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**Elvis
Beriša** |

Hope Stronger Than Fear

HOPE STRONGER THAN FEAR

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ROMA
SCHOLARSHIP
FOUNDATION

At the age of 22 **Elvis Beriša** has managed to achieve a significant portfolio of education and work experience. He is a law student with knowledge, amongst other, of research, human rights and the ways to best support marginalised Roma and Egyptian communities living in Montenegro.

Being a member of Roma community himself and speaking Roma and Albanian languages, gives Elvis both access and understanding of the issues which often stay hidden from the eye of an outsider.

But that would not suffice on its own. Had Elvis not shown an impressive ability to communicate with a vast range of people, to use his analytical skills and to put his findings in writing and place them in the wider context of Montenegrin society, his year-long trainee journalist position in Monitor would not have been a great success it was.

The result is the series of articles which we are now proud to publish. By the insight they give into the life and issues Roma community is facing in Montenegro today, we consider them to be a landmark journalism, which we hope will serve as an example to follow for the rest of the media and as a valuable learning material for the Montenegrin public and the decision makers.



Introductory Notes

Knut Neumayer, Director Programme Europe, ERSTE Foundation

Dear Readers,

It is my utmost pleasure to write these lines in order to close another year of a very successful project – the second internship of an individual from the Montenegrin Roma/Ashkali/Egyptian (RAE) community who spent nearly one year working with journalistic professionals from weekly “Monitor”. ERSTE Foundation had the great pleasure to support Elvis Berisha through Monitor’s Centre for Media and Democracy in the course of ten months, having him as the second intern in the editorial office of Montenegro’s first independent weekly magazine.

We highly appreciated Elvis’ work, not only from the perspective of empowering topics of a fragile minority throughout various reports and covers in the media, but also for being able to exchange various socio-economic and cultural perspectives about many open issues which this minority (among others) has to struggle with in modern day Montenegro.

ERSTE Foundation also saw the project as an opportunity for mutual exchange between our fellow and the editorial office he was working for, giving both sides the possibility to learn from each other.

During the course of his internship Elvis touched various topics, such as the overall social status of members of the Roma community, the role of women and the changing influences of tradition in their daily work, but also burning questions regarding the relationship of official state institutions with the local RAE communities.

One very tragic event which happened in Podgorica at the beginning of Elvis’ internship was the destruction of refugee Camp No. 1 in Konik, which burnt down to the grounds due to the poor condition of electric appliances. This devastating incident - and especially the overall social consequences which resulted out of it (leaving nearly 150 families without a habitat) - has marked the first part of Elvis’ internship and some of the topics in his articles.

Thanks to his ambitious and enthusiastic work, we have now the possibility to critically review some of the main events which marked the RAE community life in Montenegro from mid-2012 until late spring 2013, with a unique example of journalistic themes focusing on double fragilities of one of the most vulnerable populations in Europe. Be it issues of women rights within the RAE community, or the socio-medical conditions of HIV positive individuals in Montenegro, the outstanding aspect of all presented articles is the general attempt of the author to reflect on burning problems of social inclusion from a multi-perspective angle in the youngest EU-candidate country.

Therefore, this booklet represents not only a collection of Elvis Berisha’s journalistic endeavours, but also a direct effort to help to empower those fragile parts of Montenegrin society to act and react as multipliers of their own – but also others’ - causes strife for a broader public recognition and inclusion.

Milka Tadić Mijović, Executive Director, Weekly Monitor

This publication is a product of the training of members of the Roma and Egyptian communities, organised for two years running by the weekly *Monitor* with the support of the ERSTE Foundation. The distinguishing feature of this project is that it targets minority communities with a significant number of members experiencing extreme difficulties living in Montenegro and in the wider region. Many live in poverty, lack basic education, have no employment opportunities and thousands of them are refugees displaced by the recent conflicts in the region.

The aim of the project is to contribute to full integration of the vulnerable groups. That is one of the greatest challenges which Montenegro is facing, because members of those communities are still disadvantaged and in spite of some progress being made, the initiatives to promote their needs and interest are still rare. Raising awareness about the position of Roma and Egyptians, but also about how they can contribute to the development of the whole of the society, is not possible without the media who have a special responsibility to address this.

We believe that it is important to include as many Roma and Egyptians as possible to work in the Montenegrin media. Elvis Berisa in his year long apprenticeship with *Monitor* contributed to informing Montenegrin public not only about the important issues to do with the position of Roma and the Egyptians, but also about the issues affecting other groups.

Berisa's training in Monitor involved a number of stages and his progression through them was swift, thanks to his exceptional journalistic talents.

His particular strength has been his ethical journalistic stance and his facts based reporting. He distinguished himself by treating issues he wrote about in a comprehensive and broad manner and by addressing important issues of public interest.

After all the above is said, it is clear that Elvis has a special talent for journalism.

During the first months of his training Berisa mastered key journalistic forms and techniques – writing short news and reports, later moving on to cover particular issues and themes using an analytical approach and carrying out journalistic research.

Through Elvis' articles collected in this publication, he demonstrated his understanding of the subjects he wrote about and the processes taking place. He developed excellent working relationships with the representatives of the civil sector as well as state institutions and organisations.

RESIDENTS OF THE KAMP IN KONIK 1 AFTER 13 YEARS OF PROMISES

Back to the beginning, again

The fires which destroyed the little that residents of the Konik camp have gained in the past 13 years in Montenegro, closed the circle of unfulfilled promises and hopes. And under the tents, just like 13 years ago, there is still a glimmer of hope amongst the Roma that there is still a chance that they will find a refuge in Montenegro.

Camp 1 in Konik, 13 years after: 150 families of Roma and Egyptian populations, refugees from Kosovo, live in tents again. Exactly like more than a decade ago when they reached Montenegro seeking refuge. Temporary housing in dilapidated shacks which they were given in Konik, acquired air of permanence. Nearly two weeks ago the fire swept through the camp and nearly all the huts were burned, leaving more than 800 people homeless. The residents of Camp 1 in Konik are just a small part of those who, after the war in Kosovo in 1999 arrived in Montenegro. Only within the period of October to December 1999 32, 040 displaced persons from Kosovo were registered.

Generally speaking Montenegro was accepting refugees and internally displaced persons who at the time, made more than 20 percent of its population, but the relevant legislation was lacking to ensure sustainable solutions for the new arrivals. The international organizations - UNHCR, SDC and HELP provided help. The Roma and Egyptians from Kosovo were given family cards for humanitarian aid. They also received tents which provided a shelter where refugees tried, if for a moment to forget what they have been through and what they had lost. With the help of UNHCR, SDC and HELP they moved to the prefabricated barracks and the Commissariat for Displaced Persons of the Republic of Montenegro was tasked with finding a sustainable, permanent solution.

It was supposed to be solved by the National Strategy for Permanent Solution of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons Issues, which was adopted in March 2005. The aim of this Strategy was to find within a three year timescale an optimal solution for refugees and internally displaced persons residing in Montenegro. The Strategy set out as the options *repatriation, local integration and going to a third country*. From 2005 aiming to achieve sustainable return of internally displaced persons to Kosovo, the Bureau for the Care of Refugees has participated with the UNHCR and the Danish Refugee Council in the implementation of the "Go-See" project. Families who were interested in returning had the possibility to use a variety of ways (site visits to the place of prior residence, meetings with representatives of the Provisional Government of Kosovo, meetings with the representatives of local authorities) to find out about the feasibility of their return and to get a realistic picture of the situation in the places they fled.

The Bureau for the Care of Refugees has said that more than 300 families showed interest in returning to their original place of residence. Most of the

Before the camp burned the Vice President of the National Council of the Roma and the Egyptians Mohammed Uković warned of the fire danger. 'Is a reminder needed that young people lost their lives in the past few years in fires in the areas where Roma and Egyptians live? Some municipalities have received significant funding to improve the housing conditions of Roma and Egyptians and that work has not even started, let alone being finalised.

Coordinator of the Human Rights NGO Civic Alliance Milan Radovic suggested that the funds raised at the donors conference in Sarajevo should be used to buy a certain number of flats currently on sale in Podgorica and other cities and by doing so solve the housing problem of the camp inhabitants and avoid segregation.

displaced people have opted for *local integration*. Those responsible for their integration into Montenegrin society failed to implement what was required by the Strategy to achieve this. Instead, a new strategy was adopted.

A Strategy to Improve the Position of Roma and Egyptians 2008-2012 was for the residents of the camp a ray of hope in those bleak and uncertain times. In September 2009 the Government adopted an action plan to address the status of displaced persons residing in Montenegro. Unfortunately for the residents of the camp almost nothing has changed. And now they're back in the tents.

Before the camp burned the Vice President of the National Council of the Roma and Egyptians **Mohammed Uković** warned of the risk of fire.

'Is a reminder needed that young people lost their lives in the past few years in fires in the areas where Roma and Egyptians live? Some municipalities have received significant funding to improve housing conditions of Roma and Egyptians and that work has not even started, let alone being finalised'. For the implementation of the objectives of the Strategy 2008-2012, the Government had made available about 30 percent of the budgeted funds and

the remaining 70 percent went who knows where', said Uković. He reminded that the Government had promised to make 400,000 euros available just for the costs of the first year of implementation of this document.

The Secretariat of Social Welfare in the capital held a meeting in early July, before the fire broke out, with the representatives of the Red Cross, the town's street cleaning company 'Cistoca', the Office for Protection of the Capital and the Municipal Police, in order to prevent possible fires in Konik camps and to improve cleaning services.

'In the area of Konik 1 and 2, there is a danger of fire due to high temperatures in spite of daily services provided by the relevant agencies', was a statement at the time by Podgorica's Bureau of Public Relations.

The fire was not prevented. The Mayor of Podgorica **Miomir Mugoša** said that tents in the Konik camp were then the only possible and realistic solution and that the authorities were considering the medium term solution, and that the most realistic solution would be creating a site with caravans and portacabins.

The residents of the camp were unhappy with the temporary accommodation and a hundred of them protested in front of the Government building and then went to the Red Cross and the UNHCR. After the meeting with the UNHCR a promise was made to them that they would get a roof over their heads within three months. The Government committed to provide 150 containers as a midterm accommodation solution. They also promised to build nine residential units near the capital's landfill site, in spite of the Strategy envisaging that housing will not be built in this location.

The Coordinator of the Human Rights NGO Civic Alliance, **Milan Radović** suggested that the funds raised at the donors conference in Sarajevo should be used to buy a certain number of flats currently on sale in Podgorica and other cities as a housing solution for these affected by fire. 'The new interim solutions would only prolong the agony of the families and would also most certainly be a drain on resources available for the permanent solution of their housing needs', said Radovic.

The fires which destroyed the little that residents of the Konik camp have gained in the past 13 years in Montenegro closed the circle of unfulfilled promises and hopes. And under the tents, just like 13 years ago there is still a glimmer of hope amongst the Roma that there is still a chance that they will find a refuge in Montenegro. In any case, the EU has set Montenegro a condition: it has to find solutions for the Roma and Egyptians and particularly for those of them who are refugees and displaced persons from Kosovo.

When those in charge discriminate

It is two weeks after the start of the school year but children receiving social benefits and Roma children are still waiting for their free books. Those responsible for providing them promise to distribute them - as soon as possible. When exactly that will be, is not known. It is also unknown what the impact of attending school without textbooks will be on the educational achievement of the affected children.

I take my grandson to school and he asks me every day when he will get the books. I do not know what to answer him. If there are no free textbooks, I'm not able to buy them', said **Sureta Cakoli** barely suppressing tears. Five years ago, she lost a son and now she takes care of her grandson. She does not know, she says, how she makes ends meet.

A whole two weeks after the start of the school year and the free textbooks for the children users of social benefits and Roma children, are still not available in spite of the responsible Minister saying that they would reach the children by the 5 of September.

So far the schools received 7,138 sets of schoolbooks and 8,449 foreign language textbooks and the Government estimates that there are over 15,000 students in elementary and secondary schools who should receive free textbooks.

The Minister of Labour and Social Services **Suad Numanović** said that the government would provide textbooks for all and for that purpose, the Government had set aside around 900,000 euros. Why all 15,000 sets were not distributed, the Government did not explain.

After the meeting held on Friday the 31 of August, Numanović said that books could be obtained from that day onwards. He explained that the condition was that the students had to return the free books they were given year before to the school libraries and submit the entitlement certificate from the Centre for Social Work.

Most of the children of parents entitled to welfare support attended the school in recent days without textbooks, because they could not obtain them in schools or in the Centre for Social Work offices. The parents say that this is happening in spite of the promises and the books don't seem to be on their way to the socially disadvantaged.

Many parents who are in receipt of welfare benefits say that they were not informed when and where the paperwork for the free textbooks was to be

'Had I known that the books would be this late I would have borrowed money from someone to buy books for my child who now has to go to school without them', said a disappointed parent as he waited in front of the office of the Director of 'Bozidar Vukovic Podgoričanin' school, trying to find out how to obtain the textbooks. He wasn't the only one in that situation.

submitted. But even those who have done all that was required well in time, have not received the books.

One of the parents who submitted all in time, told the *Monitor* said that he did not understand why his children did not receive the books whole two weeks after the start of the school.

'Had I known that the books would be this late I would have borrowed money from someone to buy books for my child who now has to go to school without them', said a disappointed parent as he waited in front of the office of the Director of 'Bozidar Vukovic Podgoričanin' school trying to find out how to obtain the textbooks. He wasn't the only one in that situation.

There, in front of the office of the Director, parents of Roma students wait every day since the school started hoping to find out when their children will receive their books. They are concerned about their children attending the school without books.

They are angry because the media says that the Government provided free textbooks to all other children and theirs have been going to school for two weeks without

them.

REGION AND FREE TEXTBOOKS

Free books are available in most of the former Yugoslav republics.

In Slovenia, which is a member of the EU, students are given free textbooks from the first to the ninth grade, from the start of the school year and at the end of the year they are expected to return them to school.

In Croatia, the authorities granted disadvantaged families money for textbooks.

In Serbia, the distribution of free textbooks for this school year is already done. Free textbooks are given to the children from disadvantaged categories for the first three grades of primary school. The Belgrade Municipality has provided free textbooks for students of all nine grades, each Belgrade child who is entitled gets two sets of books, one for

learning at home and another for use at school.

The Government of Republika Srpska entity provides free textbooks for the first and second grades of primary schools.

In the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina 17,000 newly enrolled children from seven cantons will receive free books.

Examples of the regional good practice in establishing equal opportunities in education should be a guide to the education authorities in Montenegro in order to prevent the youngest ones becoming a part of the vulnerable groups, although in the current economic situation there is a fine line between those belonging and those not counting as vulnerable groups.

Mila Čaveliš: 'First, we distributed the books to the students who at the end of the school year in July, filled in the Ministry of Labour and Social Security forms and provided a certificate of entitlement to social benefits. We are now updating the data for the second round of distribution.'

The Center for Civic Education (CGO) urged the Minister of Education and Minister of Labour and Social Security to determine who is responsible for failing to provide books for the students from vulnerable groups who are entitled to them. They say that this had put those pupils at the further disadvantage in relation to the rest of pupils.

'This is not the first time that textbooks for students from socially vulnerable families are late. In the last school year, students whose parents received welfare support had been waiting for a month to receive free books. The teachers tried to manage the situation and minimise the negative impact on the delivery of the study program, but it was the children who suffered most', said Program Coordinator of the CGO **Danilo Ajković**.

The Director of the Primary School 'Bozidar Vukovic Podgoričanin', **Mila Čaveliš** told *Monitor* that the textbooks are currently being distributed.

'We first distributed the books to those students who at the end of the previous school year in July completed the Ministry of Labour and Social Security forms and submitted them with the confirmation that they are in receipt of welfare benefits', she said.

'There are parents who say that they handed the paperwork to someone else to submit on their behalf but it got lost, so we are now in the process of dealing with the paperwork which was completed and approved belatedly', explained Čaveliš.

The parents are contacting us daily in order to be included in the subsequent list and thus exercise their right to free textbooks which the Government has promised in the second round of distribution. However, many have lost confidence because they failed initially to exercise their constitutionally guaranteed rights.

The Ministry of Education and Sports and the Ministry of Labour and Social Security informed the public that the first round of distribution of textbooks will be followed by the second. 'As soon as possible', they said. When exactly that will be, is not known. It is also unknown what the impact of attending school without textbooks will be on the educational achievement of the affected children and how will the teachers have to cope so that overall teaching is not affected.

One part of the Roma and Egyptian children attending three city schools may not be able to attend classes even when they get textbooks. They attended only on the first day of the school when, as school representatives explain, parents said that they would not be able to bring their children to school. It is not clear when the transport to those schools, which was promised by the Ministry of Education and Sports, will be put in place.

Monitor, 14. 09. 2012.

Hope stronger than stigma

People who have HIV are not defined by the fact that they have the virus, but by their vocation, their profession their participation in the society and the family. In Montenegro however, people primarily see them as people who have HIV and not as lawyers, journalists, actors, singers ...

Since 1989 when the first case of HIV infection in Montenegro was recorded, 128 HIV positive people have been officially registered. Of them 31 have died, 50 have been receiving therapy, while the remaining 47 are either not suitable for treatment or are not in touch with the HIV services.

In order to provide support to those who are HIV positive and ensure easy access to HIV test, to basic information about the disease and to other support, the Institute for Public Health has set up a HIV Advice Service. In addition, in Montenegro there are several non-governmental organizations dealing with the issues experienced by HIV positive people or those who are suffering from AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). Despite the efforts of these organisations, people living with HIV are still discriminated against.

A National Strategic Document adopted in 2009 is based on transmission prevention of HIV among the various high risk population groups. Experts say that high risk groups include intravenous drug users, gay people, women and men involved in prostitution, young sailors, prisoners and people from Roma communities. 'These groups are at increased risk because of their professional behavior, living conditions, social conditions ...' says Dr. Aleksandra Marjanovic, a specialist in Social Medicine, adding that currently there is no data to show that the preventive measures lead to a reduction in HIV infection in Montenegro.

'Every year, seven to 12 new infected people are registered and those figures indicate a relatively stable rate of infections', she told Monitor. Even though there is scientific evidence that people who have HIV can have a family, many are of a different opinion and do not accept that HIV is only transmitted through sexual intercourse, by being in contact with the blood of a person who is HIV positive or from an infected mother to her baby.

'The health care system needs to change the discriminatory attitude of doctors and nurses not only towards us but towards our families, partners who go to take our referral letters or our prescriptions, while we're at work or when we are sick. Health care workers see us too as someone who does not deserve the attention and care', says for Monitor a person who had been infected by the HIV virus since their childhood.

'Infected mothers may or may not pass the virus on to their baby', says Dr. Marjanovic. Statistics says that the rate of transmission of the virus from mother to baby is one third. Using therapy and adequate control of pregnancy this percentage falls to two percent. In Serbia last year, 15 healthy babies were born to mothers who were HIV positive, said our interviewee.

However, in Montenegro, although the Strategy for Prevention of HIV Transmission from Mother to Baby is in place, it is still not being implemented. Dr. Marjanovic hopes that by the end of the year the implementation will start taking place. Until then, people with HIV who want to have children are referred to Belgrade or Zagreb.

The ratio of registered women and men infected with HIV in Montenegro is five to one. Men are more aware of the risky behaviors and come to be tested more frequently. At the same time, a traditional society, such as ours, finds it much more difficult to accept the fact that women can be HIV positive, which is why they are more hesitant to request a test, explained Dr. Marjanovic.

When they become aware of their HIV status people in the beginning usually blame themselves and everything around them, until they realise that this is part of life experience that they must go through.

The same was confirmed to us by an HIV infected woman, who, for obvious reasons did not want to disclose her identity. 'I needed someone who would give me hope and tell me that life is possible with the HIV virus', she recalls. 'I needed someone who wanted to and could hear me, who would listen and encourage me and tell me that I am not a bad person because I have an infection'.

She told us that for her the therapy meant a return to normal life. 'What was most helpful was finding out that with the therapy I can live to old age and achieve things in life I have not achieved yet. Also, I am more confident now that I have gained some new friends who stick around in spite the fact that I am HIV positive'.

However, now that she is used to a life of constant medical checkups and focus on her health, what worries her the most is that information about her medical condition can be easily found out by anyone who has even a little understanding about information technology, e.g. that by using her national identification number anybody can access her entire medical history kept by the health services, even though she had not consented to disclosure of such information.

People who have HIV are not defined by the fact that they have the virus, but by their vocation, their profession their participation in the society and the family. In Montenegro however, people primarily see them as people who have HIV and not as lawyers, journalists, actors, singers...

'Antiretroviral therapy is available to all citizens, who are insured under the Montenegrin National Health Service', explained Dr. Marjanovic. 'We sometimes run out of medicines needed for the treatment but the problems are dealt with as they arise', she said, adding that the treatment should not be interrupted.

Dr. Marjanovic said that it happens that the doctors do the HIV test before they operate on a patient or when they are admitted to the hospital and that those patients are at risk after leaving the hospital, because many know their HIV status before they themselves do. 'Some systemic issues are not resolved in our health system', said Dr. Marjanovic explaining that the worst examples of discrimination happen within the health services.

'The health care system needs to change the discriminatory attitude of doctors and nurses not only towards us, but towards our families, partners who go to take our referral letters or our prescriptions, while we're at work or when we are sick. Health care workers see us too as someone who does not deserve the attention and care', said to Monitor a person who had been infected by the HIV virus since their childhood.

'Doctors who have no issues with accepting people with HIV are very rare. Dentists often discriminate against people living with HIV. Women rarely access gynecologists, only two or three gynecologists welcome patients with HIV', says Dr. Marjanovic.

Our interviewee talked about his experience when he at the age of seven, was for the first time discriminated against, in primary school. 'The frightened parents of other children assaulted me, they threw stones at me, they spat and insulted me. Only because I wanted to learn and to be a normal member of society, like anybody else. For four years I studied in a room where cleaning ladies keep their brooms and I went boldly and proudly every day to school and listened to comments by boys, girls and parents coming from all sides. In the fifth grade, I was transferred to the 'big' classroom. Then, 19 students moved to other schools or other classrooms and only two boys stayed in the same classroom with me. Ironically, the teachers would always decide that the three of us attend different subjects with other larger groups. I was not allowed to do Physical Education for fear that others would contract HIV from me'.

Even degrees won't help

Thirteen Roma and Egyptians in Montenegro have passed the state exam, but only one of them works in the civil service, despite appeals by the Foundation for Scholarships for Roma. 'This illustrates the lack of readiness of the institutions to receive us within their ranks', said Teuta Nuraj, one of the 13.

Teuta Nuraj is one of 13 Roma and Egyptians in Montenegro who have passed the national exam. Together with the 11 others she is unemployed and only one of them, a Roma woman, has a job.

The Foundation for Scholarships for Roma has requested from all state institutions to ensure adequate employment for members of this group, but this did not bear any fruit.

'This illustrates the lack of readiness of the institutions to receive us within their ranks', said Teuta Nuraj. She worried about what would happen when she completes her university studies. She is currently studying at the Faculty of Political Sciences in Podgorica at the Department of International Relations.

'If we cannot find jobs after having completed high school and university education, what is all this talk about the integration of Roma and Egyptians?', asks Nuraj hoping that the state institutions will finally take action to meet

the measures to which they committed by adopting The Strategy for Roma Integration.

Although the number of educated Roma and Egyptians is on the increase their chances for employment remain poor. In this school year 63 students from the population of Roma and Egyptians enrolled at high schools and 11 at the University of Montenegro. Since 2005, five students of the Roma and Egyptian population acquired university degrees.

'More and more Roma and Egyptians are opting for education. The increase in the number of those who go to school or attend university in the past five or six years is encouraging', says **Andrija Đukanović**, Program Director of the *Foundation for Scholarships for Roma*.

'In the school year 2011-2012 we had 72 students of Roma and Egyptian nationality who attended high schools in Montenegro. That is the largest number of students receiving scholarships since the start of the Foundation

REDUCED SCHOLARSHIPS

This year, the Foundation for Scholarships for Roma (FSR) had to reduce scholarships for Roma high school students.

Andrija Đukanović of the FSR explained to *Monitor* that this year they got less money for these purposes. While in 2011 80,933 euros was allocated for scholarships, this year only 75,000 euros was set aside.

Biljana Alković, The FSR's Executive Director, told the *Monitor* that to maintain the operations of their organisation, they were

forced to reduce scholarships for high school students from 70 to 50 euros for this school year, while waiting for the donation of additional funds by the Government.

'They allocated us the funds for scholarships only, but not for the office rent, electricity, telephone, salaries for me and my deputy', explains Alković.

She said that she hopes that the Government would be able to fund the shortfall so that the scholarship users are compensated for the reduction.

when we had just 20 students,' said Đukanovic.

The number of Roma and Egyptians attending the education system in Montenegro is not at a satisfactory level, believes the *Foundation*. They reiterate the fact that the regulations do not set quotas for the enrollment of Roma and Egyptian pupils and students. 'Affirmative action currently depends on goodwill of the boards of secondary schools and universities,' said Djukanovic. 'Despite their poor social status, Roma and Egyptians have a desire for education. But on the top of other obstacles, there is the employment issue, which further complicates their socialisation and motivation for education.'

Employers in Montenegro, for example, have no incentives (in terms of reduced taxes and contributions) for employing people from the Roma and Egyptian population, which was one of the measures set out by the *Strategy for Improving the Position of Roma and Egyptians in Montenegro*. There are those who do not employ members of the Roma and Egyptian population due to prejudice. There are many examples of this. One of them is given by **Hikmeta Beriša** who we talked to and who after obtaining basic literacy skills went to complete a hair dressing course with very good results.

'I responded to an employment advert asking for staff and spoke on the phone with the employer who seemed very interested and arranged to see me.

Based on our phone conversation I was almost certain that I would get that job. The problem arose when I turned up for the interview. The employer realised that I was Roma and he told me he did not want to lose customers who, he said, will refuse to have their hair done by a Roma,' said Berisha. 'I was shocked. I felt very bad, because he did not want to give me a chance to show what I can do.'

Aleksandar Rakočević, Senior Adviser in the Department of Employment in Podgorica, told the *Monitor* that the Department is aware of the difficult situation faced by the Roma and Egyptian population in employment and that discrimination exists.

There are currently 618 Roma on the lists of the Employment Bureau in Podgorica,' said Rakocevic. Out of them only 18 are actively seeking work, four holding a secondary school qualifications. There are those who have been looking for work for two years and don't seem to be able to get a job even though they completed all job search seminars to help with finding a job. 'I have been looking for a job since 2005 and I am wasting my time,' says **Dejvid Sejdović**, who is 27 years old and who successfully attended a number of those seminars. He graduated at the Catering School, specialising in baking. The reason why he cannot find a job, he believes, is because the employers do not want to hire Roma.

"Last year at the beginning of the summer, I saw an advert by the Kruna bakery seeking an assistant baker and decided to apply. All was fine when I talked to them on the phone and until I turned up. Two people were supposed to interview me but it was not like a job interview. One was saying to the other that it was him who invited me for an interview and the second one was 'accusing' the first one of doing that. They laughed at me. Finally they told me that they cannot accept me because I am Roma."

Sejdovic says that he felt helpless to do anything because he had no witnesses. 'If I had a witness I would have reported them because of how they treated me.'

Monitor, 23. 11. 2012.

Andrija Djukanovic: 'Affirmative action currently depends on the goodwill of the boards of secondary schools and universities. Despite of their poor social status, the Roma and Egyptians have a desire for education. But on the top of other obstacles, there is the employment issue, which further complicates their socialisation and motivation for education.'

Time for Dreams

A minority of residents in the Konik camp celebrate New Year and minority of those do it for religious reasons. Those who do celebrate it are fewer and fewer due to the bad economic situation and the situation in the camp. This year, the camp has no electricity and those few decorated festive trees are without lights

For the last 13 years, every year I make a wish to get a roof over our heads so that my children would live in better conditions. Last year too this was my wish but it did not come true', shrugs Ljavidim Boneštaj. While we are talking his six children are playing sparsely dressed in a cold room. Balloons decorate the ceiling which threatens to collapse on them. The festive tree is in the corner but without lights. Our host explains that since the fire in July the camp has had no electricity.

Boneštaj and his family came to Montenegro in the refugee wave from Kosovo in late 1999, along with about 1,500 Roma and Egyptians, who have lived for more than a decade in this 'temporary' camp whose closure, as well as the permanent solution to its inhabitants housing problem, has been on the cards for a long time. Located by the waste disposal area and away from other residential parts of the city and their communities, the camp is a de facto example of segregation. Camp residents are spending holidays in container homes they have recently been given, following the fire which destroyed most of the prefabs they used to live in.

'More than 150 families are starting all over again, just like they did on the first day when they arrived in Montenegro fleeing from Kosovo. No roofs over their heads, no food, no clothes or shoes, they only had what they were wearing when they escaped a massive fire and found themselves living under the sky, disappointed with their lives and angry with the Government', says **Gani Pajazitaj**, President of the Association of Egyptians, the man well respected in the camp. The other camp residents often pay visits to him. 'We have no electricity and they say we have to pay electricity bills ourselves', remark the visitors adding that they 'know that EU have given funds for that'.

Ljavidim Boneštaj and his family will cook their New Year's meal, they say, on their neighbors' stove. 'We have no cooker. We will do all the cooking at neighbors' who have a stove. Ten years ago it was a little better, there was more money. At least than I cooked on my own cooker', says **Ljavidim Boneštaj** while holding one of his six children on his lap. He explained how he has not yet bought gifts for his children. 'They had presents last year, but this year I don't know if I can afford them'.

It is important, he says, that they are together. 'To me that is the most important thing'. They will not cook anything special, he explains. 'The usual food and something to drink. We like to indulge in celebration and to forget all the worries that beset us. And when the clock hands come together, we take glasses and toast. We try to make this night happier, happier than the other nights of the year. Then I make a wish that we will all stay together, that we are healthy and that things will improve'.

Ljuma Krasnići will spend the New Year's eve alone with her six children and

'We have not decorated the tree, we did not get one yet', says Blerim Krasnici. 'If we manage to get one before New Year we will decorate it and if not, we will have to do without it. Last year we had the tree and this year I cannot even contemplate affording it for my family'

'We have no cooker. We will do all the cooking at neighbors who have a stove. Ten years ago it was a little better, there was more money. At least than I cooked on my own cooker', says Ljavidim Boneštaj while holding one of his six children on his lap. He explained how he has not yet bought gifts for his children. 'They had presents last year, but this year I don't know if I can afford them'

Year's eves: 'Roast drumsticks,

in the dark. Her husband, she said, had died three months ago, so there will be no New Year's meal.

'We had pretty good celebrations in previous years, but this time I can't even think about it. For me there is no New Year. I will be with my children. While my husband was alive, we never lacked anything. He worked', says the young woman. While we are talking, four of her six children were trying on clothes they were given as a gift.

A minority of residents in the Konik camp celebrate New Year and minority of those do it for religious reasons. Those who do celebrate it are fewer and fewer due to the bad economic situation and the situation in the camp.

'We have not decorated the tree, we have not got one yet', says **Blerim Krasnići**. 'If we manage to get one before New Year we will decorate it and if not, we will have to do without it. Last year we had the tree and this year I cannot even contemplate affording it for my family. I am unemployed and it is hard. Very hard. I collect stuff for recycling, but there is less and less of it available.'

'Ten years ago', he recalls, 'it was much better'. 'I had my own business and there was plenty of work and money'. We had food in abundance, he reminisced. They would lay the table, he said, and the children were very happy gathered around it. 'This year we do not even have a table, it burned in the fire. And each of us had their own plate and the glass at the table', he sighs under the weight of memories.

His wife tells us with a smile what she used to do in preparing for previous New Year's eves: 'Roast drumsticks, meat, kebabs, some meze', she says while holding a poorly dressed baby in her arms.

A smokestack taken out through the window belches so much smoke that one would think that Blerim's container home is coal heated. But it isn't. 'We don't even have proper wood for heating. I go to the rubbish tips on my bike and collect some wood', says Blerim. 'When the electricity is connected, we will not be able to use our stove for heating because we will not be allowed to have a smokestack going out through the window. If I use an electric stove how will I be able to pay the bills?'

He said that this year has been the most difficult. It is even worse than the last year when his living conditions were also very difficult.

'All I think about is how to earn 20 euros for the New Year celebration. To buy some food and drinks and there is not much more we can do in the dark but go to sleep.

And they continue to dream of a New Year with plenty of food, warm homes and the festive trees decorated with lights.

Monitor, 04. 01. 2013.

The tradition waiting for a change

Most of our Roma interviewees, who know what it means to live in an arranged marriage, think that this tradition has to be changed. This includes even those who found love in a forced marriage.

I had no intention to get married. I was in the second year of high school. I knew the girl only for a week. She was 11 years old. After our one and only meeting her relatives came to my parents with a message from her parents that we have to get engaged because they saw her coming out of my house late at night. In vain I tried to explain that it was nothing more than a visit and that I had no relationship with the girl', said **Ćerim**

Avdo, a twenty year old Egyptian, one of the many who married by the customs prescribed by Roma and Egyptian traditions.

'In order to avoid the shame of what her family considered to be indecent behavior on her part, I had to get engaged with her', continued Cerim. 'My father had to take a loan to provide a payment for the bride and all else required by Roma customs'.

After the engagement, for a period of time, Ćerim and his underage fiancée were not allowed to meet and it was strictly forbidden for her even to say hello to her future husband. 'They were afraid I would steal her because I had not made a full payment for her', explains Ćerim. 'But after a while her uncle allowed me to take her out so I got better acquainted with her. I fell in love with her but I still don't like that we had to get married this way'.

Anthropologist Vesna Rasulić-Delic told us that marriage in Roma and Egyptian communities is an institution and that almost all individuals have to enter it, regardless of their personal desires, sexual or other preferences. The decisions about selection of future spouses are made more by their families than by the young people themselves and we can say that in this respect there is equality between women and men, because decisions about who they will spend their lives with is in both cases, made by others and not themselves', she says.

'Because there is no right to choose, the so called 'abductions', where girls consent to eloping with their boyfriends are frequent. Because this is not a socially acceptable practice, it might happen that bride's family never agrees to it or that they only accept reconciliation after many years', said **Vesna Rasulić-Delić**.

Vesna Rasulić-Delic:
'The reasons for parents choosing to control the selection of their children's spouses are economic, social and ethnic in nature. The family of the spouse has to be of the same or similar status to ensure the strengthening of social networks and economic status for both sides. The selection is also controlled to prevent marriages outside their ethnic group, and breaches of these boundaries leads to social condemnation.'

A twenty year old Roma man, who talked to Monitor but chose to remain anonymous, married in this way.

'I did not want to marry someone my parents chose, but the girl I knew and loved. She lived in a different city. My family knew about our relationship but we had to hide it from her parents. They were against our relationship because of an old dispute with my family', he told us. When the girl's parents learned of our relationship, she ran away from home and came to live with him and his parents. The man who spoke to us explained that what took place was an 'agreed kidnapping', because they both agreed to it.

'My father immediately contacted her father in the morning and asked to reconcile. He refused, even three times in a row, even though my father was insistent. They said that for them she no longer existed and that they would not accept the marriage. After a week I brought her to my house and my family accepted her'.

Vesna Rasulić-Delić, explains that the reasons for Roma and Egyptian parents choosing to control selection of their children's spouses are economic, social and ethnic in nature.

The family of the spouse has to be of the same or similar status to ensure strengthening of social networks and economic status for both sides. The selection is also controlled to prevent marriages outside their ethnic group and breaches of these boundaries leads to social condemnation', she explained.

The act of marriage is accompanied by various rituals. The groom's family has to provide gifts for the bride, formal and everyday wardrobe, jewelry, gifts for her family. There is also a controversial, 'buying' of the bride where money goes to bride's parents, which is seen as a 'bad' tradition.

Experts warn that a change of those traditions cannot happen overnight because those customs have deep roots in the Roma culture and a number of social and power relations are interwoven around it. 'There is no doubt that there are families and individuals who exploit this custom for personal gain and they are, I'm sure, known to and condemned by their community, which paradoxically does the same thing', said Vesna Rasulić-Delić.

Journalist **Senad Sejđović** says that the nomadic Roma Čergari, also practice arranged marriages. This section of the Roma population has slightly different traditions, he said. It is encouraging, says Sejđović, that in the last 10 years boys and girls have more say when it comes to choice of spouse than before. 'Forced marriages are not what they used to be. Both man and women contribute economically in this community and for this reason Roma women from the Čergari group have greater freedom of movement. They work, do begging, fortune telling, etc.'

There are also young people who do not mind the decisions imposed by their parents. S.B. age 20 is one of the Roma men we interviewed and he said that he respected the decision of his parents, because, as he puts it, 'if his parents like his wife he will like her too'. He believes that the old are always smarter than the young and that they make the best decisions.

He told Monitor how at the age of 19 he married a 15 year old girl he did not know before they got married. 'I left all decisions to my parents. Every parent wants the best for their child'. He says that many guys secretly watch the girl their parents say they would marry. 'I did not want to do that. I waited until the day she walked into my house and since that day we got to know each other more and more every day. It did not take me long to start loving her and she felt the same. If I chose her myself I would not have made a better choice. Now I'm grateful to my parents for making a good choice. We've been married for three years and we are very happy', he explains.

But the majority of young people end up not being satisfied. It can be heard from the Roma and Egyptians themselves that the tradition is the main cause for the current state of affairs and lack of progress.

'The main feature of any tradition is that it changes and the change needs to be made primarily by its consumers', says Vesna Rasulić-Delić. If the members of the community themselves do not initiate change, she said, nothing

'In order to avoid the shame of what her family considered to be indecent behavior on her part, I had to get engaged with her. She was 11 years old. My father had to take a loan to provide a payment for the bride and all else required by Roma customs', explained Čerim Avdo

much will happen.

'The change is hard to achieve. This is confirmed by the attack on **Behija Ramović**, a Roma activist fighting against these forced marriages'. She was attacked this week, on the night between the 14 and 15 January. Her house was stoned. So far, we know only that an unidentified person threw a stone at window of the house where she lives.

Fana Delija, Executive Coordinator of the Center for Roma Initiative reminded that the organisation Behija Ramović works for, has been delivering a project since last October, targeting forced and early marriages and that ever since then, the women members of this organisation experienced a variety of threats and pressures, some even coming from some Roma male leaders.

Winning freedoms is not easy. However, those who want them will not be stopped by stones.

Monitor, 18.01. 2013.

No right to vote, no job

Monitor spoke to displaced Roma and Egyptians from Kosovo and they explained that since they took foreign citizen status, which enabled them to stay in Montenegro, they could not find jobs in spite of having the right to work. In most cases, the employers, most of them being public companies, have citizenship as a condition for employment. Foreign citizen status does not allow for the right to vote. 'If we could vote, we would have found jobs,' said one of them

Ramadan Kurtesi: 'They told me that they would not hire anyone without citizenship, and that I and others who have the legal status of foreigners with permanent residence cannot be employed by them'

Kurteši family is one of many families who during the war escaped from Kosovo and tried to find refuge in Montenegro. Although it has been almost 15 years since they came, no adult family member has a job. Many others who acquired a foreign citizen with permanent residence status in order to gain the right to remain in Montenegro are also jobless.

Ramadan Kurtesi (41) says that he finds it almost impossible to get a job with foreign citizen status. He has been looking for a job in vain for two years now. He gained foreign citizen with permanent residence legal status two years ago. 'I worked in the publicly owned city cleaning company 'Čistoca' for six years

until two years ago when they told me that I have to leave my job because I have no citizenship'. In 'Čistoća' they told him, that they would hire him again as soon as he sorts out his legal status.

'At a great cost I went twice to Kosovo to get all the necessary documents as soon as possible' he said. 'Čistoca' did not take him back in spite of all the promises he was later given.

He then sought work at the city rubbish disposal and recycling center. There too he has been rejected. 'They told me that they don't hire anyone without citizenship and that I and others with foreigner with permanent residence status cannot be employed by them'.

Ramadan Kurtesi collects recyclables to feed his six-member family. 'One cannot make a living doing that'.

His two sons who go to school sometimes have to miss lessons because they have nothing to wear and are too hungry to attend.

During 2009 the Government of Montenegro, in cooperation with UNHCR and the EU Delegation in Montenegro agreed the Action Plan for the permanent resolution of the status of displaced persons from former Yugoslav republics and internally displaced persons from Kosovo, residing in Montenegro. This status should allow them access to the same rights as the citizens of Montenegro, except the right to vote and to be elected to political positions.

Monitor verified that the practice is different, at least when it comes to gaining employment.

Serđan Baftijari who studies diplomacy at the University of Political Science told Monitor that he was denied the right to do a job he loves because he has foreigner status.

'I've responded to the advert to run Democracy workshops published at the website of the NGO Forum MNE which Forum is organising with the Assembly of Montenegro.

Baftijari said that he has been a long-term volunteer and activist of the Forum MNE.

'I have previously completed with the Forum a range of training for youth work and I acquired skills and knowledge required to run workshops with the children'.

He says he was very surprised to receive information that he was rejected. 'The Forum MNE told me that it was necessary to have citizenship of Montenegro'. Baftijari is concerned about the future prospects of his engagement in some of the institutions where he could practice his profession.

Equal rights are not provided to persons with foreigner status, says Andrija Djukanovic, Deputy Director of the Institute for Social Inclusion.

'There are plenty of open questions which foreigner status brings up. Take the example of employment in state institutions. Their job adverts make Montenegrin citizenship one of the main employment conditions', said Djukanovic. He notes that such a state of affairs restricts the opportunities for Roma and Egyptians from displaced populations and for that reason they have to turn to private employers.

At the Conference held on 21 December last year on the status of Roma and Egyptians, it was found that members of the Roma and Egyptian populations live, despite the constitutionally guaranteed rights, on the margins of society. Therefore, it is necessary to regulate their legal status and make them beneficiaries of all services offered by Montenegro in accordance with the law.

The Ministry of Interior (MUP) argues that a person with this status can be employed in a variety of state institutions, but the list of those institutions is impossible to find.

An independent Advisor in the Ministry of Interior Bojan Bugarin, pointed out that this population should first address the issue of residence in our country and that rights and entitlements will follow.

Andrija Djukanovic believes that it is not necessary to make such restrictions because the future of the people in question is tied to Montenegro and if they already have the same rights in the areas of education and health that should apply to the area of employment too.

Bugarin said that of more than 9,000 requests made by displaced and internally displaced persons, only a few hundred sought a temporary stay and the vast majority applied for permanent residence.

'The status of foreign citizen does not bring any benefits to us. Except that the police does not harass us for not having identification papers', says Bekim Kurtesi (39). 'But maybe they are right. Why would we be employed when we cannot vote? If we could we would get jobs straight away'

People who spoke to Monitor are concerned that the story is true that one of the parties in power plans to fill 20 jobs in 'Čistoća' by sacking the workers with the temporary and permanent residence status.

Bekim Kurtesi: 'The status of foreign citizen does not bring any benefits to us. Except that the police do not harass us for not having identification papers. But maybe they are right. Why would we be employed when we cannot vote? If we could we would get jobs straight away'

Monitor, 22. 02. 2013.

Valuable role models

Being that they are entrepreneurs, doctors, hairdressers or successful students, they all have the same desire - to change the existing view of the Roma.

It is always repeated that Roma men and women are illiterate, unemployed, poor, discriminated against, and subordinate. Roma men and women who are university educated or those who are economically independent and socially active are rarely mentioned. This story is about them.

'It was a struggle but it was worth it. I have secured for myself and my family a decent, modest life', says the *Monitor* **Gzim Beriša Kićo**, one of the successful Roma.

Kiço owns three boutiques in Podgorica and in his own words, he makes a good living from them. 'I do not experience problems from my customers for being a Roma. Because we offer quality goods many prominent people do their shopping with us. He praises his boutique by adding that he counts Government officials among his clients.

Because of the conditions his parents lived in, explains this dedicated entrepreneur, he was not into education, although he was aware of its importance. From an early age he worked. 'As a child, with my family I was a seller at the vegetable market, it was hard work and I did not wish it on my children.'

That is why he ensured that his children got an education. 'I am proud of them, like my parents were of me. My two sons are helping me in running the business, and my older daughter finished nursing school in Podgorica and the Faculty of Business Management (FPM) in Bar. It is her I am particularly proud of.'

Kiće's daughter, 24 years old Anita Berisa who works for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration and is currently engaged in the MICS research conducted by UNICEF in collaboration with MONSTAT (Statistical Office of Montenegro).

'I am proud of being a Roma woman and by my own example I want to show that the Roma can be successful. Maybe all this seems unimportant to some, but the steps that I took, and other young Roma men and women are making are huge for our people. We are changing the image of Roma. More and more, what we are doing is replacing the usual 'picture' which depicts Roma as dirty', she said to *Monitor*.

'I think that, as educated, capable and fulfilled people, we will show that we are dignified human beings. By changing our lifestyle we will destroy prejudice. We will take away from the people who see us as illiterate and bad people the opportunities to belittle us and violate our rights. This is the essence of our desire. To change and provide positive examples to people. To prove and affirm ourselves as equal citizens of our society. I believe we will raise awareness of our people and achieve what our ancestors did not - to provide our children a normal life, without

Anita Berisa who is 24 years old and works for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs says: 'I think that as educated, competent and fulfilled people we will tear down prejudices and leave people without opportunities to belittle us and violate our rights because they think that we are illiterate and bad people.'

destitution, poverty and discrimination. Examples of our success make others to do the same', says Anita.

She believes that it would be of great importance to the Roma to have representatives in Parliament and to get more involved in the important decisions that affect them.

Also, among the successful Roma in Montenegro is **Nedžmija Beriša**, the first and the only Roma woman doctor in Montenegro. She works in the Medical Center in Konik. She loves her job because as she says, 'there is nothing more noble than being able to help'.

She says that there are lots of Roma men and women who are active in society and have the same goal.

'And that goal is to provide help to all those who need it, We would like to dispel any prejudices about the Roma population and show that singing and dancing is not the only thing Roma do and that amongst us we also have young, educated people, full of enthusiasm to help their own people and the people of the country in which they live', says Nedžmija.

Kenan Osmanaj is a 24 year old hairdresser from Podgorica. He finished primary and hairdressing school in Germany. 'That's where my dream started to come true when I started working in a very prestigious salon', says Osmanaj.

At the beginning of 2010 he returned to his homeland, Montenegro. He opened a hair salon in Podgorica and become one of the most famous hairdressers in the country.

Nedžmija Beriša: 'We would like to dispel any prejudices about the Roma population and show that singing and dancing is not the only thing the Roma do and that amongst us we also have young, educated people, full of enthusiasm to help their own people and the people of the country in which they live'

'I participated in many competitions. I won first prize in the Best Montenegrin Hairdresser competition in Budva in 2010. After that at the World Championship in Paris, I won fifth place in the category called 'fantasy style'. At the competition in Jerusalem in 2011 I won second place. Late last year I participated in the European Hairdressers competition in Dublin, where I was fifth', says Osmanaj.

With great motivation and talent he managed to fulfil his dream and overcome all obstacles. He is ready for new victories and successes in his work and his message to his people, as well as other citizens, is that the times of gipsy caravans and aimless wandering is finished and that everybody has to work hard to fight for a better and more favorable life and that society will have to accept such people.

All interviewees of Monitor share the same opinion – they strive towards the same goal to show that the Roma can be equal citizens in our society. 'And not second-class citizens in many see us', says Anita Beriša.

But society also must help in breaking the stereotypes and promotion of Roma.

Monitor, 29. 03. 2013.

On the margins of politics

There are no Roma or Egyptians in Parliament because the threshold for minorities set out by the Law on Election of MPs and Councillors is too high. But also because of the lack of political will to overcome this, as was the case with some other minorities

The Roma, as a political community in Montenegro do not exist. Their voice is not heard in Parliament where decisions are made. They cannot articulate their political interests through their elected representatives and their real problems remain unnoticed', said journalist **Mohamed Uković** to *Monitor*.

According to the Constitution, all minorities have the right to representation. The law on Election of MPs and Councillors specifies that all lists which secured three percent of votes can participate in the distribution of parliamentary seats and that in the event of none of the national parties winning three percent, 0.70 percent of the votes will entitle them to one seat.

'This is a good principle, but for Roma and Egyptians, is unattainable. Because this population is eight times smaller than the other populations', explains **Andrija Đukanović** of the Institute of Social Inclusion. This NGO has been dealing with this topic and communicated with all parliamentary parties regarding the issues of political participation of Roma and Egyptians.

'Had the Roma formed a national party and took part in the last parliamentary elections they would have needed to achieve 3000 votes for one parliamentary seat, which is too high a threshold for a community which makes one percent of the overall population of Montenegro and can produce slightly over 6000 votes', explains Uković. He therefore considers absurd the claim that for the Roma, the Law on Election of MPs and Councillors is advantageous.

Improving the position of Roma and Egyptians has been in recent years, on the global agenda of world politics. However, in many countries of Europe they do not have minority status which deprives them of the possibility of fulfilling their political and national rights to which other minority communities are entitled. Unlike other minority communities, they do not have a home country, which further complicates their situation.

Uković who indicated earlier that, despite the constitutionally guaranteed rights, the Roma are still on the margins of social and political events, thinks that the question of finding systematic solutions for the problems of the Roma and Egyptians is to some extent understood as something that is imposed from the outside and not as a real need in the process of democratisation of society.

'Throughout this story we cannot ignore the noticeable absence of political will to solve this problem', he says.

Andrija Djukanovic agrees with this assessment.

Muhammad Uković: 'Had the Roma formed a national party and took part in the last parliamentary elections they would have needed to achieve 3000 votes for one parliamentary seat, which is too high a threshold for a community which makes one percent of the overall population of Montenegro and can produce slightly over 6000 votes'

'All parties in parliament we spoke to say that is extremely important to them and that they are working to contribute to the improvements', he says. 'In the Socialist National Party (SNP) they believe that the use of the principle of affirmative action is made difficult because of the small numbers of Roma and Egyptians. The Positive Montenegro (PCG) party believes that the exclusion of the Roma from Parliament is discrimination and that it demonstrates a lack of political will. The democratic Front (DF) is willing to address this issue and find the best solution so that Roma and Egyptians have full entitlement to rights. The Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) pointed out that a large number of their members come from those populations. Yet, previous elections have passed without Roma and Egyptians being included in the lists of their candidates', said Djukanovic.

While all parliamentary parties stated that they were dealing with the problems of Roma and Egyptians and that they are committed to their political representation, in practice, these efforts are barely visible.

'A concession was made for the Croatian minority community which allowed them to have one MP if they won 0.35 percent of the vote. Why was not a similar arrangement allowed for the Roma and Egyptians?', adds Djukanovic. 'So, there are no Roma in Parliament because there is no political will and the entry threshold is too high in relation to their number in the population', he concludes.

The number of Roma and Croats in Montenegro is about the same. According to the latest census, carried out by *Monstat*, the Roma are even more numerous than the Croats.

The Roma population is very young and the number of juveniles is high. All this would impact on the number of potential voters for the Roma Party, should it be formed. Because of all this, Roma and Egyptians remain excluded from the Parliament.

WHEN DPS GOES SHOPING

The Network for Affirmation of the Non-governmental Sector (MANS) revealed that from October last year till the Presidential elections on the 7 April in the Konik and Vrela Ribnicka suburbs of Podgorica (translator's note: where Roma and Egyptians live) over 520 new voters were entered into Electoral Register.

MANS says that they acquired this information by comparing the voter registration lists for Parliamentary elections in October and the Presidential elections on 7 April. We suspect that this is just another pre-election manipulation by the Government involving purchase of the votes of the Roma population', stated MANS.

Monitor's source says that DPS activists were buying Roma and Egyptian's votes at 30 euro per person.

'Roma families are large and any sum offered for a vote, even 30 euros per person, is not insignificant. And if their financial situation is dire and we know that for of them that is the case, then of course they will accept it', said Monitor's source, who wished to remain anonymous. He claims that the Roma who came from abroad to vote were paid more.

Buying votes was not the only method used. There were pressures too. DPS activists visited homes and blackmailed those who wanted to keep their job, particularly workers in the state owned 'Cistoca' company.

Monitor, 29. 04. 2013.

A victim in so many ways

Murder of the underage girl A.A. in Konik raised again the subject of violence against women. Montenegro has in recent years adopted a series of good laws in this area, but in practice the old ways persist: tolerating violence, failure of the witnesses to report and lack of effective state institutions sensitive enough to recognise this kind of violence.

The underage A.A. was killed at night between the 9th and 10th of May in the house where she lived at Konik. **Mirsad Adžović**, her common-law husband, who introduced himself as her father when he walked into the police station the next morning and admitted the crime, None of the neighbors called the police.

Quarrels between the unfortunate girl and Adžović were frequent, said those who spoke to us.

One of the interviewees, who is well-versed in the family situation of the girl and her relationship with Adžović, said that he often abused her. He, as well as other people who spoke to us on condition of anonymity, said that A.A. was possibly a victim of human trafficking.

‘The murdered girl lived with her biological father in a place near the coast, while her mother and stepfather lived in Podgorica’, says our source. When her father was sent to prison A.A. moved in with her mother. She lived there for a few years only to marry at the age of 14. That marriage did not last and she returned to her mother. When she reached 15 Mirsad Adžović took her in, claiming to be her father’. The person who spoke to us claims that A.A.’s ex-husband owed money to Adžović and when he could not pay it back Adžović took the girl.

The murdered girl had a seven-month old baby whose father, according to her mother, was Mirsad Adžović. This was also confirmed by our sources. The mother told the media that Adžović tried to persuade the underage A.A. that he was her father. According to her, the underage A.A. eloped with Adžović when she was 13. Some other witnesses claim that A.A. was sold to him and that that was an open secret.

Neighbors claim that Adžović and the unfortunate girl often quarreled because she inquired whether he was her father. ‘That is why Mirsad was violent to her’, say our sources.

‘Her close and extended family, including Mirsad Adžović’s wife, who was there when the murder happened, knew that he took her as a wife and that he was violent to her, but no one did anything or tried to prevent it’. The media had previously reported that Adžović’s wife and their four children were in the house on the night of the murder.

A number of NGOs gathered around the *Center for Women’s Rights*, and condemned the murder of the underage

‘The murdered girl lived with her biological father in a place near the coast, while her mother and stepfather lived in Podgorica. When her father was sent to prison A.A. moved in with her mother and soon married at the age of 14. That marriage did not last’. Our source claims that A.A.’s former husband owed money to Mirsad Adžović, who then took her in.

girl. *Montenegrin Lawyers Committee for Human Rights* asked for action in the strongest terms by society and the relevant institutions and this appeal was supported and the violence condemned by the NGOs Human Rights Action and Anima.

A statement signed by the *Center for Women's Rights, Roma and Egyptian Women's' Rights Network* and the *Center for Roma Initiatives* stated that Roma and Egyptian women are forced to respect very strict patriarchal norms within the Roma community, where there is a high threshold of tolerance of violence against women and domestic violence, which endangers their lives.

'The specific position of Roma and Egyptian women is not recognized by both the Roma and Egyptian communities and by the state', the statement said.

Prima NGO pointed out that laws dealing with domestic violence are generally not implemented rigorously.

Organizations which signed the statement urged the responsible institutions, primarily the Police Department, but also all members of the public, to take all measures to adequately respond to violence in order to prevent the repeat of such crimes.

Montenegro has in recent years adopted a series of laws and important documents relating to the area of domestic violence. In practice, however, other problems, among which are those that witnesses, despite legal obligations rarely reported violence, but first and foremost that state institutions, starting with the police, which is the first in the chain of institutions responsible to ensure sanctions for violence, or social services and the justice system, often fail to appropriately define and recognise violence.

According to UN data, the first cause of death and disability among women between 15-45 years of age is not an illness or a traffic accident, but violence. The *Study of Domestic Violence and Violence against Women in Montenegro*, which was researched in 2012 by the UNDP, says that in Montenegro, 'the extent of violence is unknown because there is no systematic collection of data'.

Surveys of public opinion presented in the *Study*, however, show that Montenegrin citizens believe that there is violence, that it is widespread and that the victims are mostly women and children. According to the surveys every fourth man believes that violence is justified and caused by circumstances and events beyond the control of the perpetrator and that the victim is responsible for the violence, 'because they provoke it'.

Research has shown that one in every three women in Montenegro is the victim of some form of violence and that victims of domestic violence are mostly women and children, while men are identified as perpetrators. According to this study, in Montenegro 'milder forms of violence' are tolerated and only grave forms are recognised as violence.

Interestingly, the same data says that one person in three in Montenegro would not be willing to report domestic violence because of low confidence in the effectiveness of institutions, because of fear, patriarchal views about family relationships as something which should not be interfered in at all and because of doubt that this kind of problems can be stopped and overcome.

'Case studies have shown that male violence against women takes place, regardless of ethnic origin, social status and age. However, women belonging to minority communities, or migrant women who are victims of violence often face multiple forms of violence and discrimination', the *Study* said.

Roma women are in the risk category when it comes to human trafficking. The recommendations for Montenegro in the *Report on People Trafficking in Montenegro*, which was published in June last year by the U.S. Embassy, highlighted the need 'to enhance efforts to proactively identify more potential victims in vulnerable groups, such as Roma children engaged in prostitution, women arrested for prostitution, undocumented migrants, refugees and displaced persons - especially

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Roma people - children and beggars'. Special emphasis is to be 'to improve contact with the Roma communities to ensure the prevention of human trafficking and efficient identification of the victims'.

According to that *Report*, the Government of Montenegro does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking', while Montenegro is defined as a country of origin, transit and final destination for victims of trafficking.

Monitor, 17. 05. 2013.

