

The Situation of Roma: MEP Soraya Post Discusses Europe's Largest Ethnic Minority



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**Briefing of the
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe**

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The OSCE Secretariat is in Vienna, Austria, where weekly meetings of the participating States' permanent representatives are held. In addition, specialized seminars and meetings are convened in various locations. Periodic consultations are held among Senior Officials, Ministers and Heads of State or Government.

Although the OSCE continues to engage in standard setting in the fields of military security, economic and environmental cooperation, and human rights and humanitarian concerns, the Organization is primarily focused on initiatives designed to prevent, manage and resolve conflict within and among the participating States. The Organization deploys numerous missions and field activities located in Southeastern and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. The website of the OSCE is: <www.osce.org>.

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The Commission consists of nine members from the United States Senate, nine members from the House of Representatives, and one member each from the Departments of State, Defense and Commerce. The positions of Chair and Co-Chair rotate between the Senate and House every two years, when a new Congress convenes. A professional staff assists the Commissioners in their work.

In fulfilling its mandate, the Commission gathers and disseminates relevant information to the U.S. Congress and the public by convening hearings, issuing reports that reflect the views of Members of the Commission and/or its staff, and providing details about the activities of the Helsinki process and developments in OSCE participating States.

The Commission also contributes to the formulation and execution of U.S. policy regarding the OSCE, including through Member and staff participation on U.S. Delegations to OSCE meetings. Members of the Commission have regular contact with parliamentarians, government officials, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and private individuals from participating States. The website of the Commission is: <www.csce.gov>.

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Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe Washington, DC

The briefing was held at 10:16 a.m. in Room 215, Senate Visitors Center, Washington, DC, Erika B. Schlager, Counsel for International Law, Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe, presiding.

Panelists present: Erika B. Schlager, Counsel for International Law, Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe; Dr. Mischa E. Thompson, Policy Advisor, Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe; Dr. Ethel Brooks, Chair, Board of Directors, European Roma Rights Centre; Member of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Council; Soraya Post, Member of the European Parliament, Sweden; and Alfiaz Vaiya, Coordinator, European Parliament Anti-Racism and Diversity Intergroup.

Ms. SCHLAGER. Good morning, everyone. Thank you for your patience in waiting for us this morning. I think one of the challenges in having such an esteemed guest is that she does have an incredibly busy schedule while she's in Washington and New York. And we are very honored and pleased to have a Member of the European parliament, Soraya Post, here with us today.

My name is Erika Schlager. I'm Counsel for International Law at the Helsinki Commission. And on behalf of the Commission, I would like to welcome everyone here today. As some of you may know, the Helsinki Commission has a very, very long track record of engagement on issues relating to the human rights of Roma. We have been particularly active in addressing mob violence against Roma, ending sterilization without informed consent of Romani women, addressing the denial of citizenship and the loss of identity documents for Roma, particularly in the context of the breakup of Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia, encouraging remembrance of and teaching about the genocide of Roma, and countering prejudice and discrimination against Roma in the context of our larger efforts to address racism and antisemitism.

And I'm very happy to be here today with my colleague, Dr. Mischa Thompson, who takes the lead on these issues for the Helsinki Commission; and also welcome Alfiaz Vaiya, who is the coordinator of the European Parliament Anti-Racism and Diversity Intergroup. I will turn first to my colleague, Dr. Ethel Brooks, who is the chair of the

board of directors of the European Roma Rights Centre, the leading transnational advocacy group on Romani human rights issues, and an associate professor at Rutgers University. In 2016, she was appointed by the President of the United States to serve as a member of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Council. And she has also served as a public member on U.S. delegations to several OSCE meetings.

So, Ethel, thank you very much for coming down here today, and I invite Ethel to introduce MEP Post. Thank you.

Dr. BROOKS. Thank you so much, Erika. And thank you, Mischa, and the Helsinki Commission for bringing us all together today. It's really a pleasure and an honor for me to be here and for me to be able to introduce my fellow Romani feminist, my sister, and my role model, MEP Soraya Post. Early in my career when I was giving a lecture on the possibilities of Romani feminism as a young Romani scholar, an audience participant stood up—a professor of gender studies—and said: But that's impossible. You cannot be a feminist and a Romani woman. Those are contradictory positions.

In fact, given the situation of Roma, of women, and particularly of Romani women across Europe and across the globe, it's impossible not to be a Romani feminist. Everyday forms of anti-Romani racism are common in all realms of life, and are just a tiny part of the much larger, violent, and much more powerful forces that Romani people and women face constantly and consistently.

Romani women face multiple intersectional forms of discrimination and violence including, in fact, assumptions about the impossibility of Romani feminism. Romani people face racism, forced evictions, racially motivated attacks, police abuse, segregation, inhuman and degrading treatment, housing discrimination, expulsions and marginalization, educational segregation and the denial of access to schools, of unfair detention, hate speech, hate crimes, attacks by far-right groups, among other forms of violence, with which at this point we should all be all too familiar.

These structural forms of anti-Romani racism, of anti-Gypsyism, must be combatted at every level and in every area. For this reason, and for many others, it is my honor and my pleasure to introduce Member of European Parliament, Mrs. Soraya Post, to you today. Romani woman, activist, politician, feminist—she is at once an example of the possibilities of Romani feminism and an active agent in the fight against anti-Gypsyism in all forms and in all of its manifestations.

MEP Soraya Post was the first Romani woman in Swedish history to be chosen as a candidate for a political party, and the European Parliament's first member to be elected on the basis of a feminist platform, representing the Swedish political party Feminist Initiative. She is the first member of the European Parliament from an ideologically antiracist and feminist party—and through that, her election slogan during the campaign was, quote, “Out with the racists, in with the feminists,” which I love.

Ms. Post is a Romani rights activist focusing on the empowerment of Romani women and the self-determination of Romani society. Before being elected MEP, she worked as a human rights strategist for the County Council of West Sweden. She founded the International Roma Women's Network, and also is a founder of the European Roma and Traveler's Forum. She is active as an advisor to government bodies in Sweden, in the Council of Europe, and the European Commission, and has been a member of government inquiries on human rights, discrimination and Romani rights.

She was also a member of the very important Swedish Commission Against Anti-Gypsyism, which produced the report on anti-Gypsyism in Sweden. And one of her priorities in the European Parliament has been to work against anti-Gypsyism. She initiated the work on the resolution for International Roma Day, anti-Gypsyism in Europe, and the EU recognition of the 2nd of August to be recognized as Roma Holocaust Memorial Day, to commemorate the Roma genocide in World War II.

Most recently—as recently as two weeks ago—Soraya Post ushered in a resolution in the European Parliament based on the report on fundamental rights aspects in Roma integration in the EU, fighting anti-Gypsyism, which was adopted by an overwhelming majority in the European Parliament. The explanatory statement of the resolution begins, quote, “We demand nothing more, but also nothing less, for the Roma people than we demand for majority society,” end quote.

The resolution is historic in that it addresses the structural, far-reaching aspects, practices, and manifestations of anti-Gypsyism, and maps out ways to overcome the discrimination and human rights abuse that Roma have faced across Europe in every aspect of life and across every geography. In the midst of this critical work, MEP Post is also working to promote human rights and social justice across the board on a number of issues, in solidarity with marginalized communities, from standing up in the European Parliament against the Rohingya genocide to pushing to redress violence against women as part of a revamped security policy.

Welcome, MEP Soraya Post. *Miri phen*, my sister, and, as I said, my role model for what it means to be a Romani feminist.

Ms. POST. OK, please let me start by expressing my gratitude to the U.S. Helsinki Commission for organizing this briefing today, and in particularly Mischa and Erika, who I have known for many years now, after meeting in Warsaw. You remember, yes?

My name is Soraya Post, and I am a Roma woman from Sweden. I have been a human rights activist for about 40 years. And I never thought that I was going to be a politician, but when I was asked and nominated I thought, yeah, why not? I will end up doing the lobbying in the corridors. I will take the place where decisions are taken. So I did it. And I'm very happy for that, because it is an arena where we have an impact and can really make a change. I didn't believe it before—I had some kind of prejudice towards politicians. But I really changed my mind, because I can see—and also, towards the European Union and European Parliament I had prejudice. But I must say, there are hardworking politicians, with goals, with political ideals, which I admire very strongly. So I find myself at the right place. I am blessed by doing what I am doing now.

In 2014, when I got elected to represent the Swedish Feminist Initiative, I took on the mission of safeguarding the principle of democracy, of spreading and defending fundamental human rights, gender equality, and the respect of basic values of the European Union's treaties. And I am a member of the European Parliament, where I have joined the political group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats. The committee I am a member of is the Civil Liberties, Justice, and Home Affairs Committee. I'm a Ranking Member of the Human Rights Subcommittee and a substitute on the Foreign Affairs Committee. And the Committee on Civil Liberties does include EU member States. And the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee for Human Rights is everything outside of the EU.

One of my political goals is to place the situation of Roma on the political agenda, and to make really tangible change at last. It is not easy, though, because we have a lot

of challenges in Europe today because of so many wars and conflicts and peoples fleeing wars. And it is a huge challenge for Europe, how to deal with migration and refugees. So the EU is at a very critical point at the moment. And the destiny of 12 million Roma is not the priority. And this goes absolutely against the values of the EU. But this neglect is not a new phenomenon. It has been going on for, like, 800 years in Europe. And the result is that now in 2017, the situation of the Roma people is not better than in third world countries.

And therefore, following my mission to fight against injustice and inequality, I have recently initiated a draft of my European Parliament report on the fundamental rights aspects in Roma integration in the EU, fighting anti-Gypsyism. I just wanted to say, the first resolution was 2015, because all the years fighting as an activist was the majority and the politician to recognize anti-Gypsyism as a special form of racism towards Roma. But they never wanted—they always spoke about the social aspects, and never spoke about the real root cause. So for me, as a politician, it was most important that we use the right terminology. So we go to the root cause of the problem before we start to find solutions.

And the first resolution recognized anti-Gypsyism as a special form of racism towards Roma. And in the same resolution, the recognition of a memorial day from the Holocaust. It was a great start, which gave me a strong platform to go further in the work on Roma now. And the report, mentioned also by Ethel, was adopted in the parliament on the 25th of October, with a huge 75 percent majority. So it was a great success. And I was so proud of my fellow colleagues that they really took the responsibility to put their feet down and decide we have to do something about it.

So anti-Gypsyism defines a specific form of racism directed against the Roma, which manifests itself among others through individual and institutional neglect, discrimination, inequalities, stigmatization, hate speech and hate crime, social exclusion, et cetera, et cetera, which are the effects, the outcome of the root cause. So after long and hard work, the term was recognized. And anti-Gypsyism is very much present at our society at every level. We had never been good enough for the European societies to accept us as equal citizens, with guaranteed equal access to our fundamental human rights. So it was very important for me to raise up this, for people to understand and to recognize.

And the result of the deprivation of our human rights is very clear to see in all the reports produced by a fundamental rights agency and by NGOs. I will just mention a few, like 80 percent of Roma are at the risk of poverty, compared to 17 percent of the general population. Every third Roma household lives without tap water. Sixty-three percent of young Roma age 16 to 24 are not employed, nor are they in education or training. School segregation is a shameful reality across Europe. These are all different faces of anti-Gypsyism, which sometimes can be unconscious as well. And until we manage to remedy anti-Gypsyism, the root cause of the unacceptable situation that Roma are still facing in Europe, we will not see improvement in the lives of the Roma people, even if the European Commission initiates good programs and provides funds to realize them.

So my question was, is there a need to improve this situation? Yes, of course. And is there a way to improve the situation? Yes. And is there a way out of mistrust from both sides? Yes, of course there is. If there is a will, we can make it.

My report, which has been the first European Parliament report addressing anti-Gypsyism at the wide scale, lists 12 pages of demands and recommendations from which I will only mention a few of them. So it calls for an end to the paternalistic treatment

of Roma, an important step from regarding them as mere clients, as well as to ensure equal access and enjoyment of fundamental rights. This is key, since the institutions that are supposed to protect citizens from acts of discrimination and violence, in practice all too often fail so to extent the same level of protect to Roma as to non-Roma, precisely because of anti-Gypsyism.

So we demand the setting up of a truth and reconciliation commission at member States and at EU level to acknowledge the persecution, exclusion, and disownment of Roma throughout the centuries, to document these in an official white paper and to make the history of Roma part of the curricula in schools, which is crucial for creating trust. We call on the court of auditors to shape the performance of EU programs as they seem to fail to reach out to the most disadvantaged. We ask for clear condemnation and sanctioning of anti-Roma hate speech in the member States, and also in the house of the Parliament.

We call for compensation for Roma women having been subjected to forced sterilization. We call on member States to investigate without delay unlawful removals of Roma children from their parents, and to prevent such cases. We call for desegregation measures to ensure equal treatment of Roma in the field of education, employment, health and housing, and fundamental rights trainings for duty bearers. And finally, we call for the continuation of an improved EU framework for national Roma integration strategies after 2020. It's just a few—I have 12 pages of demands.

And the report calls for the end of the paternalistic treatment of Roma, an important step from regarding them as mere clients, as well as to ensure equal access and enjoyment of fundamental rights. Yes, this is a key, since the institutions that are supposed to protect to protect citizens from acts of discrimination and violence, in practice all too often fail to extend the same level of protection to Roma as to non-Roma, because of the anti-Gypsyism.

So 12 million Roma are considered second-class citizens in Europe today. And 800 years of human rights deprivation and harassment is enough. We cannot still remain in the middle ages. So this is what my work is about, and I'm happy for questions. And the report—I brought one extra with me to give to you, Ethel. Of course, you can find it online. But it is quite historical, and I really enjoy to give it to you, because I know you're an activist also. We have met several times, and I think we share the frustration that we in a civilized modern society still have to speak about these kind of issues.

Thank you very much for inviting me here. And thank you, Mischa and Erika. And also, I would like to thank Alfiaz. He's on my left, but he's sometimes my right hand, you know? [Laughter.] And he is really doing a great job when it comes to Roma issues in the Anti-racism and Diversity Intergroup. And not being a Roma himself, you really do understand the situation. It's not that easy, but I think you have got it really into your heart, and mind. This is very important, that the heart and the brain cooperate, you know? So, and it does. So thank you very much. And I'm also very pleased to present my husband. This is his first time traveling with me, and I'm very proud of that because I have been traveling around the world always alone. And I would like to—my first visit to Washington I wanted strongly to share with him, despite he was really ill before he had to leave. But he did it. So thank you.

Ms. SCHLAGER. Thank you for coming. I'm going to make a couple of observations, if I may, on some of the points that you've raised. I do have a couple questions of my

own, but before I ask my own questions I'll open it up to others here who may have some questions.

I really appreciated the emphasis you have made in the work that you're doing on looking at the core human rights component, the discrimination against Roma, as a cause of social and economic inequality and social and economic problems. Certainly in the Helsinki process I remember back to earlier years when the discussion really was framed only about social and economic issues and really not looking at civil and political rights at all, not looking at discrimination. I think that's still something that we have to work to address, to counter racism against Roma, whatever phrase we're using to describe it. So I thank you for that.

I also really appreciated your assertion that when there's a will there's a way, because I think working on Romani issues it is often the case that political leaders that we work with at the national level or the local level sort of throw their hands up and say, "These are really hard problems. What can we do?" And I think that is the perfect answer to that kind of reaction. And then I would invite you maybe to say a couple more words about the Swedish report that was done looking at the history of Roma in Sweden, which I gather may be—correct me on this—but may be something of a model for what you're talking about doing at the Europe-wide level in terms of truth and reconciliation.

If I could ask you maybe to speak to that question, and then I'll ask others for questions if you have them. Thank you.

Ms. POST. Thank you. Yes, I don't remember which year, but some years ago I was in the committee on Roma rights. And at the same time, I was in another government committee on human rights in Sweden. I travel a lot to Stockholm, and it was hard work. But during the time—and those also human rights strategies, I got to the knowledge of the different rights articles—articles of rights, the different conventions. And I knew about the mistrust, the Roma mistrust against the majority and the majority distrust towards the Roma. And so we discussed and discussed. And I always highlighted the phenomenon of anti-Gypsyism. But it was not on the agenda because, as you said, it was always about social issues.

After a while, anyhow, I managed to convince the rest of the board that there has to be a chapter in our report about anti-Gypsyism. And when we were finalizing that act, I raised a question—what can we do towards this anti-Gypsyism? We need to create trust between the two parties. And so we started a discussion. And we invited one minister from Canada—I don't remember the name—because they had a truth commission when it comes to their First Nations. We got inspiration from that, and also from South Africa, of course, because I think that is what is needed, because so many people don't know about the history. So that was one of our recommendations in that report, that we should have a truth commission.

Then it was at the table at the governmental level and ended up at the finance department, the whole report. So we had to wait some couple of years. And then finally they agreed on, OK, we can have like a wide look which covers 100 years of Swedish history, from 1900 to the year 2000. So we started, and what I did go through was laws, how authorities, public services, judges—what kind of impact and how did they look at Roma, and what kind of tools, and what happened to the Roma in Sweden during this time.

And the first, I just would like to say, is between 1914 and 1954, the borders were closed for Roma. No Roma from Europe could enter Sweden, which means that during the Second World War and during the Holocaust, not one single Roma could enter or flee to Sweden, because they were not welcome. And also, the Roma who were in Sweden couldn't go abroad, because then they couldn't come back. But as a matter of fact, two girls managed to enter, to flee from the concentration camps, with the white buses. And they thought they were two Jewish girls. But they managed to enter. And they grew up and got married and lived their lives in Sweden.

Then 1923, also, a law said that we are going to make the life for Roma so bad so that they will make a choice to leave the country by themselves. And then there were laws from 1930s until 1974, practices forced sterilization. My mother was one of the victims. When she was pregnant for a third time, in the seventh month of pregnancy, they made a forced abortion and forced sterilization. She was 22 at the time. It was 1958, 1959. The last forced sterilization towards a Roma woman was 1974 in Sweden. Until 1965, Roma were not allowed to go in school in Sweden. And they were not allowed to be settled. They could stay at one place at most three weeks, and they had to register at—let's say, the local police office, and had to stamp in a book. And after three weeks, if they didn't move, it was a reason to put them in jail. So they had to move all the time.

Oh, there are so many things. And the churches on Sunday—if there was a farmer—let's say a farmer who hosted Roma on their ground, they were named and shamed in the church, that farmer. So there was punishment to treat Roma as human. So—and this is all recognized and written in this white book, which was released—what was it, 2013 or 2014, I believe. And I didn't believe in it from the beginning because this—it wasn't what I wanted. I wanted a truth commission. And I didn't want only an excuse. I wanted an excuse from the State, or from the parliament, but I also wanted an action plan. I don't need an excuse. I don't need an apology. I just wait on an action plan.

So I was critical. But I was there at the opening and the crown princes of Sweden were there, attending to this. It was nice for the audience. And because at the same moment a journalist found out that Roma were registered by police in Skara, in the southern part of Sweden. Like, 5,000 Roma were registered, like a family tree. I was one of them, and my husband, my children, and my grandchildren. And even people who are dead, people born in the 18th centuries—1800-something were also registered. So it was really together a family tree, which is totally forbidden in Sweden, to have registration on ethnic ground.

So I lost my—I have to say—my positive feelings because I thought also during so many years I gave out most personal experience of my own life, of my mother's life, and how it was just to get people to understand and to get it, why is the situation as it is today. But then I was so disappointed. So when the journalist called me late in the evening, can I speak with you, because tomorrow they will drop a bomb about this. Can I send some journalists to you and take pictures? Yes, but what is it? Yes, your name is on that. And I started to cry—all this work for nothing. And what about this white book?

Anyhow, after some while I went very strong on media and condemning what Sweden was doing, which is like a role model for an open country. So I was very critical. I met with the minister of justice, the minister of integration and the police, everybody, together with some other Roma complaining and demanding an investigation of this. And there was a kind of investigation, but they didn't want to recognize that this was an ethnic reg-

istration. But then the justice ombudsman or the justice counselor decided to give compensation of, like, 500 euro to each one of them.

And I said, this is another offending towards us, because this register will last forever. The names of us will be put in an archive for professors or others to look for. And I fear, because of the political situation across Europe, including Sweden, is turning too much to the right, even to the extremes, and I don't know in which hands this will come to. So civil right defenders helped some people and got it to trial. And then they raised the amount of compensation to, like, 3,000 euro. And that's where we are today. But all who were registered, about 500,000 of them, were children, will get this compensation.

Yes, the white book did amazing things, because it gave a kind of trust and it did empower the Roma NGOs, the civil society, it did. But it was so sad that this with the police register happened at the same time, almost the same time, because all the work was, like, destroyed. But we are still fighting. And I must say that the minister of integration at the time, who is a very good friend of mine, left the politics. He is a diplomat in Jordan now. He really stood up for our cause, because he did understand and he saw by his own eyes that what we had been telling was no lie. It was documented in the church books, in the archives, everywhere, about the harassment and violations towards the Roma, and what kind of politics it was.

But I still believe that a white book—and this book is also spread out to schools, so the young people can in fact read about it. And I think it is important to create trust, and to have people understand—in a way, to kill the stereotype picture, this given understanding of why are Roma at the level they are at the moment. So that's why I want to have a truth commission. And I also think it's not—it's fair if people recognize and wash away the dirt before they try to go ahead. I mean, if there is a basket with apples and there is one rotten apple in the bottom, all the fresh apples will get destroyed. So this is the way we have to do it also in Europe.

Ms. SCHLAGER. Thank you.

Ms. POST. It was a long answer, but I thought I had to say all this. [Laughs.]

Ms. SCHLAGER. I think it says a great deal about the larger context. And I really appreciate the work that you have done on that report and for sharing that with everyone here. I think we have time for a couple of questions before we have a hard stop at 11:00.

QUESTIONER. I've got actually a few questions. But let me start out with, you mentioned—

Ms. SCHLAGER. I'm sorry, can you say who you are?

QUESTIONER. Yes, I'm Nina Kraut. I'm a domestic and international human rights lawyer in D.C., and my son is Roma, from Romania.

I'm interested—you mentioned that the EU was very concerned with refugees, migrants, and so on. I'm kind of interested, is there any separation that the EU in general or in particular countries, how they're treating Roma in relation to the migrant and refugee population, or are they lumping Roma with them and dealing with them sort of as a big group? Or have they sort of put Roma to the side, and ignored them while they deal with the refugee, migrant situation? That's one of my questions.

Ms. POST. Yes. I would quickly answer to that question. Absolutely, the Roma is put on the side. It's no priority at all. It's really put on side.

QUESTIONER. And they're not mixed with—

Ms. POST. No, not mixed. No, not mixed. No, Roma are put on the side again.

Mr. VAIYA. Maybe I can just—to kind of show that in practice, in our common European asylum system, of course the Roma living within the EU are, of course, treated differently to asylum seekers and refugees. I mean, they're treated as European Union citizens. But if you're looking in migration policy, the European Union has listed some countries as safe countries. And they tend to be the western Balkans and Turkey, so where the majority of the Roma population comes from. And the reasoning behind listing these countries as safe countries of origin is to prevent Roma from those countries coming to Europe. I mean, amongst other minorities but mainly the Roma minorities in the western Balkans and Turkey.

So we see this discrimination within our common European asylum system in terms of asylum and refugee policy. And I think within Europe itself, when we're seeing about the treatment we provide for the newly arrived asylum seekers and refugees, it's probably treatment that we provide to the Roma communities is probably at a much less standard and a lesser level. Especially in the eastern EU member States, we seem to have to—one example MEP Soraya Post gave yesterday was that you have—in a farm, you have the cows and the hens—

Ms. POST. Cow stables.

Mr. VAIYA. In the cow stables. In Romania, for example, they've actually put Roma—and they've taken the cows out to put the Roma into the cow stables. I mean, just to give you the indication in the kind of climate we're living. In Eastern Europe it's particularly bad, but also in Western Europe. I mean, make no mistake, Turkey—oh, not Turkey—France, Italy, are at the forefront of racial segregation when it comes to Roma and to other minorities. I think the key is to also frame it as all particular minorities are facing severe problems, but the Roma are probably facing the most severe at the moment.

Ms. POST. Yes, and I just wanted to add, like during the Balkans War, a lot of Roma had to flee. And still, they are stateless in Italy, for example. And today, Germany, for example, are sending back Roma who have been under—[inaudible]—it's, like, in 20 years—25. Young Roma who were born in Germany are transferred back by force to Kosovo. They don't know the language. They have no relatives, nothing—nothing! So no doubt, of course, they are treated very bad. And also among the refugees from, like, Syria, there are differences in the camp between the Roma and the non-Roma refugees also.

Ms. SCHLAGER. I'd like to turn to Ethel again and ask her if she has any last thoughts before I give the microphone to Mischa for concluding comments.

Dr. BROOKS. I really want to thank MEP Soraya Post for the work that you've been doing and for your comments today and for kind of framing it, especially around the events in Sweden and the white paper and what that means for all of us. But, you know, even here in the U.S., my home state of New Hampshire, it was 1979 when you had the last expulsion of Roma from my home state, where there's a relatively large Romani community in the north. And we have this entire history of anti-Romani racism, of anti-Gypsyism, across Europe and across the world. And we need to really recommit to that fight, and to think about the current political moment as one that's particularly difficult for Roma and non-Roma alike.

You know, thinking about various elections that have happened from Orban to Czech Republic, to Germany with the Alternative fur Deutschland, to Brexit, right? Many of them have run on an anti-Roma platforms. And so we're in a really treacherous political moment. And Romani citizens across the world have really—we've known this for decades

now, for centuries now. But really thinking about what that's going to mean in terms of bringing everyone together.

So the question that you asked about kind of refugees and Roma, building upon what my colleagues have said—one of the things that's happened is that even in this moment, right now, there's an attempt to kind of separate Romani issues from refugee issues. We really actually have to keep Roma at the center of a lot of this because these are 12 million people, right? I mean, we number 12 million. And at the same time, it's important to build these coalitions and to think about how we can come up with political models that really bring people together as opposed to kind of leave people aside and leave people behind.

Dr. THOMPSON. And with that, I would actually like to thank you for joining us today. I'm Dr. Mischa Thompson with the Helsinki Commission. And we have been putting on a number of briefings and events that are focused on increasing diversity on both sides of the Atlantic, that focus on all 57 countries that are part of the OSCE, in part because we really see this as being key to the stability of the region. And so the information that you heard today is specifically talking about what the history and experience has been for Roma people, but really with this idea that there's a larger vision of how our societies can actually be diverse and work.

For those of you who might have noticed the poster in the hallway, it is actually from a political participation initiative that the OSCE led with young Roma. And I think it's just a great example of the young people that are going to be the leaders in our generation from across Europe as well. And this is something that the Commission is happy to continue to support. And I think we've been doing this now for close to two decades.

With that, I would like to close and just thank you all for being here.

[Whereupon, at 10:59 a.m., the briefing ended.]



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