

Europe

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Racism, discrimination and intolerance remained prevalent throughout the 48 states of Europe. Apart from overt racism and discrimination, ethnic and national minorities face socio-economic exclusion and assimilation. Roma remain the most excluded and vulnerable group in Europe – closely followed by immigrants and some refugee groups – and face disadvantage in access to employment, education, housing and health care. Female members of minorities often suffer double or triple discrimination: as women, as members of minorities and as members of the poorest part of the population.

The admission of 10 new member states on 1 May 2004 saw the number ethnic minorities living in the previous 15-member European Union (EU) increasing from around 50 million to 80–100 million, not including immigrants. Only Ireland and the UK allowed free employment access to citizens of the new members. However, the large numbers of arrivals, especially from Poland, saw both Ireland and the UK announce in October 2006 that work permits would be needed for citizens of Bulgaria and Romania when they joined the EU in January 2007. In January 2006, the EU's European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) published a comparative analysis, *Migrants, Minorities and Housing*, based on information supplied by the EUMC's national focal points. It shows that, across the EU, similar mechanisms of housing disadvantage and discrimination affect migrants and minorities, such as denial of access to accommodation on the grounds of the applicant's skin colour, imposition of restrictive conditions limiting access to public housing, or even violent physical attacks aimed at deterring minorities from settling in certain neighbourhoods. The report also documents instances of resistance on the part of public authorities to address such discrimination. In October 2006 the EUMC published a pilot study based on the data of 12 country studies of EU member states – Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the UK. The study shows that a significant number of migrants in all 12 countries have subjectively experienced discriminatory practices in their everyday life.

The level of education among certain minority groups is generally low. Ethnic and national minorities experience language difficulties in state school systems resulting in high drop-out rates and even non-

attendance. For example, the provincial government of Carinthia in Austria is openly anti-Slovene and has fought bitterly against the provision of Slovene education, with any student opting to do studies in Slovenian considered to be taking a political stand against the German-speaking establishment. Religious minorities in France continued to struggle with the impact of a 2004 law restricting the wearing of religious signs in the classroom. Although most attention has focused on the issues surrounding Muslim schoolgirls and the headscarf, in September 2006 four Sikh schoolboys were excluded from school for refusing to remove their turbans. In a separate case, a Sikh driver who was refused a replacement driving licence because his ID photo showed him wearing a turban, lost his appeal. The French authorities argued that the measure was taken on grounds of security and was not a restriction of freedom of religion. However, the French branch of United Sikhs said the case highlighted 'indirect discrimination' suffered by Sikhs.

The incentive of joining the EU has been used to pressure the 10 new members and the other applicant countries to improve their practices with regard to minorities. Most of these new member states have adopted higher legal standards on minority rights than the 15 member states. The key minority instrument of the 46-member Council of Europe (CoE) – Belarus and the new state of Montenegro are applicants – the 1995 Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) has not yet been ratified by a number of the CoE's members: Andorra, France, Monaco and Turkey have not signed the instrument, while Belgium, Greece, Iceland and Luxembourg and have signed but not ratified it. The new state of Montenegro ratified it in 2006. Some European countries continue not to recognize their minorities as such, clinging to a unified model of the homogenized state: e.g. France, Greece – which only recognizes religious minorities as laid down in the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne – and similarly Turkey, although there have been some recent changes in Turkey due to European pressure.

The rise of Islamophobia

The 11 September 2001 attacks in the USA, and the subsequent bombings in Madrid and London, have resulted in European governments – fearing further terrorist attacks – adopting legislation that curbs the rights of all citizens but predominantly



Left: A woman holds up the Koran as Muslim protesters demonstrate outside the Norwegian Parliament. Anger erupted around the Muslim world after the publication of a controversial series of cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammed in a Danish newspaper, which were then reprinted in a small Norwegian magazine. Fredrik Naumann/Panos Pictures

targets Muslim communities. This has led to both a rise in Islamic radicalism in response to perceived racial discrimination as well as a rise in Islamophobia among majority populations. The latter has resulted in Muslim communities, particularly in Western Europe, increasingly feeling intimidated and persecuted. In November 2006, the Dutch government, in what was viewed as a pre-election gambit, proposed banning the wearing of face veils in the streets, public places, schools and courts. In Germany, Muslim women wearing headscarves are particularly vulnerable to racist attacks, and some non-Muslim schools enforce strict policies against the wearing of headscarves. In Belgium, the Flemish Region requires mosques to meet certain conditions for public funding: outside of Arabic rituals, Dutch must be used, there must be tolerance for women and homosexuals and no preaching of extremist ideas. These restrictions apply only to Islam. Anti-Muslim sentiment continued to be fuelled in Russia by the conflict in predominantly Muslim Chechnya, and in Serbia due to the situation in Kosovo, which has a large Muslim Albanian majority.

Denmark

In March 2006, Doudou Diène, United Nations Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, referred to the recent controversial depictions of the Prophet Mohammed in Danish newspaper cartoons and the subsequent violent reactions in many countries. He said: 'the cartoons illustrated the increasing emergence of the racist and xenophobic currents in everyday life'. He also pointed to the political context in Denmark, where an extremist political party enjoyed 13 per cent of the vote and had formed part of the governing coalition, and stated that 'the development of Islamophobia or any racism and racial discrimination always took place in the context of the emergence of strong racist,

extremist political parties and a corresponding absence of reaction against such racism by the country's political leaders'. In March 2006, Denmark's Director of Public Prosecutions upheld the earlier decision not to press criminal charges against those responsible for the cartoons on the basis that the drawings were protected by legislation on freedom of speech and did not violate bans on racist and blasphemous speech. In retaliation, the Islamic Faith Community, an umbrella organization of 27 radical Muslim organizations in Denmark, is lodging a complaint against the state of Denmark with the Office of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Geneva.

Spain

In 2006, the Spanish government approved a new Statute of Autonomy for Catalonia, further expanding the region's autonomous powers and strengthening Catalan culture. The statute was approved by referendum in Catalonia on 18 June 2006. Due to its geographical position, Spain is a primary entry point for African migrants to Europe. In November 2006 it was reported that some 16,000 illegal immigrants from Africa had come to the Canary Isles in 2006, and Spain continued to be accused of abuse against African migrants and asylum seekers. In July 2006, three were killed when they tried to enter the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla from Morocco, allegedly as a result of Spanish and Moroccan law enforcement officers using disproportionate and lethal force to prevent them entering; in 2005 at least 13 people were similarly killed. In October 2006, Amnesty International again expressed its concern about the allegations of ill-treatment and excessive use of force by the Spanish Civil Guard, including use of firearms and heavy rubber bullets at close range, when confronting migrants and asylum seekers attempting to climb over the fences into Ceuta and Melilla. Moreover, Amnesty asserted that, when people are intercepted by Spanish Civil Guards in the area between the two border fences, they are often immediately unlawfully expelled through one of the gates in the fence closest to Moroccan territory.

United Kingdom

In the UK, the debate over multiculturalism intensified as the repercussions from the 11 September 2001 attacks in the US and the 7 July

2005 bomb attacks in London continued to reverberate. Tensions between the government and the Muslim community flared when some prominent British Muslims blamed the UK Middle East policy for 'giving ammunition to extremists' – an analysis roundly rejected by the government. In a poll of UK Muslims published in July 2006, 13 per cent of those questioned believed that the British suicide bombers who carried out the 7 July 2005 attacks, 'could be regarded as martyrs'. A month later, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Ruth Kelly, announced the establishment of a Commission on Integration and Cohesion. In her speech setting out the terms of the Commission, Ms Kelly said, 'We have moved from a period of uniform consensus on the value of multiculturalism, to one where we can encourage that debate by questioning whether it is encouraging separateness.' According to the government, the aim of the Commission is to look at best practice around the UK, with a view to coming up with recommendations on measures which encourage the integration of minorities. The Commission is due to report in July 2007. The debate over the position of the Muslim community in the UK crystallized in the row over Muslim women wearing veils. The issue seized the headlines in October 2006, when a senior government minister, Jack Straw – the former Foreign Secretary and now Leader of the House of Commons – revealed that he asked Muslim women who came to visit him in his constituency office to consider removing their veils. Mr Straw – who represents a constituency with a high Muslim population – argued that 'the veil is a visible statement of separation and of difference'. Many government ministers – including the Prime Minister Tony Blair – supported his view. The row gathered pace, when a Muslim classroom assistant in north-east England was suspended for insisting on wearing a veil in school when male colleagues were present. Although a small proportion of the Muslim women in the UK elect to wear the veil, the issue became a focus for questions about broader Muslim integration. In the torrent of debate in newspapers, on radio and on television, it was clear that there was a diversity of opinion on the matter – UK Muslims themselves were divided as to whether it was appropriate to wear the veil in all settings and circumstances. In November, the classroom assistant, Aishah Azmi, was sacked by her school. Previously,

an employment tribunal ruled that Mrs Azmi had not been discriminated against, but had awarded her compensation for 'injury to her feelings'.

South-East Europe

In some countries of the former Yugoslavia, discrimination on ethnic grounds in areas such as employment and housing continues to block a durable and dignified return for many people displaced by the conflicts of the 1990s. However, there was some improvement concerning the issue of refugee returns, with the Sarajevo Process seeing Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia beginning to work together with international partners on the issues, although some of the most sensitive issues have yet to be tackled.

Kosovo

In February 2007, the UN's special envoy, Martti Ahtisaari, presented his plans for Kosovo's future. Following the NATO-led war of 1999, which took control of Kosovo away from Serbia, the territory – with its majority Albanian population – remained an international protectorate under UN Security Council Resolution 1244. Mr Ahtisaari proposed that Kosovo be given limited independence, with international supervision. Under Ahtisaari's plan, the Serb minority would have guaranteed places in the local government and parliament, as well as representation in the police and civil service, and a special status for the Serbian Orthodox Church. However, MRG expressed concern that the needs of other smaller minorities – including the Roma and Turks – have been side-lined under the new proposals. These communities had effectively been marginalized from the UN discussions on the future of Kosovo. There are fears that if a new constitution is rushed through a matter of months, they would be excluded again.

The situation of minorities in Kosovo is perhaps the worst in Europe. Basic human rights including the right to life continue to be violated. People face harassment and physical violence for being who they are, for living in their homes if they belong to the 'wrong' community, or for speaking their own language. The authorities, thus far, have been unable or unwilling to bring those responsible for crimes to justice. This includes those responsible for ethnic cleansing after the establishment of the international protectorate in 1999 and again in Spring 2004. These

waves of violence saw Kosovo's minority population diminish further and people forced to live in enclaves. Furthermore, segregation is institutionalized and discrimination in access to employment and public services such as health-care, is allowed to continue. MRG is extremely concerned that under the UN proposals, segregation will become even more deeply entrenched, and it will become even harder to translate the legal prohibition on discrimination into a practical reality on the ground.

Serbia

The UN proposals on Kosovo's future were badly received in Belgrade. Serbia's president stated flatly that his country would never accept the independence of Kosovo – many Serbs see the province as the cradle of their culture, with many important religious and cultural sites. Overall, the rise of virulent Serbian nationalism continued, with the January 2007 elections, seeing the nationalist Serbian Radical Party taking almost thirty per cent of the vote. The Radicals – which ran a campaign opposing EU membership and for a Greater Serbia – now form the biggest bloc in the Serbian parliament.

In the Vojvodina, which has a Serbian majority but which is an ethnic mosaic including a substantial Hungarian minority, reports of intimidation of Hungarian, Slovak and other minority communities continued in 2006, although there was a decrease in the number of incidents. The situation in Sandzak also remained tense between the majority Serb and the minority Bosniac communities. In April 2006, the Serbian government dissolved the municipal administration in Novi Pazar, heightening political tensions, which came to a head in September 2006 when a Bosniac candidate was killed during local elections. In October 2006 a referendum (criticized as being neither free nor fair) approved a new Constitution for Serbia, which curtailed human and minority rights, specifically in Articles 10, 20 and 114. Article 10 stipulated that the Serbian language and the Cyrillic script be used for official communications, while the use of 'other languages and scripts shall be regulated by law based on the Constitution', effectively banning them for official use until such laws are passed. The wording of Article 20 allows the government to curtail human and minority rights for unspecified reasons, while Article 114 requires the President 'to preserve the sovereignty and integrity of the territory of the Republic of Serbia,

including Kosovo and Metohija as its constituent part', thus making any recognition of independence for Kosovo constitutionally impossible.

Montenegro

The Union of Serbia and Montenegro ended with a referendum on 26 May 2006, when just over the required 55 per cent of Montenegrin citizens voted in favour of independence for Montenegro. It appears that most Montenegrins wanted to join the EU and were apparently dismayed at Belgrade's policies (e.g. harbouring war criminals, and its fixation on Kosovo) that inhibited progress toward accession. In April 2006, the Montenegrin Parliament adopted a new Law on Minority Rights and Freedoms, which provides for a general framework for the protection of minorities and affirms the multi-ethnic character of Montenegro and Montenegrin society. This includes non-discrimination against ethnic and other minorities, use of minority languages, free association and participation of minorities in public and social life. It also envisages the establishment of minority National Councils, as well as a Republican Fund for Minorities. However, a motion launched before the Constitutional Court questioned some provisions of the law providing for affirmative action in the area of elections and parliamentary representation of minorities through a guaranteed quota of seats, and the Constitutional Court annulled the related provisions.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina is made up of two Entities, the Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is a state of three constituent peoples – Bosniacs, Croats and Serbs – and 'Others', which includes anyone who does not identify with one of the three ethnic groups, including all minorities, people of mixed ethnicity who do not wish to identify with one group over the others, and those who simply identify as Bosnian citizens. The term 'Others' is problematic as it implies exclusion. Important rights, such as the right to stand and vote for certain offices, including the House of Peoples and the three-person Presidency, are granted on the basis of ethnic belonging and not on the basis of citizenship. In January 2007, a leader of the Bosnian Jewish Community, Jakob Finci – supported by MRG – lodged an application with the European

Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, challenging the discriminatory curtailment of these rights. The ethnically polarized campaigning during the elections of October 2006 reinforced this situation of ethnic discrimination. The Entity governments have far-reaching powers, while the power of the state government is very limited, although central government has gradually taken additional powers. Such an arrangement sets up a society where all citizens are not equal and people are discriminated against solely on the basis of their ethnicity. A July 2000 Decision of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina states that Bosniacs, Croats and Serbs have the status of constituent peoples across the whole state, not just in the Entity where they form a numerical majority, i.e. Serbs in Republika Srpska and Bosniacs and Croats in the Federation. However, in practice there is widespread discrimination in the fields of public participation, employment, public services such as health care and pensions, and education, against minorities and constituent peoples living in areas where they are not the majority.

Macedonia

In Macedonia, ethnic Albanian political parties have been members of the governing coalitions since independence, and, in the run-up to the July 2006 elections, there were clashes between the two main Albanian political parties, the Democratic Union for Integration, which was in government, and the Democratic Party of Albanians (PDA). The elections saw the PDA joining the government coalition led by the previous opposition ethnic Macedonian party. The Commission of the European Communities, in November 2006, reported on Macedonia's accession to the EU and noted that '[i]n general, inter-ethnic relations have continued to improve. The commitment of the government to make progress in the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement remained essential for the country's stability. Inter-ethnic issues were not conflicting issues during the electoral campaign.' The Ohrid Framework Agreement, which ended the armed conflict in 2001, provides for a range of legislative and policy measures to ensure equality and minority protection. As a result, constitutional changes have been made and legislation introduced or amended, including a decentralization law, giving official status to a minority language where at least 20 per cent of

the population speak it, proportional representation, measures in education, as well as measures aimed at improved participation and employment of minorities in public life and state institutions. At the municipal level, Committees for Inter-ethnic Relations are being established in areas with more than 20 per cent minority population; if given a proper role, these could be an important mechanism for participation. The Ohrid Framework Agreement focuses on the ethnic Albanian and Macedonian communities, marginalizing smaller minority communities. While comprehensive legislative changes have been made, implementation of the laws, policies and programmes has varied, with progress in some but not in other areas.

The Russian Federation

Racism and xenophobia remain rife throughout Russia. In 2006, local and international media reported racist attacks – which have been taking place for years (in 2005 alone there were at least 28 racially motivated murders) – on an almost daily basis. In a report of May 2006, Amnesty International stated that racist attacks and killings of foreigners and members of ethnic minorities were being reported with 'shocking regularity' and 'disturbingly, their frequency seems to be increasing'. Victims included: students; asylum seekers and refugees from Africa and Asia; people from the south Caucasus; people from South, South-East and Central Asia; people from the Middle East and from Latin America; citizens of the Russian Federation who do not look typically ethnic Russian, such as ethnic groups of the north Caucasus, in particular Chechens, as well as members of the Jewish community, Roma and children of mixed parentage. Even ethnic Russians who are seen as sympathizing with foreigners or ethnic minority groups, for example fans of rap or reggae music, members of other youth subcultures and campaigners against racism, have also been targeted as they are perceived as 'unpatriotic' or 'traitors'. Attacks have been reported in towns and cities across the Russian Federation. Cases included the murder in March 2006 of a 70-year-old Afro-Cuban man working as a chef in a Moscow restaurant; the stabbing to death of Ainur Bulekbaeva from Kazakhstan in February 2006; the fatal shooting in April 2006 of Senegalese student Lamsar Samba Sell in St Petersburg, after a gunman opened fire on a group of foreign students as they left a weekly gathering of intercultural friendship

between Russians and foreigners. In January 2006, nine people were stabbed at a Moscow synagogue by a man described as a 'skinhead'. People have been seriously injured in many other racist attacks.

Russian human rights activists claim that skinhead gangs operate under conditions of broad impunity, and have raised concerns regarding possible links between the Kremlin-sponsored 'youth movement' *Nashi* ('Our People') and xenophobic gangs. Human rights organizations believe that local authorities' silent endorsement of violent racism has fostered a climate of impunity for those perpetrating such attacks, with redress for victims of such attacks being minimal or non-existent. In April 2006, the Culture Minister of Kabardino-Balkaria (a Russian republic in the north Caucasus), Zaur Tutov, was attacked in Moscow, and witnesses made statements that the attackers had shouted racist slogans, such as 'Russia is for Russians!', during the assault, which resulted in Zaur Tutov being hospitalized with a fractured cheekbone, concussion and bruises. The Ombudsperson for Human Rights, Vladimir Lukin, following the initial failure of the Moscow procurator's office to classify the assault as racist, accused law enforcement officers of covering up the extent of racist violence.

The Russian Federation (RF) inherited the complex Soviet system of recognizing minorities with a territorial base. By January 1993, the politics of ethno-regionalism had produced a situation in which the Russian central authorities had recognized the special nature of most ethnic-based administrative units within the RF. Republican status (the highest) had been reached by 21 units, leaving a number of other units – six *krais*, 49 *oblasts*, one autonomous *oblast* and 10 autonomous *okrugs*. Since the demise of the Soviet system, the north Caucasus has emerged as the most ethnically volatile region in the RF. The area is riven with territorial and border disputes, involving many of the more than 60 distinct national, ethnic and religious groups (Christian and Muslim) in the region. In response to the new challenges that have faced the peoples of the region, a number of initiatives to create organizations to challenge Moscow's control have been launched, most notably in Chechnya. In the RF as a whole, the ambiguous and often contradictory rights allocated to the ethnic republics in the main agreements regulating

centre–regional relations have further reinforced the pyramid of inequality that has developed among minorities in the RF. Those minorities with their own officially recognized territory ('homeland') usually enjoy considerable advantages over other minority populations in the RF. However, the titular groups of autonomous areas with high concentrations of Slavic settlers have often faced problems similar to those of minorities lacking a formal homeland.

Chechnya remains a 'black hole' of massive human rights violations and abuses, accompanied by a lack of will by the Russian authorities to negotiate, although for most Chechens the climate has improved from the widespread terror of five years ago, when there were widespread abuses, including murder, kidnap and rape, by federal soldiers. In 2006, it was alleged that mostly fighters and their families were targeted. In November 2006, a report by the US-based non-governmental organization (NGO) Human Rights Watch concluded that torture and ill-treatment of suspected rebels in Chechnya was 'systematic', and that relatives of fighters had been kidnapped to discourage opposition. In November 2006, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the Russian authorities had violated the right to life, liberty and security of Chechens Said-Khusein and Said-Magomed Imakaev (or Imakayev), and Nura Said-Aliyevna Luluyeva, and had failed to effectively investigate their subsequent 'disappearances' in 2000. The European Court of Human Rights found that the applicants, who were relatives of the 'disappeared', were subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment and that, in the Imakaev case, the applicant's right to private and family life had been violated. The European Court of Human Rights also criticized the Russian authorities in this case for failing to cooperate with the Court by not submitting relevant documents.

Turkey

Turkey, while having made notable progress in the last few years due to European pressure, continues to experience a major national identity problem with regard to recognizing minorities as well as facing up to its past history of repression against minorities such as the Armenians and the Kurds. Amid growing uncertainty about EU membership, the European Commission issued its annual progress report in November 2006, charting the country's progress towards accession. While noting some progress in





Left: 'No Parking' traffic sign aimed primarily at Roma vehicles in Sighisoara, Romania.

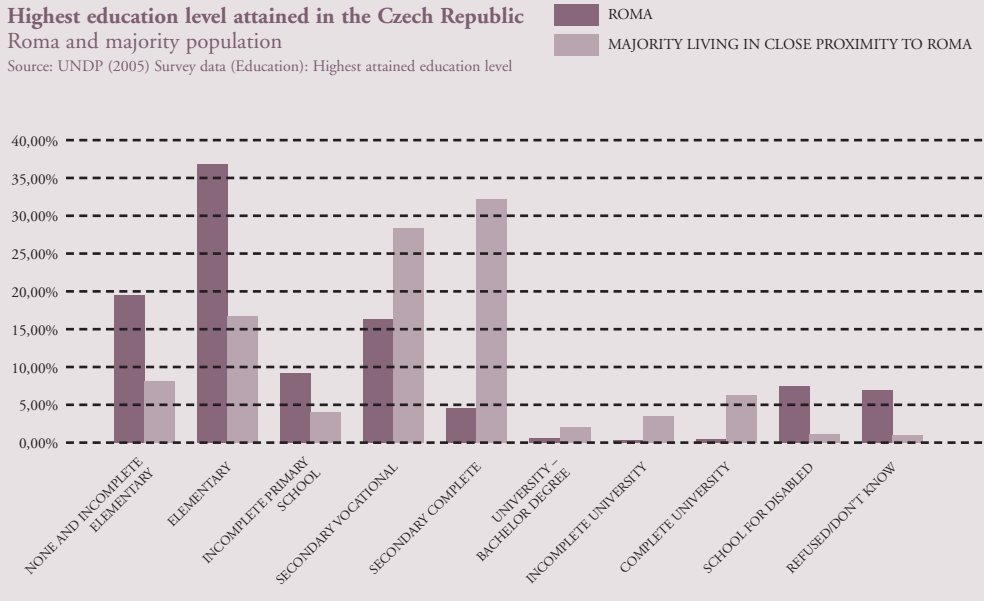
Peter Barker/Panos Pictures

reforms, the Commission noted that there was 'a need for Turkey to address the serious economic and social problems in the South-East and to ensure full enjoyment of rights and freedoms by the Kurdish population'. In addition, apart from ensuring freedom of expression by amending Article 301 of the Penal Code and by bringing the legislation as a whole into line with European standards, further efforts were needed to strengthen freedom of religion, women's rights and minority rights. Article 301 of the Turkish penal code criminalizes the 'public denigration' of Turkishness, the Turkish Republic, the Grand National Assembly, the government, judiciary, military and security services in terms so broad as to be applicable to a wide range of critical opinions. More than 60 writers have been charged under the law since its introduction in 2005. For example, in September 2006 the novelist Elif Shafak was tried for 'insult' to Turkishness under Article 301 for comments referring to the Armenian massacres as genocide made by fictitious characters in her bestselling novel *Baba ve Pic* ('Father and Bastard'). The case provoked international condemnation and she was acquitted. Turkey's continuing refusal to admit to any notion of the Armenian genocide was highlighted by the EU Parliament report on Turkey of September 2006 and, in October, the French lower house of parliament passed a bill making it a crime to deny that Armenians suffered genocide at the hands of Ottoman Turks, provoking a furious reaction from Turkey. In January 2007, the Turkish-Armenian journalist and editor, Hrant Dink, who campaigned courageously for the public acknowledgement of the fate of Ottoman Armenians, was shot dead in an Istanbul street. His murder caused an international – and national – outcry, and prompted much soul-searching about the ugly rise in nationalism in Turkey. A youth from Trabzon was arrested for Dink's murder.

Minority Rights Group International (MRG) also continued to campaign for the rights of the hundreds of thousands of people displaced by the war in the south-east of the country. Many now live in poverty around Istanbul and other Turkish cities. Spurred by the accession criteria, the Turkish government

Highest education level attained in the Czech Republic Roma and majority population

Source: UNDP (2005) Survey data (Education): Highest attained education level



introduced a new law to compensate for destroyed property. However, the authorities did not make strenuous efforts to inform those who may benefit from the laws – and the expiry date for compensation at the beginning of January 2007 passed with many still unaware of their new rights. When Pope Benedict XVI paid a landmark visit to Turkey in November 2006, issues of religious freedom once again came to the fore. Although Turkey is a constitutionally secular state that guarantees substantial rights to religious minorities, in practice deep-seated discrimination persists against non-Muslim minorities such as Christians and Jews, and Muslim minorities such as the Alevis – a Muslim sect different from Turkey’s majority Sunnis, numbering 12–15 million. Despite changes to the law, adherents of minority religions continue to face discrimination in education, and over rights to own and establish places of worship in Turkey.

Roma

Across the region, Roma remain severely disadvantaged in key areas of public and private life, such as housing, employment, education and health services. They are also frequently the targets of racism by law enforcement officials and non-governmental actors. In April 2006, a group of 20 youths armed with metal bars and spades attacked a Roma family

and a visiting ethnic Russian woman as the group were sitting round a fire talking in the Volgograd region; a Roma man and the ethnic Russian woman were killed and others were seriously injured. On 24 January 2006, the European Roma Rights Center (ERRC) filed an application with the European Court of Human Rights against Romania, concerning a case of excessive and unjustified use of force by the police against the Roma Pandeles family in Targu Frumos in August 2003, as well as the subsequent failure of the authorities to conduct an effective investigation into the alleged incidents. In November, the Commission of the European Communities noted that Roma in Macedonia were still disproportionately the subject of ill-treatment by the police.

In April 2006, the EU Parliament released a report on the situation of Roma women in the EU, which stated that ‘Romani women face extreme levels of discrimination including multiple or compound discrimination’ and that they tended to have shorter life expectancy than other EU females; were often excluded from health care; faced attacks on their physical integrity, including coercive sterilization; often failed to complete primary education, and that Roma girls, along with Roma boys, faced racial segregation and biased attitudes from teachers and school administrators; were especially vulnerable to high unemployment; were

frequently victims of trafficking; and that a significant proportion of Roma women (and men) throughout Europe lived in sub-standard housing.

Coercive sterilization of Roma women continued to be an issue in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, with no action by either government to provide adequate remedy to victims or even to comprehensively stop the practice. In August 2006, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) expressed its concern regarding coercive sterilization of Roma women by Czech doctors, as well as condemning Hungary for sterilizing a Roma woman without her consent in January 2001. In August 2004, eight of the Roma women involved in sterilization cases filed a case with the European Court of Human Rights when Slovak hospitals allegedly denied them access to their own medical records. The case was ongoing at the time of writing.

Roma remain politically under-represented and Roma women especially so. In 2006, there were two Roma women from Hungary in the European Parliament, but there are none currently serving in any European national parliament, and representation of Roma women at the local level is similarly weak.

Roma children remained disadvantaged in access to education. In May 2006, the EUMC released a report, *Roma and Travellers in Public Education*, on the situation of Roma and Travellers in education across the EU, which showed that Roma and Traveller pupils are subject to direct and systemic discrimination and exclusion in education. In November 2006, Amnesty International released a report highlighting the lack of access of Roma children to primary education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia. The report noted that often Roma did not attend school, or did so only intermittently, and that many failed to complete even primary education; in places they were segregated in 'Roma only' groups or classes, where they are offered only a reduced curriculum; and racist attitudes and prejudice were prevalent, even among some teachers and educators working with Roma children. Such segregation in education is compounded in countries such as Serbia and Slovakia by dubious testing processes, whereby many Roma children are classified as educationally backward and sent to special schools. In May 2006, 18 Roma children forced to attend segregated

schools in the Czech Republic filed their final appeal before the European Court of Human Rights: in February 2006, the Court had ruled that, although the Roma children suffered from a pattern of adverse treatment, the Czech government's intent to discriminate was not proven.

Roma were the victims of forced evictions in a number of countries throughout 2006, including Bulgaria, Italy, Romania, Russia and Turkey. In October 2006, an extended Roma family was forced to leave their home in Ambrus in Slovakia by local inhabitants. In April 2006, the European Committee of Social Rights ruled that Italy, in both policy and practice, systemically violated Roma's right to adequate housing. The Committee ruled that: housing arrangements for Roma in Italy deliberately aimed at separating Roma from the mainstream of Italian society, thus blocking possibilities for integration and subjecting Roma to racial segregation; in a number of Roma settlements in Italy, housing conditions were so inadequate as to threaten the health and even the lives of the inhabitants; the Italian authorities regularly and systematically subjected Roma to forced evictions, arbitrarily destroying their property and humiliating the evictees; in many cases, those evicted became homeless; in some instances Roma evictees have been collectively expelled from Italy; and that a significant number of Roma in Italy lived under constant threat of forced eviction.

An important development is the Decade of Roma Inclusion, set to run from 2005 to 2015, which was initiated by the World Bank, the Open Society Institute and the Hungarian government in summer 2003. The Decade has four priority areas: education, employment, health and housing, and two cross-cutting areas, gender and non-discrimination. The governments of Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, and Slovakia have signed up to the Decade's action plan. There is also the Roma Education Fund, which covers the same countries for the same time period. The potential of the Decade initiatives for improving the lives of the Roma is substantial. To date, however, the record of the participating countries on moving toward the stated goals has been mixed, with problems of insufficient resources allocated at national level, and with adequate participation of

Roma, which is often hampered by numerous internal divisions and rivalries, in the designing, drafting and implementation of plans.

In Bulgaria, a programme for Roma literacy and occupational training 'From Social Aid to Employment' was launched in May 2006, aiming to provide basic occupational training for unemployed Roma, and other measures were implemented in 2006 in line with the Decade of Roma Inclusion. However, the Commission of the European Communities in November 2006 noted that concerns persisted: measures to integrate Roma children in schools needed to be further enhanced to cover higher education; the health conditions of many Roma remained poor, with outbreaks of disease caused by poverty or lack of hygiene frequent, and many Roma continued to have limited access to health-care services; there was a need for greater access of Roma to the labour market; and that the forced evictions of non-registered Roma settlements were increasing tensions.

In Romania the new National Employment Plan, approved in August 2006, provided targeted action for minorities, including Roma, and the administrative capacity of the National Agency for Roma improved in 2006 as regional offices were being developed. However, implementation is slow and the social inclusion of the Roma remains a problem; overall living conditions are still inadequate; unemployment of Roma remains high; and forced evictions continue.

In Albania, the Commission of the European Communities noted in November 2006 that the disparity between the social and economic situation of Roma and that of the rest of the population was increasing, with 78 per cent of the Roma living in poverty and 39 per cent in extreme poverty. The situation of the Roma community in Tirana notably worsened in 2006, with some 40,000 Roma in need of social and economic support by November 2006. Only 12 per cent of the Roma are enrolled in secondary school, compared to a national average of 81 per cent. Social factors and the mobility of certain groups make lack of access to education and health services, especially vaccination, a particular problem. Weak or non-existent birth registration of Roma children in Albania, as well as lack of personal documents, makes them particularly vulnerable to human trafficking.

Denial of citizenship

Minorities in some countries continue to face discrimination around issues of their legal status. In Slovenia, thousands of people 'erased' in 1992 from the registry of permanent residents, mainly people from other former Yugoslav republics (many of them Roma), are still waiting for their status to be resolved. As a result of the 'erasure', many are denied full access to their economic and social rights. In Macedonia, one of the conditions for citizenship is to have a permanent source of income. This indirectly affects minorities, as they form a significant portion of the unemployed population, particularly Roma and Turks. Also, an applicant has to prove that they have continuously resided in Macedonia for eight years, and people often find this difficult to prove. The Ministry of Internal Affairs is often discriminatory towards Muslim minorities (Albanians, Bosniacs, Turks), who often find that they are denied citizenship on the grounds that they are 'unsuitable ... due to security reasons'. Meskhetians in the Krasnodar Territory in Russia continue to be refused recognition of their citizenship on ethnic grounds and so are unable to access a wide range of basic rights. In Greece, the authorities still refused to reissue citizenship documents to some members of the Muslim population in western Thrace, with those affected thereby denied access to state benefits and institutions. In Estonia, in February 2006, the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers noted that the number of persons without citizenship in the country was still disconcertingly high, while in Latvia, which similarly has strict citizenship criteria – including five years of permanent residence, command of the Latvian language, knowledge of Latvian history and Constitution, legal source of income, renunciation of previous citizenship and a pledge of loyalty to Latvia – as of January 2006, 80.1 per cent of the total population of Latvia were citizens, 18.3 per cent were non-citizens and 1.6 per cent aliens and stateless persons. Russians accounted for 66.5 per cent of the non-citizens. The continuing division of Cyprus has resulted in considerable numbers of people not yet afforded legal citizenship. ■