

### ***The Roma in Turkey***

Turkey's Roma community represents a special color in the palette when we are looking at the picture of the European Roma, and the geographical characteristics broaden our view to a larger scale, taking into consideration that more than 95% of Turkey belongs to the Asian continent. Roma started their historic journey from India about a thousand years ago, and a large group settled in Turkey in the time of the Ottoman Empire.

Today, Roma in Turkey reveal the art of the mixture between geographical multiplicity and historic noteworthiness.

According to official data, about 500,000 Roma live in Turkey. It is estimated that the real number reaches four to five million, taking into consideration that large numbers are illiterate and do not possess personal documentation. Through the years, the Roma have been given different names in different regions of Turkey. They are called Çingene(Chingene) in Western Anatolia and Thrace, Mutrip in Van-Ardahan and surrounding areas, Elekçi (Elekchi) in Central Anatolia, Poşa (Posha) in the Erzurum area, Cano (Djano) in Adana, and Esmer vatandaş (esmer vatandaş, or dark citizen), "Köçer" (Kocher) and "Arabacı" (arabadj') in various regions of Anatolia. The Roma in Turkey are mainly divided into three groups: the Rom, Dom and Lom communities.

About 95% of the Roma, also called "settled nomads," live in big cities, earn their living by playing music, selling flowers, basketry, tin-working, or collecting waste and iron. There are communities that still preserve their nomadic traditions. They live in warm areas in winter and move to outer districts of cities in summer.

Roma in Turkey are considered as equal citizens but with significantly poorer living conditions.

### ***The 2010 Roma gathering in Istanbul***

In a festive atmosphere, with music and dancing, more than 15,000 Roma from all over Turkey welcomed Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan on the afternoon of Sunday, March 14, 2010 in the Abdi Ipekci sports hall in Istanbul.

Ms. Elmas Arus, Chairwoman of the Zero-Discrimination Association highlighted in her impressive opening remarks that the problems of the Roma start as early as their birth. "We thought that our school uniforms would make us equal to all other school children. Unfortunately our Roma origin was such a strong uniform that it separated us from our friends, and our teachers settled us in the last rows in the classrooms. These uniforms are the ones that we have to wear for a lifetime.

The Premier explained that he is familiar with Roma issues because he was born in the famous Roma settlement of Kasimpasa in Istanbul. *"I heard every derogatory term used for you. I saw the way you were outcast and framed as 'gypsies', 'tziganes', 'chingene' and many other names," he said. "Let them say what they please. What is important is that you are human beings and you have to be treated equally to all the others who live on this land"*

*"I don't want to see my Roma brothers living in the tents anymore. I don't want to see them living in the destroyed houses anymore,"* said Erdogan as he unveiled plans for the Housing Development Administration, or TOKİ, to increase living standards for the Roma by building new houses in 40 provinces. He explained that the Roma families will get new houses in the framework of the project at affordable prices, with installments of 100 Turkish Liras (50 Euro) per month in total of a 20 years` payments. The construction has already started, and the first families are expected to move in early summer 2011.

Many of the Roma called the event a historic milestone because, as they explained, they have never been invited by any government officials until today to talk about their hardships. "We were always the people on the margins, the forgotten ones," an old man answered to a question posed by a journalist from the national media.

### ***Some concrete actions of the Turkish government 2010 - 2012***

Just one week after the Prime Minister`s meeting with Roma in Istanbul, the Edirne municipality made a move to support the government`s democratic initiative. Mustafa Büyük, the governor of Edirne, has guaranteed jobs for all university graduates from the Roma community. Edirne is the biggest province in the region of Thrace and is also known for its considerably large population of Roma.

A Roma Research Center was established in Southern Turkey at the Aydin Adnan Menderes University.

Couple of affirmative actions was applied to the huge housing renewal programme of the government across the country. Roma were provided with secured number of apartments in each locality.

Similar affirmative actions were applied to the wide range of public work programs throughout the country in which about 1000 Roma per city were granted short-term work contracts.