

**Commission on Security & Cooperation in Europe:
U.S. Helsinki Commission**

“Panel Discussion: *Aferim!* (“*Bravo!*”)”

Commission Staff Present:

**Erika B. Schlager, Counsel for International Law, Commission for Security
and Cooperation in Europe**

Participants:

**Margareta Matache, Instructor, FXB Center for Health & Human Rights,
Harvard University;**

**Cristian Gaginsky, Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of Romania;
Dereck Hogan, Director, Office of Central European Affairs, Department of
State**

**The Film Screening and Discussion Were Held From 2:00 p.m. To 5:05 p.m.
in Room 122, Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C., Erika B.
Schlager, Counsel for International Law, Commission for Security and
Cooperation in Europe, presiding**

Date: Thursday, February 16, 2017

SCHLAGER: I'm Erika Schlager with the Helsinki Commission. Thanks to all of you for being here.

I'm very pleased that we're able to have this screening of the film "Aferim!" How's my pronunciation? I hope that was passable. "Bravo!" And I just want to say a couple words about the subject of the film before we get started.

As some of you may know, Romani slavery in Romania lasted from the 14th century up until the middle of the 19th century, when the modern Romanian state was founded, and it's a situation which is not very well-known, and it's really been almost nonexistent in public debate even though its impact continues to influence Romania's social life. The United States is a country which shares the ugly stain of slavery, and we welcome this opportunity to consider its lasting impact on our societies, politics, culture and citizens.

"Aferim!," directed by Radu Jude, is part of a successful new wave of Romanian filmmaking. The action of this film is set in early 19th century Wallachia, a predecessor to modern Romania, and follows a local policeman, Costandin, who is hired by Iordache, a local noble. They're out to find Carfin, a Romani slave who has run away from the nobleman's estate after having an affair with the nobleman's wife, Sultana. Costandin, our policeman, sets out to find the fugitive with his son in tow, and begins a fateful journey.

So, after we have film, we'll have a very short break. And then, about 4:00, we'll – we have some wonderful guests to speak about the current situation and the film. And so I appreciate everyone being here. Thank you.

[The film "Aferim!" is shown.]

SCHLAGER: OK, thank you. I know – that's the second time I've seen that film, and it's really a lot to absorb. So we're going to take a break for about 10 minutes, and then we'll get back together and have a discussion with Cristian Gaginsky, Dereck Hogan and Margareta Matache.

There's a ladies' room down the hall on the right, and if you go down the hall on the left there's a men's room. Thank you.

[Break.]

SCHLAGER: Once again, I'm Erika Schlager, and I want to thank everybody that is here. On behalf of the Helsinki Commission, we really are very pleased that we were able to show this film and that we're able to have a continuing discussion about it as well.

As many of you know, the Helsinki Commission has a long record of working to ensure the remembrance of and teaching about the historic experiences of Roma, including enslavement, genocide during the Holocaust, and persecution during the communist period. We have actively worked to promote respect for the human rights of Roma, particularly in times of conflict. And members of the Helsinki Commission especially value the opportunity to hear from Roma

directly, including at Commission hearings and briefings, and as part of their meetings with civil society and government representatives when they're in Europe.

Before I turn to the three folks who have agreed to join us for this discussion now, I do want to thank a couple people who are here: my colleague Dr. Mischa Thompson, who works with me on these issues and is our lead expert on issues relating to nondiscrimination, and most recently represented us at the most recent OSCE meeting on Romani issues organized by the German Chair-in-office last September; and David Meyer from the Department of State, who is both a kindred spirit and who has been an incredible and very successful partner in trying to keep Romani human rights issues on the front burner. And I really appreciate that they are here, along with everyone else today. Lastly, Jud Nirenberg from the Romani American community, who also participates in a group of folks who get together periodically and try to figure out how we can best advance these issues. And so I appreciate the counsel that you bring to that working group.

I've asked three folks to be here today, and I really appreciate that all of them are here. All of them I know have extremely busy schedules.

And the first person I'll turn to in just a moment is Cristian Gaginsky, the deputy chief of mission from the Romanian Embassy. The bios for all of my colleagues are on the table out front, so I won't read all of that, but I do want to note that Romania has played a leadership role in drafting the OSCE Action Plan on Roma and Sinti Issues in the early 2000s, and I think that was an extremely important document for the OSCE to have. And, with Ambassador Liviu Bota, Romania really helped shepherd that process, and we appreciate that very much. Romania has been a consistently good partner in the OSCE in raising and advancing issues related to Roma.

I do want to say parenthetically here that there was an additional effort to reach OSCE consensus on a new decision on advancing Romani participation in political and public life at the last ministerial – excuse me, ministerial council meeting in December, and unfortunately the Russian Federation blocked that effort. But it was not for lack of good efforts on the part of Romania, and the United States was also supporting that effort. So, Cristian, thank you very much for being here, and we look forward to hearing what you have to say.

Secondly, we'll hear from my colleague Dereck Hogan, director of the Central European Affairs Office in the Department of State and member of the U.S. Senior Foreign Service. Dereck, I am thrilled with the energy you have brought to the office and the initiatives you've taking to advance Romani human rights issues, and I really appreciate you being here and willing to share your perspectives today.

And then, last and certainly not least, we will hear from Dr. Margareta Matache, who has testified before the Helsinki Commission before. She is currently at the FXB Center at Harvard University, where among other things she has organized several outstanding and extraordinary conferences relating to Romani human rights issues. And we are honored to have you back here at a Helsinki Commission event.

And again, thank you all for being here.

So I will sit down and I will turn to Cristian, and then ask Dereck to say a few words, and then to Margareta. I think that also at the conclusion of this we will open this up for questions and comments that people may have about the film, or conversation in general, and I will moderate that.

GAGINSKY: Sure. Well, thank you very much, Erika.

I think I'll start off with just a couple of very quick comments about the film – (inaudible) – and then just a few remarks about the theme of the Roma situation – (inaudible).

So my feeling about the film is that it's really a remarkable artistic creation, which has been praised in various artistic circles, rightly so. I think one of the leading magazines was quoted to describe the film as an exception, extremely intelligence insight into a crucial period of history. And as you know, the film was launched in 2015 – in early 2015. And then it quickly became a nominee for the Oscar foreign film award. And it turned out that it didn't get the actual nomination, but certainly we still are very proud of this important Romanian artistic creation.

I think the best characterization of the film was made by its author, director and writer, Radu Jude, who said that idea of this film was about making the past present and transcending realities between different historic times. And as you have seen, there are – there are several overlapping realities or narratives in this film. But definitely one, or the most important, central theme, is the treatment of Roma and the situation of the Roma community in Romania. And then, of course, the scope of our meeting today is to – is to look at how that's changed, and how that situation is today.

So I'd first like to again thank Erika and the Commission's membership and staff for making – for having this first Commission event of the year dedicated to a theme that's so important for us, and that reflects certainly our collective commitment and engagement to advance respect and consideration of human rights, and to ensure the highest standards of fulfillment of the human dimension principles and commitments in the OSCE, and certainly, collective engagement and commitment included, I believe, in the OSCE, for that. It includes Romanians, it includes Europeans, Americans. It includes governments and community and NGOs and scholars and researches and individuals.

I also appreciate the privilege to be here with two outstanding professionals, Dereck and Magda, who are very much respected and appreciated for their careers and achievements.

And, coming back to the present, I think I would – what I would attempt to do is to describe briefly the policies of Romania, as one of the countries with significant Roma communities in Europe, has chosen to develop over time, and in an effort to empower members of the Roma community to take the full benefits of their status as equal citizens.

And I would make three main points here. One is awareness. As you know, in just a few days, on February 20th, we will be commemorating 161 years from the abolition – since the

abolition of Roma slavery. This commemorative day, which brings the historic plight of the Roma community more up front to Romanian public conscious, which was introduced only in 2011. But the affirmation of Roma identity as a group, as an ethnic group, and its recognition as a national minority, started soon after the 1989 demise of the – of the communist regime in Romania.

It started during the first days of the 1990s, with the establishment of Romania's new democratic pluralistic multiparty political system, which for the first time created the conditions for the political representation of Roma, as well as of other minorities in Romania. It continued with the emergence of the Roma community movement, which started to play a critical role in policy advocacy and development.

And then here I have to say that, as some – as many of you know, one of the leading figures of Romani activism – I believe the central figure for many years – was Nicolae Gheorghe – whom I know some of you have known and worked with – (inaudible) – and I had the privilege to engage with him. And I want to bring up his name because – in part, to pay tribute to this amazing personality and legacy, not only as an activist for Roma emancipation, but also as someone who had the vision, character, and moral authority to set up a universal transformation of the Romanian social mindset.

His involvement and work, as well as the work of those who followed, particularly in the community, has had a defining role in the crystallization of today's European and Romanian Roma policy. So efforts to create awareness and memorialize the situation of the Roma community, and to drive the active participation of Roma in shaping policy, have started very early in post-communist Romania. But of course, awareness and memory is just – is just the first step.

The second point I want to make, the second step, is taking action and actually setting standards. And there is quite a thick record of governmental action in Romania in support of Roma, I should mention, over the last two decades. Romania was the first country to adopt a national strategy for Roma inclusion in 2001, ensuring conditions for the community's political and civic participation, and developing a set of policies aimed at curbing discrimination, and providing for equal opportunity and access to basic living conditions such as education, health, employment or housing.

There are many specific measures that have been taken over time in all these areas, which have produced measurable improvements in many Roma communities in Romania. The Romanian institutional framework has been adjusted in a way that creates more responsibility and accountability in the way measures and decisions are taken and implemented. And there's a national agency for Roma policy, which coordinates the overall effort to achieve an ever higher degree or level of social cohesion and participation.

Affirmative action measures have been introduced, particularly in education, where schools are mandated to provide registration for members of Roma community at all levels – in elementary, to high school, to the university studies. The majority of the international instruments that promote human rights and Roma right have been endorsed are being

implemented in Romania, from the U.N., to Council of Europe, to OSCE, the European Union, and other regional fora.

And, as this record shows, there's – much has been done, certainly. But still, way much more still needs to be done in this area. And to the extent that governmental action has an impact on community development, I think that at a very minimum it creates a framework which includes a number of standards and instruments and facilities, in line with established practice in other countries in Europe, and then works with as many stakeholders as it is possible to ensure that that framework is available and accessible to everyone in the community.

And the final point is I'd like to make this commitment. And here again, I will – I will just speak about the government part of that commitment and process. And what I'd like to emphasize is the state responsibility in representing and protecting its nationals. And it's true that various communities across Romania are in various degrees of integration, access to resources, and this integration is sometimes ineffective. The inclusion process is long, hard and frustrating. And everyone, perhaps, should be doing a lot more to achieve the end goal.

But at the end of the day, when members of the Romanian Roma community, individually or in groups, have been subjected to really traumatic situations of discrimination, injustice, or violence while traveling or living in different countries or jurisdictions, Romania and the Romanian government stood decidedly – stood by them as equal citizens of our country. So this, I think, is a reminder that as long and painful our experience has been and continues to be ensuring better conditions for our Roma community, we acknowledge that, we work on it responsibly and humanely, and we're animated by a genuine call to support the aspirations – (inaudible) – for all of our citizens.

I will just conclude my comments here and definitely will be available for the rest of the Q&A session.

SCHLAGER: Thank you.

HOGAN: Thank you. Oh, I should turn this on. Is it on now? OK.

Well, thank you, Erika. Thank you, Cristian, and thank you, Magda, for allowing me to join you in watching this film – that was the first time I had seen the film – as well as go and have what I hope will be a larger discussion on what we can all do to protect and promote the rights of Roma.

Just my initial impressions – I'm going to go off the cuff a little bit, like Cristian did, and give my initial impressions of the film. And it struck me, being an African-American, that there were many things that I saw growing up that took place prior to our civil rights movement, thinking of "Birth of a Nation," for example, and what – and there was obviously so much brutality in the film – the brutality committed against African-Americans. But what struck me even more, or equally profoundly, is the mentality. It's just the way you can perceive some one and describe them in such a way as non-human. And so that as a the result of that, the actions you're seem justified because they're not human. And so that's what I think that film just very

effectively drilled home, for me at least. So I look forward to the discussion on the film in a moment.

So, again, I want to thank – I thank the Helsinki Commission for hosting this screening, and for this discussion. I am really glad to be here. And as I mentioned earlier, “Aferim!” really grapples with difficult historical issues that still resonate and effect people’s lives today. They remind us that we cannot ignore our own role in protecting human dignity. That’s why it’s so important that we’re able to have this discussion today, sit alongside Magda and Cristian and Erika, because in the United States we share this ugly legacy of slavery, and the continuing struggle to address its lasting impacts on our society, politics, and culture.

In fact, Romania’s emancipation of Roma proceeded our own Emancipation Proclamation by six years, when Abraham Lincoln signed that on April – excuse me – September 22nd 1862. And as it happens, both Romania and the United States have many citizens of Romani descent. There are in the United States roughly 1 million persons of Romani ancestry living here and contributing to America’s ethnically rich diversity. As Romania will mark Emancipation Day on February 20th, we should reflect on the progress that we have made to protect minority rights around the world, even as we acknowledge the challenges that still prevent members of minority communities from achieving full integration.

During a visit to Bucharest, Romania, last year, I met with several dedicated Roma activists. We discussed the important steps the Romanian government has taken to address the concerns of the Roma, as well as the additional steps that need to be taken, again, to achieve full integration. We believe that securing the equal participation of Roma in political, social, and economic life will strengthen democracies, invigorate economies, and lead to greater stability. The United States reaffirms our commitment to the inclusion and equal treatment of all Roma, wherever they call home. No one should be driven from their home, turned away from school, or denied a job because of baseless prejudices.

Our two countries share a commitment to democracy, and a strong Euro-Atlantic alliance. We also share similar challenges in ensuring respect for the rights of persons belonging to minority communities. We believe governments and public leaders have a particular responsibility to openly condemn anti-Roma statements and discriminatory practices, to promote positive messages about the Romani community, and to fully implement the Roma inclusion strategies that they themselves have developed.

The U.S. Department of State takes very seriously its role to promote strong Romani civil society throughout Europe, and encourage governments to create an environment that fosters community, fosters opportunity for Roma, and protects Romani victims of violence and discrimination. We have programs to foster inter-ethnic dialogue among Roma, and non-Roma youth, provide legal services and public education to Romani communities, and trains Roma civic leaders to engage in effective advocacy. U.S. embassies in Europe highlight Romani contributions to their respective countries, and champion activists working to address challenges Roma face.

U.S. embassies also support Romani organizations and activists, host cultural events that showcase Romani heritage, visit Romani communities, and even facilitate internship programs at our embassies and American companies based in those countries. We're also proud that last year Romani-American, Dr. Ethel Brooks, was named to the council of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, our nation's preeminent federal institution devoted to the study and memory of the Holocaust.

As a member of the OSCE, the United States strongly supports the OSCE's long-term efforts to promote Roma inclusion, especially the implementation of the 2003 Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti that was mentioned earlier. We support the activities of OSCE field missions in Europe, which work with governments and Romani communities to support socioeconomic inclusion. The United States also collaborates with the OSCE contact point for Roma and Sinti issues, currently Mirjam Koroly, and in her efforts to protect the fundamental freedoms of Romani individuals.

We do all this not because we believe we know what's best, but because we know we need partners in this ongoing work of refining our democracies and correcting injustice and discrimination. We recognize that we convince our society only by shining light on past injustices and working every single day to prevent acts of discrimination. We also know that these are challenges that require – these are global challenge that require a global response.

So thank you, Dr. Matache, for your lifelong devotion to promoting Roma inclusion, not only in Romania but around the world. Thank you, my friend Cristian, for your government's commitment to build an even more inclusive society. And I look forward to hearing your perspectives this afternoon and learning from you more ways that we can protect Roma rights throughout the world. Thank you.

SCHLAGER: Thank you.

MATACHE: Good afternoon. Thank you so much, Erika, for your kind introduction. And it's such a great honor to be sharing the stand with Dereck and Cristian.

And I have to say that today your institutions are sending such a powerful message to the world.

(Technical difficulties.)

MATACHE: Yeah, so you are sending such a powerful message to the world by marking the commemoration of 161 years from the abolition of Roma slavery in two Romanian principalities, Wallachia and Moldova. I think that I give voice to many Romani activists and Romani people out there when I say that we are very grateful for the work that the Helsinki Committee, and you, Erika, in particular, have done in the past two decades to defend and to promote Romani rights across the world.

Now, getting back to the movie, every time I watch "Aferim!" – but also when I watch "The Great Shame," another – a play that was written by a Romanian Roma activist on Roma

slavery – the words of Viorel Achim, a well-known Romanian historian, come in my mind. And I think that I echo a little bit of what Cristian mentioned earlier. So what Achim says is that the past explains the present and the present explains the past. And oftentimes when I think about that, it makes me feel very powerless, knowing that so far both Roma and Romanians in my own country have not been able to accept and to explain to their own children the situation of the Romani people today through the ties that this situation has with the past of slavery.

And to me, achievement of inclusion and diversity revolves around a break with a past of injustice. And yet, Romani slavery is still not taught in our Romanian schools and is not really in the mainstream history books in my country. And that, along with several other factors, I would say, prevent generations after generations of children – both Roma and Romanians – to understand the roots of the present-day prejudice, poverty, relations of power, but also what I call Gadje privilege, or non-Roma privilege in Romania and beyond. But I always start my introductory remarks with some past and present factual information. And I apologize for those who already know – already know this. But in – I want to set the basis for a more analytical and more nuanced discussion afterwards.

My hope is also to hear from you all, what are your thoughts on how to actually achieve the inclusion for those who belong to historically marginalized communities and groups. So let me start by saying that Romani global diaspora is formed by about 14 to 15 million Roma. The majority of them live in Europe, but as Dereck mentioned, there is also about a million Romani people in the U.S. And also, there are many people in the Middle East, in Australia, and in Latin America. The origin of Romani people come from the territories of northern India, or more precisely from the Punjab region. But we lack written archives, so this is a whole debate in itself about our origins.

Ever since the arrival of Roma on European territories – that was about 1,000 years ago – Roma have been continuously exposed to prejudice and rejection, and they have been targeted by policies of exclusion up to the present day. And just to mention the 20th century, when eugenic beliefs and also policies at the time led to the extermination of Romani people during the Holocaust, and also led to the forced sterilization of Romani people in Czechoslovakia or also Sweden. On the territories of now what is Romania, Roma have been slaves since their arrival up to 1855 in Moldova and 1856 in Wallachia – basically for almost 500 years.

The slave owners, as we've seen in the movie, included not only the crown and then nobles, the Boyars, but also the church – the Romanian church. After the final act of abolition, around 250,000 Roma were free, in both principalities, and they became legally free. Yet, they are not provided land. And they were not provided any other remedies. So, in practice, the emancipation process did not really give a chance to Roma to get more social and economic opportunities. And it is hard to make now accurate estimations, but we believe that the church, the aristocracy, and also the Romanian state benefited a lot, and benefited through a huge amount of money from Roma slavery in our country. Again, back to the present, the Romani slavery is not yet taught in schools. We have no history books, we have no memorials, no museums to acknowledge this episode in our country's history.

But there are some small gains of progress towards acknowledgment. For instance, in 2007, the Romanian government worked together with Romani activists to establish a national commission to study the Roma slavery. It didn't really work out, but the interest was there. In 2011, the Romanian parliament declared February 20 as the commemorative day of Roma slavery. More so, last year, in 2016, Damian Drăghici, a member of the European Parliament who is also Romani descent, placed a memorial plaque in the Tismana Monastery, where the first references to the Roma slaves were documented.

But there is so much more to say about slavery, and I'm not a historian and due to the lack of time as well I will just go ahead and touch briefly upon the current situation of Roma as well. And please allow me to reflect on the situation of Roma in Europe as I think there are so many connections between what is happening in Romania and across the whole continent. And there are also a lot of joint efforts at the European level that needs to be taken into account when we discuss the Roma situation today. And it's fair to say that the past 25 years, civil society, donors, international organizations, and also governments have implemented several projects and also national policies targeting the Roma. In the national initiatives such as the Decade of Roma Inclusion or the OSCE Action for Roma and Sinti, which both of you mentioned earlier, but also more recently the EU Framework for the National Roma Integration Strategies, benefited from the commitment of most European governments with large Romani populations. And indeed, there are many examples of initiatives that proved to be successful for some Romani individuals and communities, but I think that overall the data in Europe shows that still today Roma remain marginalized and discriminated against across the continent.

So probably, at least to me, apparently change is necessary as Roma continue to be discriminated against, as Roma continue to be at the margins of society, although there are so many – so many policies in place nowadays. And I think that the marginalization is much more evident in informal camps or in settlements that are placed at the outskirts of Western cities in Europe, as well as in ghettos or villages in Central and Eastern Europe.

What is missing, according to my research, is policies that are aiming at diminishing prejudices against Roma. And these have been rarely tackled in policies and in measures. And as you can see, as a result a 2016 fundamental rights agency report shows that in the past year, one in four Roma has been discriminated against or felt discriminated against, and four out of 10 Roma felt discriminated against at least once in the past five years.

And this study does not even discuss the more complex struggles in the case of intersecting identities, LGBTQ Roma, women and girls, Romani women and girls or Romani people with disabilities. Also, violent attacks against Roma, hate speech and also hate crimes have been documented in the past decade in several European Union countries, and I think Hungary was one of the countries that – in which the situation of Roma was put at risk quite a lot starting in 2007 up to 2012. So basically, what I'm saying is that a lot still needs to be done and to build upon what has been worked upon already worked on in the past 25 years. But I think that the key question for all of us is where to focus our work and what can we do, how we can shift the paradigm and achieve better results knowing that there is commitment out there to improve the Roma situation.

And education seems to be one of the answer that – answers that is accepted by all sides – Romani activists, governments, scholars and so on. And we also know that education has proved to be one of the most powerful tools to dismantle power relations and to dismantle poverty. Yet, the act of education in the case of my communities, I believe that has been misunderstood very often in policies, but also in research.

Last year, in 2016, I went to Serbia and interviewed several Romani students, and one of them told the story of her family and how she went to university. And she told me that her grandmother said that God has gave you the school for the Gadje, what we call non-Romani in our language. And indeed, if we are to look beyond this statement and to look beyond the portrayal of Romani culture as one that rejects education, her statement speaks to the continuous exclusion of Roma from the public school system. And across Europe, Roma continue to be segregated in special schools, special classes, separated schools. And also, many Roma continue to be pushed out from school. We call it, I think, “dropping out,” but we feel that very often they are pushed out from school by poverty, by rejection, by bullying, and many other factors.

Yet, for much of the public education history, scholars, law and policymakers continued to reproduce and echo the same imaginary about Roma, and that’s the popular idea that Romani culture rejects education. And I think that reflects back on the policies, the way that we draft them. And if we look at the European Union strategy, the European Union Framework for Roma, the main aim of this policy is to enroll Romani children to primary education, but we “encourage” them to go to high school and “encourage” them to access university. And I think that that language says a lot about what the object is and the standards that we have when it comes to Romani education, and that needs to be changed. So, in my opinion, what we need is to shift from this way of thinking that Romani culture rejects education and we need to focus more on anti-Romani racism in schools, on how to make schools more welcoming for minorities, including the Romani people. And finally, what we need is also to look at the past so that I can – and I’ll go back to my initial thoughts on slavery. I think that children, both Romani and non-Romani children in Romania, they need to know what slavery meant for our country and how we can overcome, how we can create solidarity with Roma and how we can actually have more responsibility for the common past of our country. Thank you so much.

SCHLAGER: Thank you, all of you. And before I open it up a little bit, I just want to circle back and see, Cristian or Dereck, if you have any additional comments to make.

GAGINSKY: You know, I mean, yeah, just a couple, just – because I mean, you know, what Magda said was so powerful just coming up after the movie, which was so powerful. And I think that indeed, I mean, looking back to what happened in history is indeed probably one of the keys that can really bring and continue to reinforce and consolidate progress today.

And what I wanted to say, to make a connection is, I think that the merit of the film is right – you know, it’s a very particular one because, as we all know and just saw, there’s so little actual information, right, documentary evidence, like books or – (inaudible) – movie. And it helps you look back, and it’s even more significant – because, I think – over the past 25 years of post-communist Romania, you know, there’s been a lot of progress measured, documented. But the – but the 50 years that preceded that were like, you know, very opaque. You couldn’t see

through and look at the history before. So I think what this movie in a way does is just to give it now sort of a lens through that thick block of communist silence and neglect and ignorance, and deliberately so, into, you know, part of that history. And I think that that makes it, again, maybe so more important.

And the other comment I had was in relation to what Dereck said, and that's the fact that obviously many of the – of the things that Romania has done throughout this past 25 years have been driven in large part by this shared commitment and shared adherence to the values of humanity and dignity and tolerance and human rights that the U.S. government, and obviously the U.S. Congress through things like Helsinki Commission, have been so at the forefront of promoting a goal. And so I think there's an important recognition that we owe and affirm to that partnership over years. And many of you here, I know you certainly have been directly and personally involved along this way. So I want to – it's just – it's just a recognition comment. So

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SCHLAGER: All right. If there are comments or questions that people would like to ask or – you know, I think this is the time to do it. And would you identify yourself when you –

Q: Yeah. I'm Danjel Hyseni. I'm from Albania, and I'm part of the Roma community also. But I'm doing a fellowship – I'm a Lantos Fellow in the Office of Congressman Hastings.

And just I wanted to ask what happened with the Roma that moved from Romania to France and they wanted to be deported. And I wanted to ask, they got back, they get integrated in the – in the community?

GAGINSKY: (Inaudible.)

Yeah, so – (laughs) – so that's something that kind of – it was a more significant episode a few years ago, right, in 2011 – 2010/2011 – when, indeed, a number of Roma groups that had established residence in France, in various neighborhoods, were kind of directed to return to Romania. And, you know, many of – many of them have indeed returned. In certain situations, there was a bit of confusion at the time on, you know, what was the proper process and, you know, what kind of measures would the local authorities in France or other countries would take to kind of encourage people to move back to Romania. And that's when I think – that was actually, you know, one of the messages that I had in my previous remarks, is, you know, that's when – that's when Romania really didn't look at the fact that, you know, those were Roma people or, you know, minority or other groups. They were Romanian nationals. They were Romanian citizens. And we addressed that as such in our dialogue with, you know, our other partners. So, yeah, they – many of those returned and continued their lives at home in Romania. Others have decided to, you know, spend a while back home and then, you know, continue to try to find other opportunities. But, you know, it's a process, and it's not confined within the boundaries of any of our countries, however. It's something that we all share. So –

MATACHE: Just a couple of comments. But to put it in a context, I think there are about 400,000 Romani people living in France, and 20,000 of them are people traveling from Romania and Bulgaria to France. Most of them live in settlements on the margins of big cities.

And there was a – the migration of Roma from Romania to France was not something new in 2010. It just happened that in the '90s and beginning of 2000s, a lot of money were invested by the French government into sending Romani people back from France to Romania through a voluntary repatriation program, which basically meant that Roma benefited from free transportation back home. But what happened was that that program was not particularly successful because Roma will go home for a couple of weeks, months, and then they will return to France.

So, in 2010, the French government decided to come up with a policy proposal which basically stated that they want to fingerprint all those who have traveled from France to Romania and back – but not only from Romania, but more generally. But it was clear for us that it was – they targeted the Roma. But I think that back then, as Cristian mentioned, both the Romanian government and the European Commission had a strong reaction and to the level which the European Commission threatening France with the infringement proceedings back then.

So the proposal was taken back by the – I think the situation of Roma migrants in France is far from being OK. I think one of the problems in France in some localities is that there is no interest for integration. The policy is to send the people back. Where there was investment and interest for integration, like, for instance, in the city of Strasbourg, the municipality's very happy with the results. Roma have housing, children go to school, they have great results, and so on. And Strasbourg s not the only case, but this is a case that I know.

SCHLAGER: If I could just add that the deportation of Roma from France was also something that the leadership of the Helsinki Commission, then Senator Cardin and Congressman Smith, did raise because of the discriminatory nature of the design of the deportation and the way it was implemented.

Do we have other questions?

Q: Hi. Alex Johnson with Open Society Foundations. So, really, thank you all for your statements.

I have a question. I wanted to get back to this concept around education and how history was portrayed, specifically in terms of, you know, of course, the mentioned not having the story in history books. What is the role for maybe educational exchange? Because here domestically we also have in my own personal experience growing up a challenge in terms of a narrative of how, you know, a story is told in terms of enslavement of African people, for example. So I would like to hear about maybe what are some initiatives for transatlantic exchange in that regard and maybe your own efforts in terms of generating new content to contribute to those educational materials to fill in that space.

HOGAN: Yeah, so I want to start with a couple of points. I think you're tapping into something that I personally think we fully realize in terms of the potential there. We have, through the State Department, a number of exchange programs, professional, academic exchange programs. One in particular, the International Visitor Leadership Program, IVLP, where we work together in Washington with our embassies to facilitate two- to three-week exchanges, or

there's another program, whether it be Fulbrights or FLEX, Future Leaders Exchange Program, for high school and college, and advanced degrees for a longer period of time. And I know when it comes to Roma and the issues that a number of our embassies in Bratislava and Prague have organized these IVLP programs to the United States, whether it's dealing with how to be better community leaders – and so these programs take the youth, take these young people around the United States and put them in direct contact with community leaders. And so I know of that example.

I personally know – and I have a friend here from the State Department, as well, David Meyer, who's been working these issues a lot longer, and he can please stand up and jump in on this. But I personally don't know of any program that actually goes into education, how we in the United States have worked on this issue of, you know, changing the mentality, changing the mentality of Americans when it comes to African-American history, for example. So I – so if there is, great. I'd love to hear about it. If there isn't, we should work on it.

So, David, do you have anything you want to say?

MEYER: Oh, I'll just say that last month we did have some, actually, Czech and Slovak educators here and –

HOGAN: Educators, good.

MEYER: Yeah, and ministry government officials, and they went around the U.S. and talked to other – basically learned about integrated education in the U.S. and the process by which the U.S. has gone about on advancing inclusive education. So that's, I think, a great example –

HOGAN: It's a very good example.

MEYER: – of the types of things we're able to have on this front. But certainly we're always looking for other ideas. Our embassies are always looking for interesting ideas with, you know, partnerships with local NGOs and educators to things that they can support and amplify and bring to governments and to try to find ways to kind of boost those activities.

HOGAN: Thank you, David.

MATACHE: Yeah, just a few thoughts. In 2011, I was one of the Romani activists who were invited to be part of the IVLP program, and I had a great opportunity to visit several states here, and Alabama was one of them. I think that one of the greatest lessons in – of history that I had in my life was that program, and it was also one of the drivers of my thoughts. Why not for Roma? Why can't we have a museum where people can go in to see the history of my people, and so on? And so that was part of my learning process. And I certainly hope that we could have one focused specifically on slavery, right, and another program. And then I think this – in 2016, the Open Society Foundation, the Budapest Office – and the Justice Office, they also organized an exchange visit of – between Romani lawyers from Central and Eastern Europe, or

Europe more broadly, and organizations and individuals here to look among other issues, like the issue of slavery. And my hope is that they will build on that visit and come up with new ideas.

And finally, myself, for me, the issue of slavery is very much personal as well, because I come from a village where most Roma have – may have been slaves. And also my aunt, she's now 82, but every time I ask her, so what were you doing when you were a child – and she'd never been to school – and she said I was working on the land of the boyar. And that always strikes me: So what if? So we contracted a lawyer in Romania to look into my family history and to see, well, is there any connection between my family and slavery. But what I'm saying is it's so painful now to know, and I want to know that. So that's part of my personal history.

But then at Harvard we also do quite a bit of work now on reparations for state-sponsored injustices. And by that we don't mean necessarily financial compensations, but also look at memorialization and symbols and so on. And the whole program is educating not entirely to Roma, but we want to place the Roma slavery and Roma reparations into the flow of the conversation on reparations.

And the conference that we organized last year to mark the International Roma Day involved scholars from Romania, for instance, working on Roma slavery, but also scholars from Jamaica or from other Caribbean countries so that we can discuss together what are the strategies for reparations. And I think that based on that conference, we are now editing a book looking at reparations from the perspectives of many groups out there, including looking at the Armenian genocide, looking at the African-American history here, and Jamaica, South Africa, and so on. So we will try to do comparative view on these issues and make a point that, well, we have a common topic, so we don't have to always work isolated, but we need to join forces and work on that.

SCHALGER: Thank you.

GAGINSKY: And if I may, there's a complementary, I think, track that at times have been – has been, you know, present in what we've done, and that goes back to Dereck's point about the many State Department programs and engagement strategies and instruments.

I recall some few years ago there was that concept of the tech camp and, you know, kind of the State Department concept – and I don't know if you – any of you remember – and that camp – and it wasn't – we did tech camp Romania. That meant kind of a seminar done in Romania with a theme that, you know, was – that aimed to contribute to more community progress. And there was a tech camp on entrepreneurship. There was a tech camp on women. There was a tech camp on – specifically designed for the Roma – for the Roma community, and that meant how do we – how do we employ technology to, you know, enable greater effectiveness in the sole sum of the – that community needs? And so, you know, I mean, occasionally we – you know, we come up with very interesting and smart engagement opportunities and – but that again speaks about, you know, the kind of – what can come out of when we do things together.

SCHLAGER: Are there any last comments or questions? I'm going to conclude with just a couple of observations. So, first of all, Cristian, I want to thank you for mentioning Nicolai Gheorghe. As someone that worked with him, I really see him as one of the leading civil rights activist in the Romani world, the late Nicolai Gheorghe, and someone whose legacy we really should remember and honor. And hopefully, what we're doing today, we're carrying that forward.

I was struck in what each of you said by the theme of the aspirational nature of the work ahead of us. You know, all of us have a challenge to not only advance the work that's been done but to protect the achievements that have already been made. It's two parts, and we have to do it together. And I was reminded, especially with Lantos fellows in the room, of the comments of the late Congressman Lantos, who said that "the veneer of civilization is paper-thin. We are its guardians, and we can never rest." And with that in mind, we will certainly persist in our efforts to protect the achievements that have been made and to advance them even further.

Thank you. (Applause.)

[Whereupon, at 5:05 p.m., the discussion ended.]