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***After Tatárszentgyörgy
On the Subjective Perceptions of Security***

by Péter Tálás

The double murder in Tatárszentgyörgy¹ and the declaration of the police chief of Miskolc² means a definite threshold in the relation of the majority and Roma population in Hungary, as the question of 'civil war' was raised publicly for the first time. Though we might understand the desperate temper connected to the recent cases of ethnic violence, and might accept that the Roma – non-Roma relationship has certain security policy aspects as well, but we rather agree with the President of the Republic in rejecting the idea of envisioning civil war.

Civil war is a form of political violence – just like *coup d'état*, terrorism, rebellion, etc. – which should be clearly differentiated from ordinary crimes. According to the 1949 Geneva Agreements, civil war has four main criteria: the party starting the civil war has to control at least part of the country's territory; it has to exercise real legal power over the civilian population living on the occupied territory; either the central government or a third party has to recognize it as a belligerent; and the government has to use the regular armed forces against it. This is definitely not the case in Hungary. Thus all those, who speak of civil war in connection with the relationship between the majority and the Roma community, use a rather subjective interpretation of both the current situation and security in general.

Similarly problematic, both from the moral and the professional point of view are those declarations, which try to picture the criminal acts committed by Roma people as 'Roma criminality.' In Hungary the ethnicity of the citizens has not been registered in criminal statistics since 1991. Moreover, even in census such data might only be given vol-

untarily. Thus one can only have rough estimates even on the overall size of the Roma population in Hungary, and practically no verified data exists on their rate among crime perpetrators. Therefore using the term 'Roma criminality' has simply no scientific ground; it only makes anti-Roma prejudices becoming stronger. One might also note that Hungarian governments of the recent 19 years have spent immense amounts of money and resources on Roma integration without actually knowing, who exactly the Roma are, and how many of them live in Hungary.

Security perception, of course, has an important dimension of subjectivity. According to numerous public surveys and opinion polls, the Hungarian society is strongly xenophobic, and has widespread, strong, and open anti-Roma feelings. These prejudices might lead to the securitization of the Roma question, simply by setting the public demand toward policymakers to 'handle to problem.'

The main concern of national security is not an ethnic, but a social one. The ratio of segregated people (including Roma and non-Roma as well!) living in deep poverty has been increasing in Hungary, and might reach 9-11 percent of the whole population to 2050. This tendency endangers the overall integrity, stability and development of Hungary. Efficiently countering these challenges would first require the thorough and differentiated mapping of all the segregated groups, regardless of their origins. Besides, the majority society is recognize, that these segregated groups are going to stay with us anyways, even if we only grow our prejudices stronger instead of handling their problems.

¹ Tatárszentgyörgy is small village in Central Hungary, where the house of a Roma family was on fire on 23 February 2009. The father and his 5 years old son were shot, while escaping from the fire. The perpetrators are unknown.

² Gen. Albert Pásztor, police chief of Miskolc spoke openly about 'Roma criminality' on 30 January 2009, stating that all robberies happened in last December were committed by Roma people.