and interactions with the public. The introduced agencies catering to minority issues (i.e. National Council on Ethnic and Demographic Issues in Bulgaria) were endowed with coordinative functions and limited public budget. They also lack decision-making authority or extensive links with the Roma communities. Interestingly, these institutions were not the main target group for training activities, despite

receiving PHARE funds for 'capacity building activities'. More problematic was the fact that participation in trainings was strictly voluntary (no conditionality was placed upon public bureaucracies) and not attached to institutional benefits (i.e. recognizable certificates or credentials, wages increases etc.). As one of the interviewees stated *"the training were designed quite well and offered useful information and methodology, however, we had difficult time attracting participants ...Roma issues were not popular and public servants wanted to avoid becoming 'Gypsy specialists' especially since no greater benefits were provided upon completion of the project. Those who joined were already interested in Roma issues ...so we were sort of preaching to the converted crowd"* (Bratislava). Moreover the content of the trainings dealt mostly with the recognition of 'cultural diversity' and 'specific socialization of Roma clients' and offered little opportunities to enhance knowledge of legislative procedures and legal statutes. The main drive was to train 'mediators' who could serve as linchpins between the community public services. Once again the underlining assumption was that the essential institutional model for inclusion was already in place, and now all that was needed was to convince Roma to use it. As such no wider reforms were envisioned and Roma issues were confided to PHARE initiatives. Moreover, the authorities felt little need to scale-up the projects or make them part of their budget. As one of the Roma activist stated *"the authorities were satisfied to use European money in social-inclusion programs, it automatically freed them from the responsibility of taking care of the problem... they would cut their budget and simply fill the whole with EU funds"* (Bratislava 2013).

Another set of measures aimed to facilitate infrastructural development. In this area Slovakia benchmarked and allocated the largest share of PHARE provisions, while Bulgaria followed with creation of the Roma urban development fund and sustainable development programmes. With time however it became quite clear that infrastructure measures did not directly target the Roma population, and often bypassed geographical areas with segregated Roma neighbourhoods. Respondents confirmed that this omission was not so much a product of deliberate neglect, but a consequence of legal ambiguities (Heli, Hojsik, Kostka 2013). The legal standing of segregated communities in both Slovakia and Bulgaria was never fully resolved (UNDP 2012), while in Slovakia the very definition of 'social housing' continues to be a subject of fractious political debate. Given that infrastructural PHARE aid for Roma communities was not linked to any national or regional infrastructural strategies most of the aid was dispensed in 'crisis prevention' manner. In other words money was used to provide ad-hocks repairs for the most desolate dwellings, or construct cheap housing in most isolated communities. Such practices, although often viewed as positive by final beneficiaries, contributed to deepening of spatial segregation. One of the project managers stated that the legal barriers and lack of support from the government severely hindered the inclusive dimension of housing measures *"we could not secure necessary building permits nor where we able to connect our efforts to larger scale infrastructural developments ... the government provided only the necessary co-financing what barely covered primary development ... we could not provide assistance for maintenance of new housing ... it was beyond our scope and resources"* (Slovakia). Interestingly in Bulgaria housing measures, implemented in a culturally mix environment, singled out Roma as a priority target group, what many though a lost opportunity to facilitate solidarity between different groups facing economic hardships. *"The creation of the development fund for Roma neighbourhoods was totally negligent of non-Roma living in the proximity, this right from the start incited animosity inside the communities, strengthened by the sad fact that most of the Roma residents were not aware that such fund was created"* (respondent Bulgaria). It soon became apparent that the housing projects were not able to delivered lasting results mostly because the beneficiary population could not be reintegrated into the labour market thus lacking funds for supporting their new dwelling. Continuous cuts in social assistance only reinvigorated the issues *"people were left with bare subsistence; the money was not enough to cover basic utilities or maintain the housing in proper condition ... we were not able to work with the community since our project was considered a one-time based initiative"* (Bulgaria). Interestingly money which could be used for such follow-up maintenance projects were used up for miscellaneous activities ranging from 'cleaning-up' campaigns and training projects to setting up information centers.

Overall, the choice of PHARE measures could not realistically hope to achieve more than to test new approaches and develop some working practices among project managers. The inability to attach the measures to mainstream governance practices meant that PHARE projects were not able to influence policies. Few successful cases (i.e. introduction of zero classes in Slovakia) should be viewed with caution, as they also internalize the highly politicized notion that it is Roma who need to adapt to the existing system. This means that these programs are not aimed at changing models of governance and altering power relations, but rather at assimilating Roma and inserting them into the 'consolidated' system of mainstream values and expectations. A failure to do so could thus be pinned upon the people and not the faulty prescriptions underlying the presented measure. As one Roma activist expressed *"every time impacts are not noticeable the fingers are pointed at the Roma ...their lack of ambition or interest in improving their situation ... however the truth is that nobody ever talks to this people ...they bring in these programs without actually confirming that they are desired or even needed"* (Sofia 2013). The respondents were in agreement that technocratically developed solutions often failed to gain support and participation of the involved municipalities and Roma and non-Roma inhabitants, what in some cases even jeopardized the integrity of projects' delivery. However it is clear that most of the PHARE projects were designed just in such a manner. This hindered not only effectiveness and legitimacy of introduced measures, but contributed to anchoring segregation – as Roma were locked in specific social-assistance measures while ignored in larger development measures. One Roma activist expressed his frustration and such course of action *"EU money is a nice and clean way to keep Roma far away from everybody else ... the elaborate schemes to introduce mediators or field social workers for example ...all they do is make sure that Roma themselves cannot approach public servants, that a third party is needed to promote 'normal' interaction ...By now post-office clerks don't want to talk to Roma ...they want to talk to the mediators"* (Bratislava 2013).

## **Conclusion**

Regarding overall results achieved, the main message of former practitioners is that PHARE could not have hoped to achieve more than to function as a pilot programme, to raise awareness and test approaches that – with more significant funding either from national or structural funds resources – could achieve more significant results. However the real shortcoming of the entire project was the consistent representation of Roma exclusion as a phenomenon largely independent of mainstream socio-economic development. The perception of specificity of Roma quandary was not supported by empirical data, but a set of normative and highly politicized notions about what causes poverty and marginalization. At the same time the dispensed measures followed a standard model and were not in any substantial way tailored to the needs and expectations of the community. This not only hindered their sustainability, but also created a notion that Roma are unable to follow through with integration activities. Looking at this observations, one could infer that the welfare of Roma cannot be separated from that of society overall. European funding does carry the promise of inciting lasting and significant social change. Accordingly, it is a tool that carries the promise of achieving a lasting and significant improvement in the fortunes of the Roma minority, but only if there are consistent and comprehensive national policies, able institutions, true partnership with stakeholders in place. Pre-accession funds can help to progress into that direction. But they will not be able to reach that goal on their own.

To be of any use for the contending member states IPA programming needs to introduce meaningful and comprehensive strategies that reject the highly individualized discourse on exclusion and focus more on structural dimensions. Roma integration issues must be examined and pursued in the framework of the overall economic and social development strategies of the national governments. On the one hand, seen from the angle of structural and social policy overall, infrastructure development is "useless" without investment promotion. Investments won't happen if there is no possibility to provide for the necessary qualified workforce. And vocational training is futile if there are no jobs for which the unemployed could be educated. On the other hand,

from the perspective of Roma integration, no significant change will be achieved for the Roma until and unless integration policy is mainstreamed into all relevant sectoral and regional government and local policies. It must be seen clearly that disadvantaged minorities, including the Roma, are suffering from the inadequacy of access to quality education, employment services, child care, social care and health. This means that – rather than providing effective aid in overcoming their disadvantages resulting from social prejudice unemployment and poverty – the state is often one of the causes of their problems, by itself putting Roma at a disadvantage. Here, IPA assistance can play an important part by improving the efficiency of these public services, and also by providing targeted assistance to service providers for Roma communities. Finally it must be remembered that in many cases, the real impact of social development projects can only be determined several years after – therefore, long-term monitoring of supported projects is essential if lessons are to be used in the design of future interventions. In general, in order to use the potential of EU funding, Roma-exclusion should be seen as part of systemic shortcomings and not as individual choice or cultural preferences.

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## ANNEX 1

PHARE National, Multi-Beneficiary, Cross-Border and other Programmes - Financing Memoranda & Project Fiches

Bulgaria: [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/fiche\\_projet/index.cfm?page=410708&c=BULGARIA](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/fiche_projet/index.cfm?page=410708&c=BULGARIA)

- BG 9907 **Promoting the integration of Roma community** (1999 obj.1 Integration of the Roma)
- BG9914 **Beautiful Bulgaria II: Temporary Employment and Vocational Training** (1999 obj.8 Employment and Social Affairs)
  
- BG0104.01 **Roma People Integration** (2001 obj.4 Ethnic Integration and Civil Society)
- BG0104.02 **Ensuring Minority Access to Health Care** (2001 obj.4 Ethnic Integration and C.S.)
- BG0102.06 **Social Inclusion** (2002 obj.2 Economic and Social Cohesion)
- BG0204.01 **Urbanization and Social Development in Minority Areas** (2002 obj.4 Ethnic Integration and Civil Society)
  
- 2003-004-937.01.03 **Educational and Medical Integration of Minorities** (Political Criteria)
  
- 2004-016-711.01.03 **DSI Minorities Integration** (obj.1 Political Criteria)
- BG 2004/006-070.05.01 **Ethnic Minorities Labour Market Integration** (obj.5 Economic and Social Cohesion)
  
- 2005-017-353.01.03 **Ethnic Minorities** (obj.1 Political Criteria)
- 2006 018-343.01.02 **Ethnic Minorities** (National Programme Part II)

Slovakia: [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/fiche\\_projet/index.cfm?page=16513&c=SLOVAKIA%20\(ARCHIVED\)](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/fiche_projet/index.cfm?page=16513&c=SLOVAKIA%20(ARCHIVED))

- SR9905.02 **Political criteria Sub-programme: Minority tolerance programme** (1999 Political Criteria)
- SK0002 **Improvement of the situation of the Roma** (2000 Obj.1 Political Criteria)
- SK0009.03 **Human Resources Development through counselling and training at regional level** (2000 Obj.8 Economic and Social Cohesion)
- SR0103.02 **Infrastructure for Roma settlements** (2001 Obj.1 Political Criteria)
- SR0103.01 **Support to the Roma minority in the educational field** (2001 Obj.1 Political Criteria)
- SR0107.02 1.2 **Human Resources Development through preventive and individual active measures for the unemployed** (2001 Obj.5 Economic and Social Cohesion)
- 2002/000.610-03 **Further integration of the Roma children in the educational field and improved living conditions** (2002 Obj.2 Protection of minorities)
- 2002/000.610-15 **Human Resource Development Grant Scheme** (2002 Obj.6 Economic and Social Cohesion)
- 2003-004-995.03.11 **Grant Scheme on Equal Opportunities and Social Inclusion Support** (2003 Obj.3 Free movement of services)
- 2003-004-995.01.05 **Integration of Roma in Education** (2003 Obj.1 Political Criteria)
- 2003-004-995.01.06 **Health Care for the Roma Minority** (2003 Obj.1 Political Criteria)

