**Alliance against Antigypsyism**


# *Antigypsyism – a reference paper*

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Antigypsyism is the specific racism towards Roma, Sinti, Travellers and others who are stigmatized as 'gypsies' in the public imagination. Although the term is finding increasing institutional recognition, there is as yet no common understanding of its nature and implications. Antigypsyism is often used in a narrow sense to indicate anti-Roma attitudes or the expression of negative stereotypes in the public sphere or hate speech. However, antigypsyism gives rise to a much wider spectrum of discriminatory expressions and practices, including many implicit or hidden manifestations. Antigypsyism is not only about what is being said, but also about what is being done and what is not being done.[1] To recognize its full impact, a more precise understanding is crucial.

The *Alliance against Antigypsyism*[2] here proposes a working definition that reflects a systematic conception of antigypsyism. This paper sketches its key characteristics, the connections between its different aspects, and its myriad manifestations, which require specific approaches. It wants to encourage policy and decision makers to put into action a coherent, but diverse, set of measures to combat antigypsyism.

A number of key aspects deserve emphasis from the outset. Firstly, it is essential to see that antigypsyism is not a 'minority issue'. It is a phenomenon of our societies, which has its origin in how the social majority view and treat those whom they consider 'gypsies'. To combat antigypsyism, our attention needs to shift to mainstream societies, while raising the voices of those who are dramatically affected by antigypsyism, but also usually silenced by it.

Secondly, antigypsyism is not the result of the poor living conditions many Roma have to live in, or the result of 'how different they are'. The idea that promoting Roma integration is the main path to countering antigypsyism is a fallacy that misconstrues the origins and essence of antigypsyism. It inverts cause and effect.

This means that, thirdly, addressing the effects of discriminatory treatment – poverty, poor quality housing, substandard education, to name a few – is necessary, but in and of itself does nothing to eradicate the ultimate source of the disadvantaged position of many Romani citizens. Consequently, antigypsyism cannot be simply treated as a thematic issue, alongside housing, education, health and employment. It needs to be dealt with as an integral part of thematic policies.

Finally, what sets antigypsyism apart is its high level of social acceptance. There is a general leniency towards antigypsyist attitudes and practices. The moral stigma attached to other forms of racism is largely absent for antigypsyism. Europe has seen the emergence of a 'reasonable antigypsyism'[3]: To scold Roma and take discriminatory action towards them is all too often perceived as justifiable and legitimate. Antigypsyism is the norm rather than the exception in public discourse.

Antigypsyism is not only widespread, but also deeply entrenched in social and cultural attitudes and institutional practice. This makes the challenge of tackling it both more urgent and more difficult. Antigypsyism is like a continuous headwind. 'Roma inclusion' will remain illusory as long as we do not confront the headwind itself.

# 1 Defining antigypsyism

There is as yet no commonly accepted definition of antigypsyism that finds wide acceptance in civil society, public institutions and academia. Certain elements recur, but descriptions are often imprecise or even lacking altogether in documents using the term. To simply use antigypsyism as a synonym for 'Roma discrimination' or as a reference to certain specific expressions ( such as hate speech or negative stereotypes) obscures the specificity, extent, and underlying structure of the phenomenon.

The term 'antitsyganizm' for the first time appears in late 1920s Russia. Its current use originates in academic debates of the 1970s and 1980s.[4] Drawing important parallels with antisemitism, despite certain controversy, the term started entering the institutional lexicon in the early 2000s. Its gradual adoption signals the recognition that Roma and associated groups fall victim to a specific form of racism. This recognition is a momentous step in the struggle for equal rights.

Key texts reflecting this process include the 2005 European Parliament resolution[5], which for the first time used "anti-Gypsyism" in an official EU document. The OSCE, FRA, and, in particular, the Council of Europe (CoE) have been pioneers in exploring the implications of antigypsyism and placing it on policy makers' agendas. The Council of Europe's ECRI Recommendation no. 13 (2011)[6], remains as the benchmark of addressing antigypsyism in a coherent and comprehensive manner.

In 2015, the European Parliament reiterated its call of 2005 to tackle antigypsyism,[7] and the European Commission for the first time made significant use of the term in its report on the Implementation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies.[8] The growing institutional use of the term is a seemly development. The great test for decision makers is now to translate the recognition of antigypsyism into effective action – based on a profound understanding of what the phenomenon entails. To formulate a working definition of antigypsyism that finds wide acceptance and makes the concept relevant for a broader group of decision makers should help create effective action to combat it.

The definition of antigypsyism proposed by Valeriu Nicolae in his 2006 paper 'Towards a Definition of Anti-Gypsyism' remains influential today. Commanding though his assertion that dehumanization forms the central tenet of antigypsyism is, the paper's argumentation is more evocative than systematic. As the title suggests, it intended to generate debate, not conclude it. We are proposing the following working definition of antigypsyism that aims to encompass the debate in civil society, institutions and academia up to the present.

## 1.1 Working definition

*"Antigypsyism is a historically constructed, persistent complex of customary racism against social groups identified under the stigma 'gypsy' or other related terms, and incorporates:*

> *1. a homogenizing and essentializing perception and description of these groups;*
> *2. the attribution of specific characteristics to them;*
> *3. discriminating social structures and violent practices that emerge against that background, which have a degrading and ostracizing effect and which reproduce structural disadvantages."*

This working definition aims to present an analytically coherent explanation of antigypsyism[9]: it underlines its layered structure, indicating how the discriminatory practices that are part of antigypsyism flow from and relate to the ideological construction of an alien other, a process that antigypsyism has in common with other racisms. It underlines the invented or 'imaginary' character of its objects, to make clear that it does not target individuals or groups with common attributes, but operates on the basis of the projection of certain shared traits that supposedly diverge from common norms, while denying those affected the recognition of personal or common dignity.

The definition also highlights the historical character of antigypsyism along with the fact that it has no fixed content: It adapts and readapts to changing social, economic and political realities, but always resurfaces. [10] This definition avoids placing certain manifestations of antigypsyism, specific to certain contexts, at the center of attention, so as not to obscure other – perhaps less visible, but equally harmful – practices. To acknowledge antigypsyism is to recognize the multifaceted character of the phenomenon and the common roots of discriminatory practices with widely varying forms and intensities.

## 1.2   Terminology

Before we turn to a more detailed elaboration of the background, characteristics and expressions of antigypsyism, two notes on terminology are in place.

Firstly, the arguments presented here favour the use of the term 'antigypsyism' over terms like "anti-Romani racism" or "Romaphobia", which are sometimes proposed as synonyms. These terms directly refer to the group that is mostly, but not exclusively, affected by this racism. The term antigypsyism – in citing the majority's projections of an imagined out-group of 'gypsies' which simultaneously constructs an imagined in-group – is analytically more accurate and makes clear that other groups - Sinti, Travellers, manouches, Egyptians – are equally affected. The term "antiziganism" conveys the same content: To use antigypsyism by preference is more a matter of convention, reflecting the fact that 'gypsy' is the English term comprising the core elements of this racist ideology.

Secondly, we have deliberately chosen the notation without hyphen: "*antigypsyism*"; not "*anti-G(g)ypsyism*". This is because the latter would inadvertently give the impression that something like 'gypsyism' exists. Although certain currents of thought assert the existence of *Rromanipen* – a shared frame of affiliation among Roma – this should not be considered at all related to the projections pronounced in antigypsyist discourse. This usage also refutes the argument that antigypsyism should not be used because the term 'gypsy' has pejorative connotations. What those who embody antigypsyism are antagonistic towards is actually a creation of the collective imagination that is entirely ignorant of Romani cultures and perspectives.

## 2   Key aspects and background of antigypsyism.

In this section, the constituent elements of the proposed working definition will be explored in more detail in order to further clarify the background and characteristics of antigypsyism at different levels.

## 2.1   Historically rooted

Today's antigypsyism has deep historical roots in our societies. The strenuous relationship between majority populations and those stigmatized as 'gypsies' can be

described as part of a common heritage, which underscores its persistence and occurrence across different countries, in Europe and beyond[11]. It should be clearly understood that Romani people are not the cause of this ideology. The emergence of antigypsyism is not to be confused with the migration of Romani people's ancestors into certain regions. Rather, it flows from processes of social construction and projection that are prevalent elements of the development of European 'civilization'. Against this constant factor, the ideological justifications of the unequal treatment of Roma and other groups, and the practices of discrimination and persecution of them, have been shaped and reshaped over and over and should be understood against the backdrop of particular historical developments and events.

The effects of historical discrimination and persecution do not end with the act itself, but continue to negatively affect the people persecuted as 'gypsies' in their economic, social and psychological lives. The slavery of Romani people in what is now Romania, for example, had formally been abolished by the mid 19th century. However, the social practice of perceiving Romani people as less than human has continued to produce prejudice and everyday discrimination, both there and elsewhere. Moreover, the historical conditions of slavery durably deprived Roma of the possession of land, means of production or wealth. The poverty of many Roma today is still, to a certain degree, shaped by the historical fact of Romani slavery. Historical segregation policies have similarly isolated Romani communities from economic opportunities in many places and continue to affect the livelihoods of those communities.

The same argument holds true for the effects of the European states' persecution policies against the 'gypsies' that culminated in the genocide perpetrated by National Socialist Germany and its allies during World War II. The Nazis' aim was not only to kill every single Romani individual, but to extinguish *Romanipen* as a whole. The loss of human lives, besides impacting economic and social factors, also meant a loss of cultural resources, traditions, diversity and language skills, and this strongly affects today's Romani people's access to those resources. Additionally it has to be understood, that – not unlike slavery or the coercive sterilization of Roma women – such a persecution produces severe trauma that passes from generation to generation.

## 2.2   An essentialist ideology

The basis of antigypsyist ideology is the presumption of fundamental differences between 'them' and 'us' which informs group construction processes and the designation of identities of those outside the group. While such processes are present in some form throughout most of European history, the act of 'othering' was combined with the advent of the ideology of 'race' toward the end of the 19th century. The concept of a 'gypsy-race' was a consistent part of these ideologies. Their function was to establish the notion of a fundamental 'otherness', where all individuals of the 'othered' group share certain characteristics that set them apart from a supposedly 'superior' group, that these processes simultaneously construct.

After the Second World War, explicitly racial ideologies became illegitimate. The act of othering shifted to notions such as 'ethnicity', 'heritage' or 'culture', which are equally used to uphold the concept of homogenous groups with essential characteristics. Moreover, in particular academic circles, scientific racism continued to shape the existing knowledge and popular discourse on Roma.[12] Today's antigypsyism may not explicitly employ the notion of 'race', but it conveys the same ideological concept by postulating a distinct 'culture' shared by and defining all members of the thus-constructed group.

Antigypsyist ideology notably incorporates attributions that imply that 'gypsies' are not 'civilised' enough. Accordingly, the semantic content projected onto 'the gypsies' is always that of those who do not share, accept, won't or have not yet internalised the norms and values of dominant society. Locating potential failures and fractures of these norms at the borders of or outside the imagined community[13] is a way of

emphasizing and strengthening them. 'Gypsyness' has no relation to the actual people being stigmatized as 'gypsies', but presents a mirror image of our societies' dominant norms: it pronounces how its members should not behave and thus acts to discipline them.

## 2.3    Hierarchy

The process of 'othering' not only sets Roma and other groups apart, but also introduces a hierarchy of rights holders: Roma are not just different, they are somehow considered lesser and therefore not worthy of equal treatment. This dehumanization of Roma acts as a moral and political justification for the fact that they are routinely denied their fundamental human and civil rights.

The introduction of a social hierarchy equally entails that Roma and associated groups are generally not considered part of the national (imagined) community in social and political discourse. This not only acts as a further justification for their unequal treatment, but also makes Roma and others vulnerable to scapegoating and instrumentalization. Because national solidarity does not obviously extend to include Roma communities, any positive measures towards them are often perceived as favours granted to them rather than necessary actions to safeguard their equality of rights. Moreover, the hierarchy implied by antigypsyism reflects structural inequalities of power. Roma and associated groups find themselves in positions of relative powerlessness - materially, politically, but also culturally. This limits their common ability to achieve economic progress or participate in decision making, but also prevents them from effectively challenging their inferior status in the public domain.

## 2.4    Attitudes and social practice

The term antigypsyism covers the level of social stereotypes, clichés and prejudices. These are commonly accepted and incorporated by individuals as the basis of their own prejudiced attitudes towards Roma and associated groups. While the persistence and omnipresence of such prejudices has been well documented,[14] not every person holding them will act from them, nor necessarily approve of extremist postures towards or violence against Roma.

The level of attitudes, therefore, must be understood as a necessary but not sufficient condition for antigypsyist discrimination, hate speech and violence. There are other social and individual factors that influence the way antigypsyism surfaces. A personal bad experience with somebody perceived as a member of the stigmatized group may play a role, for instance, or the social status of the individual in question.

Antigypsyism cannot, however, be properly understood as the result or aggregate of negative attitudes. Acts or expressions of antigypsyism follow certain patterns that correspond to and emanate from social practices. These feed on and reproduce prejudices, but exist relatively independent of them. The social practices of antigypsyism are expressions of the broader social relationships between majorities and Roma and associated groups. This has important implications for the way we tackle antigypsyism: Countering and disproving stereotypes and challenging negative attitudes is necessary, but it does not address the habitual acquiescence of majorities to discrimination of Roma.

## 2.5    Systemic nature

It is therefore crucial to take account of the systemic or structural nature of antigypsyism. While we may speak of individual antigypsyist 'acts' – such as denying an individual access to a service or an act of violence – the impact of antigypsyism is not simply the sum of all of these. Antigypsyism has a systemic nature, both as regards

its mode of operation and its effects. The sting may not so much be in any singular act of unfair treatment toward an individual, but in consistently being treated unfairly, even in small ways: The operation of social practices of antigypsyism. In addition, Roma can be subjected to collective acts of discrimination such as hate speech, as well as institutional discrimination that reproduces existing patterns of disadvantage. Those are deeply rooted in the institutions, cultural concepts and power structures of European societies and all too often results in the accumulation of multiple layers of disadvantage over a lifetime.

As with self-reproducing effects, this can even happen without anybody involved in the process specifically or consciously intending the discriminatory outcomes. In its effects, antigypsyism is systemic in that it affects Romani individuals regardless of whether they have ever individually been faced with any specific acts of discrimination or unfair treatment. Furthermore, the institutions that are supposed 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, exactly because of antigypsyism. Such lax sanctioning of antigypsyism sustains further discrimination and racist acts. The role of duty bearers is important to mention here, as it is their responsibility to ensure equal treatment for all, regardless of their individual attitudes.

## 2.6    Internalization

To be labeled as the 'other' on a daily basis and having certain characteristics ascribed to you, has important socio-psychological effects. These compound and interrelate with the effects of discriminatory treatment. Individuals deal with this labeling in different ways. Reponses range from a conscious and absolute rejection of any label, to the intentional use of such labeling (for example, for economic reasons), to an internalization of the prejudiced labeling that results in self-stereotypization or self-stigmatization. This process is not uncommon among people who are confronted with racist ideologies. It is comprised of the acceptance of the idea of one's own inferiority, as well as the adoption of stereotypical 'romantic' clichés to describe oneself.

This process of internalizing stereotypical clichés should not be confused with the declaration of a specific element of an individual's identity or that of the group (such as certain traditions, achievements or cultural characteristics). At the same time, it should caution us about the complicated relations between self-identification as Roma, Sinti etc. and being labeled by others as belonging to such a group.

## 3    Dimensions of antigypsyism

While the previous section considered antigypsyism as a psychological, social and political phenomenon, this section focuses on its manifestations. While the use of the term antigypsyism most commonly refers to its most extreme and visible expressions, it manifests itself in many different ways. Together, these manifestations form a wide spectrum of expressions – covering both ideology and action – which we will structure along a number of dimensions that occur in many different combinations.

## 3.1    From right-wing to mainstream

Antigypsyism has long been accepted as a right-wing phenomenon that has to be challenged by police, governments, democratic parties and civil society. This is absolutely true, especially as the threats that are most dangerous on a physical level often come from right- wing groups or parties. Nevertheless, it is important to understand and accept that antigypsyism is not limited to right-wing extremism, but finds its way well into mainstream society and can be found among voters and

representatives of any party: A 'reasonable' antigypsyism is widely shared and accepted across political divisions.

Politically, antigypsyism functions as a tool to promote identification with national, religious or other imagined communities and therefore has to be understood as a pattern of understanding society that is reproduced in all parts of society - in everyday language, in cultural products such as music, movies or literature, in mainstream media, and through mainstream politicians. The fight against antigypsyism has to target the entire range antigypsyist positions, ranging from those of right-wing radical protagonists to mainstream stakeholders.

## 3.2   Negative and positive

The stereotypes and clichés that form the ideology of antigypsyism not only consist of demeaning, negative stereotypes, but include positive, romantic, exoticizing stereotypes as well. More importantly, like their negative counterparts, these romantic stereotypes are also understood to constitute characteristics that are unlike those of the self-described 'majority'. The romantic cliché of the 'easy-going Gypsy with a violin' embodies the same social message as does the negative image of 'parasitical Roma relying on social welfare': Both clichés support the idea that 'they' do not earn their living like 'we' do, i.e., through hard labor. As the 'positive' cliché can have equally harmful outcomes, awareness-raising about antigypsyist stereotypes should not only target negative perceptions of Roma and other groups, but should address the pernicious effects of considering groups and individuals (and their needs, preferences and potential) through the lens of preconceived group characteristics, including the exoticizing and romanticizing ones.

## 3.3   Malevolent and Benevolent

In parallel, it is essential to point out that not all manifestations of antigypsyism are necessarily malevolent. Misunderstanding Roma as needing 'special treatment', for example, can come from entirely well-intended motives. Paternalistic approaches to Roma are an example of this. What connects the intentionally malevolent and putatively benevolent forms of antigypsyism is their shared assumption that Romani people are fundamentally different and therefore need to be treated in a specific way and cannot be considered actors in their own right. There is also a tendency toward a self-fulfilling fatalism that underestimates Roma, perpetuates low expectations of them, and articulates the presumption that Roma are too different to have the same aspirations as everybody else.[15]

Between these two extremes there are also many gradations of 'mild' antigypsyism that are negative but not extreme. What is essential to comprehend, is that the effects of these 'weak' forms of antigypsyism can still have a large impact, because they equally contribute to sustaining and reproducing the systemic nature of antigypsyism. A duty bearer does not have to be extremely antigypsyist in his/her attitudes in order to produce or sustain certain forms of institutional discrimination that fundamentally affect the lives of many people in the long term.

## 3.4   Implicit or explicit in its intent

Some hate speech can target Roma directly and explicitly; but many other antigypsyist statements or actions take a more implicit tone: While they unequivocally target Roma or associated groups, they do not explicitly name them, relying on proxy designations ('the people who don't want to work') or euphemisms ('re-education', or many so-called 'public safety measures'). Indirect forms of discrimination are related to this: Measures or policies that disproportionately affect certain groups even though they are based on

'objective indicators'; clientelization or institutionalization of marginalized individuals or communities; or the acceptance of poor- quality projects because 'Roma are so difficult to work with'.

### 3.5 From denial to over-acceptance

A corollary of the wide acceptance of antigypsyism in our societies is that it is also common among duty bearers, whether explicitly or inadvertently. The most common posture taken by public authorities, public figures and decision makers to the occurrence of antigypsyism is non-action. Such non-action, too, can take different forms. On the one hand, in the political and public domain duty bearers tend to ignore the problem of antigypsyism altogether for as long as possible. Explicit reactions only occur if politicians and representatives are forced to take a stand. Then the reactions of politicians and other representatives of the 'majority' society range from absolute denial of any responsibility to an absolute over-acceptance of guilt.

The former reaction is usually based on the assumption that either there is no problem, or that the marginalised people themselves are responsible for their situation. When antigypsyism is not ignored or denied, decision makers and officials often tend to the other extreme: verbal over-acceptance. They express their dismay, perturbation and sympathy, but all too often use this strategy of 'being on the same side' as a tool to immunize themselves against criticism even as they fail to take any concrete action against antigypsyism.

### 4 Ways forward

Without a claim to exhaustiveness, this paper has aimed to sketch some of the most important dimensions along which antigypsyism manifests itself, the different guises it takes. Being able to recognize antigypsyism in its different forms and understand its semantics and the relationships between discourse and practice is a first step towards formulating fitting strategies to combat it. One key measure is to collect evidence that captures the multifaceted character of antigypsyism. The existing international and national monitoring structures, such as those covering various forms of racism, hate speech, hate crimes, discrimination, social attitudes and policy implementation, need to be revisited and revised in order to effectively document the complex manifestations of antigypsyism.

With this paper we also argue that taking antigypsyism seriously means we cannot limit ourselves to instruments in a particular domain only, or ones that focus on particular manifestations of antigypsyism. Antigypsyism is a multifaceted phenomenon; to tackle it requires a diversified set of instruments that includes criminal justice, equality measures and awareness raising. Ultimately, this entails foremost the responsibility of duty bearers to respect, protect and fulfill the human rights commitments that bind them under international law.

**Colophon**

This reference paper is published under the auspices of the *Alliance against Antigypsyism*. You can find the full and up-to-date members list of the *Alliance* at: www.antigypsyism.eu

The text of this document was prepared in the first half of 2016 by a drafting party with the following members:

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**Notes:**

[1] Jan Jařab (2015), *Eight circles of anti-Gypsyism*. Unpublished paper.

[2] The *Alliance against Antigypsyism* is an occasional coalition of organizations promoting equality of rights for Roma. It endorses the proposed definition and promotes a common understanding of antigypsyism. A full member list can be found on: www.antigypsyism.eu

[3] Huub van Baar (2014), 'The Emergence of a Reasonable Anti-Gypsyism in Europe.' In: Timofey Agarin, ed., *When Stereotype Meets Prejudice: Antiziganism in European Societies*. Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag.

[4] Martin Holler (2014), 'Historical Predecessors of the term 'Anti-Gypsyism'.' In: Jan Selling, Markus End, Hristo Kyuchukov, Pia Laskar and Bill Templer, eds., *Antiziganism. What's in a Word? Proceedings from the Uppsala International Conference on the Discrimination, Marginalization and Persecution of Roma, 23-25 October 2013*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 82 – 92.

[5] European Parliament (2005) *Roma in the European Union.* European Parliament resolution on the situation of the Roma in the European Union.

[6] ECRI (2011) *ECRI General Policy Recommendation No. 13 on combating anti-gypsyism and discriminiation and Roma.*

[7] European Parliament (2015) *International Roma Day – anti-Gypsyism in Europe and EU recognition of the memorial day of the Roma genocide during WW II.* European Parliament resolution of 15 April 2015 on the occasion of International Roma Day – anti-Gypsyism in Europe and EU recognition of the memorial day of the Roma genocide during World War II.

[8] European Commission (2015), *Report on the implementation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies'.* The term is absent from the EU Framework itself, however, which only refers briefly to prejudice against Roma. Earlier European Commission documents, such as the 2008 Staff Working Paper, *Non-discrimination and equal opportunities: A renewed commitment. Community Instruments and Policies for Roma Inclusion*, did use the term. Another key EU text on Roma issues, the 2013 *Council Recommendations on effective Roma integration measures in the member states*, mentions anti-Gypsyism, but does not include any specific description.

[9] The working definition draws on the work of Markus End. For an extensive elaboration of its constituting elements and the relationship between them, see his study *Antigypsyism in the German Public Sphere. Strategies and Mechanisms of Media Communication* (2015, Dokumentations- und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma).

[10] Antigypsysism is 'polymorphous and protean': Bernard Rorke (1999) *Perspectives on racisms old and new.* Quoted in Nicolae (2006).

[11] Antigypsyist prejudice and practice is not restricted to Europe. See the 2015 *Report of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues, Rita Izsák. Comprehensive study of the human rights situation of Roma worldwide, with a particular focus on the phenomenon of anti-Gypsyism.*

[12] Thomas Acton (2016) Scientific racism, popular racism and the discourse of the Gypsy Lore Society. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 39 (7), pp. 1187 – 1204.

[13] Benedict Anderson (1983) *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism.* London: Verso.

[14] See the 2012 Council of Europe report *Human Rights of Roma and Travellers in Europe* (Hammarberg Report) as well as the results of the 2009 EU MIDIS surveys, conducted by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency.

[15] Jan Jařab, ibid.