

# THE STORY OF ŠARIŠSKÉ MICHAĽANY SCHOOL

Critical Reflection and Challenges



**eduRoma**  
Roma Education Project

**The Story of Šarišské Michal'any School**  
*Critical Reflection and Challenges*

**II. part**

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## INTRODUCTION

Roma-related issues and questions have recently become a relatively frequent matter of political and media attention both in Slovakia and in the international context. It is becoming apparent yet again that this area represents one of the sore points shared by EU member states which they are unable to deal with in an effective and just way that would fall within the liberal-democratic tradition. This study aims to contribute to this field and help to form social, political and educational conditions that would allow for successful integration of Roma students from socially disadvantaged environment into the regular education process.

However, grasping of inclusion and inclusive education necessarily means that a new way of thinking needs to be enforced, too. The introduction of inclusive education is a long-term process which requires enormous effort and financial support from the state. Roma inclusion in education in the form of state commitments is reflected in the following documents which have been approved by the government:

- Medium-term Strategy of Roma Ethnic Minority Development in the Slovak Republic Solidarity – Integrity – Inclusion 2008 – 2015 (*Strednodobá koncepcia rozvoja rómskej národnostnej menšiny v Slovenskej republike Solidarita – Integrita – Inklúzia 2008 – 2015*). This Strategy aims to: ‘Create a conceptual model for the forming of more favourable conditions in marginalised Roma communities in terms of permanent social development, development of community and social services and social change-focused integration’<sup>1</sup>
- Strategy of the Slovak Republic for Integration of Roma up to 2020 (*Stratégia SR pre integráciu Rómov do roku 2020*).
- Revised National Action Plan of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005 – 2015 for the years 2011 – 2015 (*Revidovaný národný akčný plán Dekády začleňovania rómskej populácie 2005 - 2015 na roky 2011 – 2015*).

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1 See: [www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk](http://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk)

- The Ministry of the Interior’s ‘Roma Reform Programme - The Right Way’ (*Správna cesta – Rómska reforma*) Draft, presented in part at the end of 2012.<sup>2</sup>

The structure of the Slovak education system is characterised by frequent differentiation between a student’s family background and his or her attainment. School systems face a challenge: to improve students’ performance (quality) and minimise the impact of students’ socio-economic background<sup>3</sup> on their attainment (equality). This means that the chance to achieve positive changes in the schooling of all students is directly linked to the question of securing social justice in education.

The 2003, 2006, 2009, 2012 and 2015 PISA international surveys shed more light on the real situation in Slovakia.<sup>4</sup> Through ESCS index, the surveys take into account students’ socio-economic status (based on their parents’ occupational status, the highest level of students’ parents’ education and home/material possessions). This part of the surveys works with information obtained from the directors of the participating schools and from the 15-year-old students by means of questionnaires. In OECD PISA surveys, students’ socio-economic background was measured using the index of economic, social and cultural status (the so-called ESCS6 index). The

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- 2 A set of close to 90 measures that the government of Slovakia and the new government plenipotentiary Peter Pollák plan to enforce, are rooted in 10 pillars which are intended to serve as a basis for the drawing up of individual areas of the so-called Roma Reform Programme. The topics covered range from social welfare through to housing, land reform, and education. See: <http://www.sme.sk/c/6537509/desat-pilierov-noveho-romskeho-splnomocnenca> (10 Pillars of the New Roma Plenipotentiary, in Slovak).
- 3 Strategic documents drafted by the Ministry of Education (such as the *Concept of Education and Training of Roma Children and Students, Inclusive of Secondary and Higher Education Development*, approved by Government decree no. 204 of 2 April 2006) offer a definition of socially disadvantaged environment. The definition has not changed since 2006 – socially disadvantaged environment is defined as a child’s family which is receiving social assistance benefit and the income of the family does not exceed subsistence minimum; where at least one of the parents falls within the category of disadvantaged job seekers; where the highest level of education completed by parents is primary or where at least one of the parents has not completed primary education; or which lives in a non-standard housing and sanitary situation (e.g. a student does not have a place designated for studying, he/she does not have their own bed, the house is not connected to the grid, etc.).
- 4 Some 60 countries worldwide have participated in PISA 2003, 2006, 2009, 2012 and 2015: all 30 OECD member countries and other member states. The first time Slovakia participated in OECD PISA survey was in 2003.

results indicate that the price society has to pay for inequality in education can be really high in the long term: those, who have not acquired a sufficient level of competence for a successful life in society, will not utilise their potential and will rely on drawing resources from the said society through social welfare payments and higher healthcare costs. Last but not least, a high level of inequality in education subsequently limits civic engagement and poses a threat to social cohesion.

Within the context of this study, the following findings are deemed the principal PISA 2015 outcomes (adapted according to <https://www.nucem.sk>):

- In 2015, Slovak students achieved statistically significantly worse mean results than the OECD average in all three competencies. Results of our low achievers are relatively worse than those of OECD low achievers, while the results achieved by our top performers are almost comparable to OECD top performers.
- In Slovakia, the impact of students’ unfavourable social background on their attainment is one of the most significant in all OECD PISA countries. Students with the lowest socio-economic status lag behind their peers with the same background in OECD. The negative influence of parents’ unemployment on students’ attainment in Slovakia ranks among the highest within OECD.
- In terms of students’ attitudes towards learning, our students state significantly lower levels of perseverance, openness to problem solving, as well as lower level of belief in their own abilities. Compared to 2003, many of our students’ attitudes towards learning have deteriorated significantly.
- When it comes to indicators related to the learning environment organisation, Slovakia is no worse than the OECD average in most of them. However, a noticeable deterioration can be observed in a number of aspects since 2003, which could have a partial impact on students’ performance. The number of students repeating a grade has grown significantly. Students who repeated a grade achieve worse school results than students who have never repeated a grade. Disadvantaged students face a higher risk that they will repeat a grade than their more privileged schoolmates. A general rule applies that the better a student’s attainment, the less likely he/she is to repeat a grade. The biggest problem can be observed at the primary education level, where as much as 1.4% of students have repeated a grade more than once, which is twice more than the OECD average (0.7%).
- Socially disadvantaged students in Slovakia usually fail to become top perform-

ers. In OECD countries, some 6% of students manage to 'beat' the socio-economic odds against them and exceed expectations in spite of their situation. In 2015, only fewer than 4% of students managed to do so in Slovakia, which is the lowest number of all OECD countries.

- Regardless of the type of school, students from schools in smaller municipalities achieve weaker results.

The 2015 PISA survey results offer partial answers to questions like *should efforts aimed at improving attainment of students be directed predominantly at low achievers or at students coming from disadvantaged socio-economic environments? Is it better to focus on selected students or enforce policies focused on entire schools?*

Analysis of the Slovak case shows that students' performance improves rapidly if their socio-economic status improves. A strong link existing between students' socio-economic status and their attainment indicates that, when it comes to school results, only a small percentage of students perform better than expected, given their socio-economic status. In Slovakia, focusing on underperforming schools can be efficient, as schools' socio-economic status is closely connected with differences in the results individual schools achieve. A higher portion of differences in schools' average performance can be attributed to the different social status of individual students attending these schools in Slovakia. On the other hand, focusing on disadvantaged schools can work, too, as socio-economic differences among schools are vast here – they include as much as 36% of differences pertaining to students' socio-economic status (the average in OECD countries is 24%) and, at the same time, differences between a school's performance with respect to their mean social status is above-average in Slovakia.

## 1. THE COURT'S VERDICT – YEAR 2012

On October 30, 2012, Regional Court in Prešov ruled that by placing the Roma students in separate classes, the Elementary School in Šarišské Michaľany infringes the equal treatment principle stipulated by the Anti-discrimination Act and by the School Act. The court also ruled that the forming of Roma classes was detrimental to human dignity and ordered the school to change the education conditions for Roma students since the beginning of the following school year (2013/2014). Arguments of the defendant stating that the school had not divided the children on the grounds of their ethnicity but rather that they had been forming classes for children from socially disadvantaged environment did not help either. The court's senate also found it irrelevant that the school was placing students in separate classes on the basis of previous consent of the children's parents, as no one can waive their rights in advance.

The court also found that the segregation practices aimed at Roma students had been employed by the Elementary School in Šarišské Michaľany for several years before. In the 2008/2009 school year, the school placed most of the Roma children who had previously attended joint classes with their non-Roma counterparts in separate classes. On the basis of relevant Anti-discrimination Act provisions, Centre for Civil and Human Rights (Poradňa pre občianske a ľudské práva) NGO filed a lawsuit against the Elementary School in Šarišské Michaľany at the appropriate district court. The Centre claimed that the school's segregated education of Roma children in separate classes was discriminatory and constituted a breach of the equal access to education principle.

District Court ruling of December 5, 2011, in which it was decided that the school had unlawfully discriminated against Roma children, became final in October 2012 after it was confirmed by Prešov Regional Court. This breakthrough ruling has brought a variety of questions regarding the measures that need to be taken on the national as well as local level in order to ensure efficient elimination of discrimination when it comes to access to education.

Mayor of Šarišské Michaľany Vincent Leško failed to hide his disappointment after the ruling was delivered: *"In my witness statement, I have pointed out that there*

are no Roma classes in the school. The very fact that the Senate had been using the term 'Roma' was, in my opinion, a matter of segregation. With regard to the verdict delivered by the Court, Slovakia should ask itself what would be the level of knowledge of our future students under such conditions." The Mayor lacked expert opinions of relevant school authorities, school inspection authority and Ministry of Education staff members in the trial. "No one has asked for those. With the exception of the director of our school, no other teacher has been called, even though the problem in question is of educational nature," said the outraged Mayor.

Director of the defendant Jaroslav Valaštiak holds a similar opinion: "We will be thinking and looking for the ways to solve the matters, though I cannot tell at the moment what would be the consequences of this." Pursuant to the ruling, the school was obliged to remedy the unlawful situation by the beginning of the following school year. The Court did not deem relevant whether parents of students approve of the placing of their children in mixed classes, as the parents are often uneducated and unable to appreciate the rights fully. According to initial calculations, the ratio in case mixed classes are formed will be 1:2. "Six children from problem-free families and twelve disadvantaged background students. What will that do to our national schooling system?"

After the ruling, the school was afraid that majority population students will leave the school and transfer to other educational institutions elsewhere. Out of the total of 425 students, 267 are from socially disadvantaged environments. Majority of these children come from a Roma settlement in the neighbouring village of Ostrovany. The legal action against the school in case of discrimination was brought by Centre for Civil and Human Rights (Poradňa pre občianske a ľudské práva). According to the petition, the school segregated Roma students and breached the equal treatment principle.

After the court delivered its verdict, Centre's legal counsel Vanda Durbáková stated: "This court ruling is a historical milestone which can launch changes in our society in the direction towards equal access to education for every child." Durbáková believes it would be too early to comment on potential legal actions against other schools which form similar classes: "It is true, however, that this school is not an exception and that such practices are quite common."

Centre's coordinator Štefan Ivančo added: "We believe this decision will be a signal for other schools leading them to realise that segregating Roma children and their education in separate classes is not OK."

District Court in Prešov pronounced the judgment in this case on December 5, 2011. The school attended by 425 students have appealed the ruling which was the first ever verdict of courts in the matter of Roma children segregation in education in Slovakia.<sup>5</sup>

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5 See: <http://presov.korzar.sme.sk/c/6587005/odvolaci-sud-potvrdil-segregaciu-ziakov-v-sarisskych-michalanoch.html#ixzz4LYGcL4dc> (in Slovak)

# 2.

## 2. AUDIT OF THE SCHOOL – YEAR 2013

A high level of dependence of students' attainment on their socio-economic background indicates that the education system has yet to meet the requirements of fair distribution of education among all, in accordance with their abilities and possibilities, and that it does not safeguard social equality in education. A number of published studies and research papers talk of separation (segregation) of Roma students in Slovak schools (see, e.g., Petrasová et al., 2012; Petrasová, Porubský, 2013; Huttová, Gyárfašová, Sekulová, 2012; Porubský, 2008; Salner, 2005 etc.). Evidence proving that the situation has improved is missing. On the contrary, available data indicate that the rate of Roma segregation in education is growing on various levels and that segregation comes in various forms.

In terms of segregation elimination, the 2008 School Act introduces paramount potential for change in the form of an explicit ban “of all forms of discrimination and, in particular, segregation”.<sup>6</sup> However, apart from this provision, the Act does not include any definition or any other mention of potential desegregational or inclusive measures or programmes. Although the segregation ban, which is particularly mentioned in the Act, is an essential step forward, it is not sufficient on its own. There is currently no single definition of segregation that would be either rooted in legislation or generally accepted by the expert public. Similarly, there are no blanket data concerning the real scope of segregation in practice. Thus, unless clearly defined boundaries of segregation, unambiguous methodological instructions and inclusive education models are in place, schools will always have enough space to segregate Roma students in the education system under various pretexts (such as meeting the special educational needs of students or the drafting of specialised curricula for socially disadvantaged background (SDB) students).

Pursuant to previous legislation and practice, measures impacting the improvement of access of Roma students to education are aimed at “children from socially

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<sup>6</sup> School Act, Art. 3 (c) and (d)

disadvantaged backgrounds”. Together with students with disabilities and talented students, SDB students belong to the group of students with special educational needs.<sup>7</sup>

The abovementioned fact means that the school in Šarišské Michaľany is obliged to implement specific methods and forms and establish individual conditions for Roma students from socially disadvantaged environments. As stated above, the school is characterised mainly by the practice of separating of Roma students from socially disadvantaged environments from other students in separate classes. It is clear that this is happening on the grounds of the students’ social and ethnic origin. And even though the school claims that the aim of the selected practice is to form ideal conditions and ensure higher efficiency of learning in homogenous groups, we believe that Roma student segregation is motivated by the effort to separate Roma children from their non-Roma peers (in order to prevent these students from leaving the school). It is also important to note that the analysis confirmed that non-Roma parents’ activities have not been leveraged by any other countermeasures adopted at local level.

The *eduRoma* civic association initiated an audit of the school in Šarišské Michaľany, which was carried out between May and July 2013. The main objective of the audit was to identify problems and needs of the school management (content analysis of core documents) and of the formal and informal education processes in the process of the elimination of unlawful segregation and the forming of an inclusive education model (direct observation), and to find out how teachers identify issues and their causes in Roma students’ education (interview). We were also interested in the way the school’s system is

- adapted to the fact that a significant number of students (using Bourdieu’s<sup>8</sup> views) whose cultural and symbolic competences are at a lower level than that

7 School Act, Art. 2 (i)

8 Pierre Bourdieu (1930 – 2002) came up with an idea which was contrary to conventional beliefs regarding schools as institutions that create social equality in society. Bourdieu challenged the hypothesis of the democratisation function of education and stressed its role in legitimising and reproducing social inequalities in access to culture and, consequently, to the social benefits that society offers its members (Bourdieu, Passeron, 1979).

regularly assumed by the education process enter the primary education processes;

- influenced by traditions.<sup>9</sup>

## 2.1 Direct Observation of the Work of Lower Secondary Education Teachers

The following part presents the findings of direct observation (10 lessons) of the work of lower secondary education teachers as well as an analysis of the follow up interviews with the teachers. The observation and interviews in form 7. A took place on 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 2013 (it is a mixed class with 22 students in total, of which 2 are Roma; 19/1 were present on that day). Observations and interviews in form 6. B took place on 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 2013 (this is a class attended by 15 Roma students, of which 11 were present on the day of observation). A pre-defined observation and record sheet were used during the observations and evaluation was done using a 5-grade assessment scale to mark the observed status situations, as well as verbal and numerical assessment. Each quality indicator was assessed on a scale ranging from ‘very good; strong predominance of positives, minor deficiencies’ to ‘unsatisfactory; strong predominance of negatives, major deficiencies’.

*Area: Ability to choose and implement teaching methods and forms of teaching that would promote active engagement of all students in the education process.*

Both classes were heterogeneous in terms of the students’ level. The observation showed that none of the teachers in the two classes managed to ensure the full active involvement of all students in the course of education. Frontal forms of work did not facilitate interpersonal interaction among students and cooperative activities using the students were missing. There was no space for dialogues or discussions, reasoning or thinking, even though these are the very means of *habitus* ac-

9 The education system in Slovakia has been formed by the age-old tradition of the so-called transmissive school based on the idea of cultural transfer between generations.

quisition and language code development for students from different social and cultural backgrounds.

Experience shows that if we concentrate on the 'average' students only, we are losing students on both poles. Different teaching methods (such as cooperative teaching) should be employed in the case of a heterogeneous group of students, as well as an effort to find a balance of the breadth and depth of the schoolwork given. Frontal teaching methods better suit those students whose primary *habitus* and language code acquired in their domestic environment most closely approaches the school conditions. It is important to realize the importance of creating conditions allowing for a more varied approach to students e.g. through alternative high-quality resources designed for working with text and hypertext (prepared by experts in the given field), such as books, work sheets, computers, etc.

#### Area: Asking Questions

Students were doing the same assignments and answered the same questions, which were often off-topic. Teachers did not have well-prepared strategies to encourage the development of higher cognitive functions. They did not use questions to guide their students towards the forming of their own opinions and attitudes. In one case only was the teacher asking questions in a way that showed an effort to help change the interaction pattern and create an atmosphere in which students form their own questions.

#### QUESTION FORMING EXAMPLE – lesson record

**Topic:** Human Rights **Class:** 7. A (mixed)

Teacher / dictating: "You have the right to choose your occupation freely and you have the right to be paid for your work."

Student / asking: "What does it mean to have the right to be paid for my work?"

Teacher / answering, irritated: "I think the meaning is clear to us!"

Teacher / dictating: "You have the right to have what you need."...The teacher asks: "What do we need?" "And what happens when we don't have it?"...and answers her own question: "We have the right to acquire it."

Teacher / dictating: "Right to rest and recovery" ... The teacher asks: "Do we have this

right at school, too?" ...and answers her own question: "Yes, you have breaks between lessons." "Music or PE classes can also be seen as recovery activities."

Teacher / dictating: "Right to attend school." ... The teacher explains: "Primary school attendance is compulsory in our country. You have the right to get school aid for free. But we also pay for workbooks. You have the right to free education. There are various forms of life-long learning. We have universities of the third age."

Teacher / dictating: "Your freedom cannot be limited by freedom of the others." ...

The teacher explains: "It means that my freedom ends where your freedom begins. For example, you have the freedom of expression and you are limiting others by not giving him space. Not to think of yourselves only – me, me, me, no one else but me."

Teacher / assigning work to the students: "In the next part of the lesson, each of you shall look for information on special interest and civic activities of non-governmental organisations on the internet."... The teacher goes on to explain: "What is a non-governmental organisation? These are those that do not take part in the government but which influence it."

Until the end of the lesson, students work individually at computers. The teacher walks among students, explaining the correct spelling of the term 'non-governmental organisation' or advising students: "Your task is to look for examples of civic activities or interest activities on the Internet ... to find some non-governmental organisations and the information about what it is doing... let's say three will do ... and note down in your note books what it is they're doing. It is not spelled 'known-governmental organisation' but non-go-vern-men-tal. Ok, I'll come, I can't be there and here and everywhere at the same time. You keep on saying you don't know. I told you I did not want law acts. So, do you have it, or not? Of course, but I had to come right away. I don't know what you want to look for at home when you still have 5 minutes now. We will go through the organisations next time."

Students who have completed the task were allowed to play computer games (the first one some 10 minutes prior to the end of the lesson).

Clearly defined progress in a student's development and an exact specification of development of the student's mental functions is expected from the education process. Greater emphasis needs to be put on cognitive teaching methods as a tool promoting higher-quality learning. Development of the cognitive should be seen in a broader sense and it can be defined as acquisition, processing and interpreta-

tion of information. Cognitive functions are necessary in all areas of life and in all mental activities, they are essential for thinking, planning, completing tasks, controlling complex activities, and they include emotions as well as the ability to understand social situations. All students (including Roma) should learn the way to learn and activate their cognitive functions not only for their education to be more successful but also in order for them to be able to adapt to technical, social and cultural changes better in this ever-changing world.

*Area: Education planning and designing*

The main argument in favour of external differentiation forming (exclusively Roma or non-Roma classes) is the claim used by the school's management that it increases the effectiveness of the education process. Pedagogical methods applied in the Roma-only class were more structured. Emphasis was put on discipline, adherence to formal rules and on sanctions. The non-Roma students in form 7. A did not raise their hands, they were shouting out yet they were not told off. The Roma students in form 6. B, however, had to raise their hands.

*Area: Classroom environment, intercultural sensitivity*

The environment in both classrooms was understimulating and did not reflect the cultural diversity of students. Teachers did not use teaching aids or equipment that would reflect the diversity of students and their families and they failed to introduce materials connected with the students' real lives in education. Absence of interaction and positive relationships among students and between students and teachers was observed in both classrooms. Teachers only interacted in the 'teacher – schoolwork – student/students' direction.

Teachers did not promote intercultural understanding in form 7. A (mixed). There were no incentives whatsoever coming from the teachers to induce communication between non-Roma students and their Roma classmate. None of the classmates communicated with the Roma student during the morning observation – neither during the lessons, nor during the breaks. During playtime, the Roma student went to join her Roma friends.

**CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT FORMING EXAMPLE**

**Topic:** Human Rights **Class:** 7. A (mixed)

Students were working in the computer classroom during their civic education lesson. With the exception of one Roma student, all students had access to computers. The Roma student was sitting separately, outside of the computer area, for the first 30 minutes of the lesson. For the remaining 15 minutes, the teacher asked the student to join some of her classmates at the table. He placed her chair behind the back of another student and, thus, she was the only student in the classroom who had not worked with the computer during the lesson, even though the tasks that all students were to work on were aimed at performing an information search.

The classroom environment was understimulating in both cases (e.g. the walls were dirty, notice boards were faded, pictures placed on them failed to stimulate students' curiosity, the notice board included a year-old announcement in form 7. A – the classroom rules for when they were 6. A). The hand towel in 7. A's classroom was dirty, in 6. B it was missing completely. One student in 7. A spent the entire day sitting sideways due to the small size of his desk.

**2.2 Lower Secondary Education Teachers Interviews**

In their individual interviews, none of the teachers failed to preach about the low value Roma families ascribe to education, identifying it as the main cause of their underachieving. According to the interviewed teachers, Roma students' low levels of motivation and poor school performance are both rooted in Roma students themselves and in their families. The teachers defended the placement of Roma students in separate classes arguing it was the solution which was satisfactory for all parties involved and that segregation is, in fact, a levelling instrument. P. Bourdieu and P. Passeron (1979) point out that the firmness of similar dichotomies is caused by them being "...overlapping and included in other dichotomizations, which, as a consequence of social dominance relations and as a result of the complete reversal of cause and consequence relationships, are perceived in a way as to appear to constitute entirely natural or objective systems of classification."

One of the main tasks of education today is to activate schools and make them increase the quality of their work permanently and under their own steam. This quality can be indicated by the way in which a school proclaims its mission; its phi-

losophy; its idea of the long-term development of the school and setting of objectives that would be in accordance with the said mission. When asked to define those problems related to Roma students' education and causes thereof, none of the teachers assessed their own work and the work of the school in terms of efficiency of implementation of strategies aimed at the schooling of the said students. Many of the 'nonconforming' students (mainly from the village of Ostrovany) were mainly seen as an obstacle on the way to maintaining the school's good reputation rather than a professional challenge and a chance for the school to become a good practical example.

It would be legitimate to assume that it is, above all, the school and the teachers who can – and are professionally obliged to – tend to the needs of all students, use education to incite their thirst for knowledge and to stimulate their optimism, sociability, trust and accommodation – i.e. all that forms the basis of social capital, which holds even in case of students in difficult family or life situations (modified according to Ondrejko, 2011).

Based on the abovementioned, we conclude that even in spite of the efforts of the school's management and teachers to democratize education, school reforms can be seen more on the organisational level (the way the system is organised) and only to a limited extent on the institutional level (how the system works). This mainly showed in the unchangeability of the nature of education processes applied by lower secondary education teachers – reform ends in front of the classroom doors.

### **2.3 Content Analysis of the School Educational Programme**

#### ***Objectives of the Teaching and Learning Audit***

The quality of the school's work and its education results are determined by the quality of the school management's work, which is also important for the inclusive model of education. At present, the School Educational Programme represents a main school management tool. Throughout the process of its drafting, approval and implementation, the School Educational Programme should reflect the current situation in the school, the school's vision (aims and competencies of graduate profiles at various stages of education offered), as well as particular methods and processes for the achievement of these. The School Educational Programme is a live document resulting from the active cooperation and involvement of all participating subjects (the school's management, teaching staff, founding authority and rep-

resentatives of parents) and, as such, it should epitomise their joint efforts aiming towards the securing of education values at the school. During the process of drafting of the School Educational Programme, support of the teaching staff is of key importance, as it will be the teachers who will implement the programme objectives. Therefore, the aim of the audit was to evaluate the said aspect of the programme's creation and implementation in practice.

#### ***Teaching and Learning Audit Principles***

- Objectivity, expertise and complexity

#### ***Teaching and Learning Audit Subject Matter and Methods***

1. Pedagogical documentation of the school – School Educational Programme (Method: Content analysis of submitted documents)
2. Quality of communication between teaching staff members and the school management (Method: Survey probe - questionnaire)
3. Quality of work of the school's management and its vision (Method: Structured interview with the director of the school)

#### ***Date of audit: 1<sup>st</sup> July – 26<sup>th</sup> July 2013***

The teaching and learning audit took place at the end of the school year and at a time when the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic announced it was proposing changes to the state educational programme and the court ruling in the case of Roma children segregation conducted against the Elementary School in Šarišské Michaľany was confirmed by the appellate court. Positive characteristics of this stage are the fact that the school was intensively searching for more efficient instruments of stimulating development of students (including students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds).

#### ***Conclusions and Recommendations***

Pedagogical documentation – School Educational Programme audit consisted of a study of pedagogical documentation provided by the school's management. Even despite the auditor's requests, the school's management failed to submit a comprehensive, up-to-date (approved and currently valid) school educational programme (the one submitted was drafted by the previous management as a part of a demand-side project funded by EU - ESF funds). The management provided partial

documentation, part of which was not directly related to the audit, but which served to document the efforts made by the school's management to change the situation at the school:

- a) Currently applicable curriculum (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> stage);
- b) Proposed curriculum for the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> stage of elementary school;
- c) 2 branch curriculum proposal (with extended foreign language and technical subjects teaching);
- d) Justification of the proposal dated 19<sup>th</sup> June, 2013 (Annex 1);
- e) Excerpt from the School Educational Programme – general part (Annex 2).

Due to the nature of the documents, only the analyses mentioned in points d/ and e/ were prepared. The materials provided analyse the current educational situation at the school. It refers to monitoring carried out in the school (though no dates or names of responsible persons or participants were given). The analysis talks about the proposed two-track education with language/natural sciences and polytechnic branches. Proposed allocation of lessons in the school educational programme is adapted to both alternatives. If such proposal is a result of joint discussion on the part of the teaching staff and management of the school and provided it is in compliance with the aims of the School Educational Programme, it is eligible for implementation. However, implementation of such a plan would come with the risk of two levels of education: one for students who, even today, are not capable of learning in two languages that are foreign to them (as their native – mother – tongue is the Roma language) and another for those who do not have this 'handicap'. The authors of the proposal confirm this with their own analysis: *“Students of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grades can choose English as an optional subject – even though two thirds of the students enrolled at the school come from an environment where Roma is the only language spoken.”* This reservation can be eliminated provided that students are pedagogically diagnosed (or re-diagnosed) on a permanent basis, which would allow for a flexible transfer between different branches for both groups of students. The document, however, failed to list pedagogical practices employed by the school's management to place students in particular branches. It is clear that the well thought-out pedagogical practice to be used for enrolment of students in different branches, as well as the safeguards ensuring the formation of equal-quality educational services in both branches are missing, which poses a permanent risk of segregation concerning the students' opportunity to study in the track (branch) appropriate for them.

Excerpt from the School Educational Programme – *Part I. Recitals* provides general characteristics of the school (students and teaching staff) which, however, fails to reflect the complex situation, mainly that concerning education of students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds properly. Similarly, the parts concerning projects, cooperation with parents and cooperation with the founding authority are lacking any mention of the proposed ways of solving this situation. The conception of cooperation with parents, as it is defined in the School Educational Programme, is insufficient and does not lead the school's management or teachers towards the specific problems and needs of students: *“Part 4. Active cooperation with the School Council shall continue. The school's efforts are focused on its improvement and expansion. A plenary meeting of students' parents takes place on a regular basis, each autumn, and the management of the school uses this meeting to inform the parents about educational activities which have been implemented in the course of the previous school year. Matters such as organisation of the upcoming school year, cooperation possibilities and other school activities are discussed, too. Parents will also be informed of the possibility to donate 2% of their income tax through the school's non-investment fund 'Slničnica' in order to support activities for the school's students. The fund's budget is used to subsidize the costs related to the participation of students at various subject, art or sport related competitions. Contributions are also used for didactic equipment and the acquisition of teaching aids as well as for additions to the [school's] library collection.”* The abovementioned excerpt implies that the school does not have a well thought-out communication tools in place for liaising with parents (of socially disadvantaged students in particular) and that it had not formulated the main priorities that would be necessary for the improvement thereof.

*Part II. School Educational Programme Characterization* includes:

1. The school's pedagogical principles (its vision and aims) are aimed at “quality education and appropriate upbringing” and promotion of ICT and foreign language teaching. Other aims can be deemed purposeful but it needs to be said that the very fact the school environment includes representatives of other ethnic groups needs to be reflected in the process of further aims and objective formulation, too. Therefore, it is recommended to form a consensus and particularise these aims when the School Educational Programme is innovated.
2. School focus and stage of education (school leaver's profile) is defined incoher-

ently (ISCED I is missing) and does not provide a comprehensive picture of e.g. key competences, as required by law.

3. Pedagogical strategies defined in the School Educational Programme resemble more a list of activities required by the Pedagogical and Organisational Guidelines of the Ministry of Education than a list of actual strategies and methods aimed at the development of all students. The following part of the text: *“Personality and social development is secured through stimulation of groups of under-achieving students and by promoting students’ individual abilities”* indicates the right way forward, but it needs to be described in more detail.
4. Support provided to special educational needs students.

The following is a quote from the School Educational Programme – the part on *Students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds*: *“In the first grade, our aim is to help students acquire basic hygiene-related habits, teach them to use a toilet, tissues, to wash their hands, keep their workplace clean and to take care of their school materials. Students are taught basic rules of social interaction – greetings, saying ‘thank you’; they are taught how to behave in a group of peers, how to respect each other, how to behave in public or in a public transportation vehicle. Students are also taught to read, write, count, to get to know their natural surroundings and learn how to protect it, and emphasis is also put on the development of students’ artistic and sporting talent.”* Considering the role and status defined in the school educational programme, the text above is not sufficient, as it limits development of students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds to mere acquisition of social and cognitive skills but fails to address their integration (inclusion) in a majority environment. Therefore, this particular area of support provided to students with specific educational needs will need to be particularised in the new programme.

*Part III. Internal Control and Evaluation System* lists criteria used to evaluate the success of students, teachers and of the entire school (some paragraphs are repeated). The criteria are inconsistent and do not provide for a comprehensive efficient management instrument. They can be seen more as a set of rules to be applied during evaluation which, however, once again fails to relate directly to the considerable group of students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. When it comes to evaluating the teaching staff, criteria such as “support provided to students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds”, which would be fully justified, are missing. Assessing the quality of the school based on the satisfaction level of the school’s

‘clients’ – children and parents – is insufficient, as the aims of the school go beyond the mere effort to satisfy the needs of legal representatives of students and their children.

## 2.4 Questionnaire – Communication Between Teaching Staff Members and School’s Management

An audit of communication between the school’s management and teaching staff members was carried out in the form of a probe – a questionnaire submitted by the 19 members of the school’s teaching staff on an anonymous basis. The results were statistically evaluated and conclusions were formulated based on this evaluation.

Fig. 1 Evaluation of the Questionnaire (Results)

<b>1. Please evaluate the overall level of communication between the school’s teaching staff and management (please chose the most appropriate answer):</b>	
Very good	13
Good	6
Unsatisfactory	0
I cannot say	0
<b>2. Please evaluate communication between the school’s teaching staff and management in the following areas (using the 1 – excellent to 5 – insufficient scale):</b>	
Long-term aims of the school	Ø 1.74
Cooperation with community and parents	Ø 1.63
Teachers’ problems	Ø 1.70
Students’ problems	Ø 1.70
Teaching methods	Ø 2.05
Evaluation of the school’s results	Ø 1.52
Relationship between the school and its surroundings	Ø 2.10
Planned changes	Ø 2.00
<b>3. What, in your opinion, could help improve the level of mutual communication in the school (please mark a maximum of 3 answers or add your own suggestions):</b>	
Communication training for members of the school’s management	3

Communication training for teaching staff	6
Communication training for all employees involved in education process	12
Bigger space for expert discussion between the school's management and teaching staff	10
Improved management of working and teachers' meetings	3
Higher involvement of teachers in school management activities through advisory and methodological bodies	3
Other (please add): 0	
<b>4. If you were offered a chance to attend communication training (please mark one answer only):</b>	
I would definitely attend	7
I would consider attending	10
I don't think I need it, I can communicate with anyone without any problems	1
I don't know, it would depend on how my colleagues would decide	1
<b>5. Please use the other side of the questionnaire sheet to write your comments, suggestions, and ideas regarding communication between the school's management and teaching staff:</b>	
"when the management make a promise, they should keep their word"; "parents, too, should be informed of the changes taking place in the school - in the School Educational Programme, so that they do not transfer their children to other schools"...	

### **Evaluation and Interpretation of the Questionnaire Results**

The first question indicates teachers' overall satisfaction with the level of communication between them and the school's management. The second question expresses the 'average' grade teachers assigned to selected areas (fields of communication with the school's management). It indicates that areas such as planned changes or school's relations with its surroundings should be discussed more extensively. Teaching methods represent a similarly important area, as the results may herald the need to focus on effective teaching strategies. Question no. 3 signals an overall need to improve communication between all parties of the school's education process involved. The answer to the questions regarding the need for better communication and expert discussion between the school's management and teaching

staff seems to be in partial contradiction (question no. 1). The fourth question concerned the motivation of respondents to contribute to the improvement of communication. The determination of the teaching staff to accept their share of responsibility – e.g. attend communication training – is gratifying. In question no. 5, two respondents expressed their personal opinion on the topic in question. A face-to-face interview with the director of the school, Jaroslav Valaštiak, has confirmed his effort to introduce positive changes in the school aimed towards an inclusive model of education. At this stage, the determination of the school's management and teachers to be a part of implementation of planned changes to the school educational programme (curricula drafts submitted) is clearly visible. We consider it essential to carefully think the proposal through with respect to the contexts of inclusive education principles, appropriate instruments (curricula and syllabi) and that of development strategies for socially disadvantaged students. At this time, selection of the strategy to implement the formulated vision and approach all relevant stakeholders inviting them to cooperate is of key importance.

# 3.

## 3. REFLECTION - YEAR 2016

The following part aims to present, in the form of interview transcripts, the opinions of various stakeholders on the elimination of Roma children segregation at the school in Šarišské Michaľany and on the introduction and implementation of inclusive education methods over a period of four years following the pronouncement of the judgment of the Prešov Regional Court. The researchers intend to reflect selected interesting moments as seen in practice rather than provide a comprehensive picture of the area researched. We would like to use the respondents' answers to point out some of the rigours, barriers and reservations concerning the elimination of Roma students' segregation at the Elementary School in Šarišské Michaľany and affecting the introduction of inclusive education for all.

### Interview with Radoslav Legdan

*In the period 2013 – 2016, Radoslav was working at the school in Šarišské Michaľany as a volunteer. He was tutoring Roma children. The interview took place in June, 2016.*

*In your opinion, has the school in Šarišské Michaľany executed the ruling pronounced by the Regional Court in Prešov ordering the elimination of segregation of Roma children attending the school?*

**LR:** In my opinion (that of a volunteer), the school has only executed the Regional Court's ruling in theory. On many occasions, I witnessed situations showing that the execution of this ruling became really rather abstract, i.e. even if the school's management did adopt measures to desegregate [the school], it only meant that some 1 – 3 students were placed in a class full of white students. Take, for example, the 'Christmas performance', that the former director Mr. Valaštiak was in charge of: as expected, many segregated students turned up for the performance rehearsal (in December 2014) – the ratio was approx. 12:30. Until that moment, I really believed that the school's management takes the [desegregation] matter seriously and responsibly. But the noticeable fact that emerged during the actual Christmas performance, starting at 6 pm, proved me wrong. The list of students to actually perform in the staged performance included as few as one desegregated student!

Apart from this student, the other children involved in the performance were all non-marginalized. I'll tell you ... some desegregation! It was a farce I still remember with great disgust. The fact is desegregation in Šarišské Michaľany (SM) is a marathon, not a sprint. But it needs to be born in mind that the entire process is influenced by many variables thanks to which the [end of the] entire process is nowhere in sight. The school's management is doing things for the sake of appearance though, so that they steer clear of a public faux-pas. All in all, I believe the school could have done more than what they actually have done over the two year period.

*Who has contributed the most to the ruling's execution?*

**LR:** EduRoma! eduRoma was the only erudite facilitator to get involved and maximize their efforts to solve the desegregation. This civic association wanted one thing – to bring all parties involved (the mayor of SM, school in SM, Prešov University, the Ministry of Education, school inspection, experts from the Slovak Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities offices in Prešov and Košice, psychologists, ethnologists, the US Embassy and many others) together and form one cohesive entity through meetings and various teambuilding activities. The environment that eduRoma has found itself in was (and I believe still is) full of emotions, tension and inability to cooperate rooted in the various personal or political beliefs of the persons involved. Each of the desegregation elimination process participants has been (is) acting on their own behalf and for themselves, which is counter-productive, hence it all fails due to this individual approach, which comes in many shapes and with even more supporters. Yet, even in spite of the said, I am rooting for eduRoma and their effort to exert acceptable pressure on the development of the matter and on the maintaining of a constructive framework that would be free of any sour taste – political or other.

*What are the obstacles preventing the execution of the ruling?*

**LR:** Personal failures and inconsistent efforts to reach a common goal.

*What more could be done to execute the ruling?*

**LR:** Cooperation based on respect for all participants in the desegregation process. What I see as the biggest problem is the status of teachers in schools. In general, it is difficult to motivate teachers of children from segregated communities. There are, however, teachers in the elementary school in Šarišské Michaľany who do want to,

and thanks to their enthusiasm do, help desegregate the school, but – sadly – there is not many of them, which makes them extremely important and irreplaceable. It is important to form a space for teachers like these so that they can perform their work – to educate students regardless of their marginalized or non-marginalized backgrounds. Teachers are not supposed to be judges or moralists. First and foremost, they are the facilitators of education for all children. So let us let them do their job, but let's remember that, without help, their potential will never be utilised to the fullest.

*In your opinion, what is the school's current motto?*

**LR:** Based on the abovementioned, I think the school's motto can be summed up as follows: We teach for the sake of teaching. But how, why, and for what reason or purpose? These are the questions I don't have answers for at the moment – and if there's anyone who would claim they do, do not believe them. I believe that the motto that the Elementary School in Šarišské Michaľany should be along the following lines: If we want our children to be free of prejudice, we need to start with ourselves.

### **Interview with Monika Duždová**

*A member of the eduRoma team of volunteers. In the period of 2013 – 2015, Monika worked at the school in Šarišské Michaľany as an assistant teacher. The interview took place in June, 2016.*

*In your opinion, has the school in Šarišské Michaľany executed the ruling pronounced by the Regional Court in Prešov ordering the elimination of segregation of Roma children attending the school?*

**MD:** Segregation elimination and, therefore, the execution of the Regional Court's decision by the Elementary School in Šarišské Michaľany was implemented only in some of its points. The so-called 'black' and 'white' schoolyards were abandoned. Before the appointment of Mr. Jaroslav Valaštiak as the school's director by the SM Municipal Office, the school's students used to spend their breaks separately, i.e. the non-Roma students were in the 'white' yard and the Roma students were in the 'black' yard. The [newly appointed] director abolished this nonsense and ordered the children to spend their breaks in the school yard together. This part of the

school started to be used by all students together also during some school lessons such as PE [lessons], as well as for some other curricular and extracurricular activities. I can, for example, mention the event called School Summer Olympics, a very nice joint activity; or the Summer Sports Day, which was organised together with eduRoma and with the support of the Municipal Office as a municipal event. Another step towards the elimination of segregation at the school concerned school meals. The Roma children who were entitled to hot meals by law, were unable to have their meals in the school canteen and thus they were provided packed lunches, consisting of a baguette, a fruit drink and a bun or one piece of fruit, instead of the hot meals they were entitled to. And I also want to add that Roma students were not allowed to eat in the school canteen because the non-Roma students' parents did not wish them to do so. Director Valaštiak abolished even this order, albeit partly – the 'zero' to fifth grades, i.e. the first stage classes, started to have their meals in the school canteen. However, this arrangement still had a small imperfection – the Roma children attending the said classes could only have their meals all at once, after the fourth lesson. Obviously, not all first stage grades' timetables ended with the fourth lesson. It was 'solved' in a way that a second long break, lasting for 25 minutes, was scheduled. In that period of time, some 120 – 130 Roma children had to have their meals. The non-Roma children whose lessons ended at the same time were waiting behind the canteen doors and could only have their meals after the Roma children left. So, even though some of the Roma children were provided hot meals, segregation has not really been eliminated when it comes to this part [of the judgment], as the children did not have their meals together.

It also needs to be said that second stage students were still provided packed lunches only. In this regards, director Valaštiak approached the Ministry of Education as well as the Plenipotentiary for Roma Affairs, Peter Pollák, asking for financial assistance with the extension of the school kitchen's capacity, which was not sufficient for the preparation of meals for all students. I think the school only got a part of the sum they requested and used it to purchase a convection oven for the school kitchen. This allowed for the meals to also be prepared for sixth grade students, yet they too had to have their meals after the fourth lesson. You might say that the important thing is that Roma children were provided hot meals... this can be agreed with if we were not talking about segregation elimination.

Then there were spare time activities organized through an MPC (Methodological and Pedagogical Centre) project that was supposed to include all of the school's

students in efficient spare time spending in an unforced way. Many of the teachers led their after-school clubs, but I am not sure if they had both Roma and non-Roma children attending them. These were either exclusively Roma or exclusively non-Roma clubs. The only after-school group which focused on integration and, as such, included both Roma and non-Roma children, was the club I led. We have achieved great results. We were singing songs in both languages, Roma and Slovak, and we also had songs with our own lyrics which connected the children.

Another step was the painting of the foyer of the school, which was decorated with the motives of all children of the world joined together. This was a very nice activity. Students who participated in this activity all have their signatures on the walls. It needs to be said that this activity was made possible mainly thanks to the school's director Jaroslav Valaštiak, technically it was supported by deputy director Jozef Mačo and the Arts teacher Mr. Krištof. What was important was the fact that it was a joint activity by both Roma and non-Roma students. Slowly, I am getting to the most important point of segregation elimination – the placement of students from Roma-only classes and from the entire Roma ground floor in other classes attended by other students. I am really sorry that this did not really happen. There were some mixed classes created at the school in which Roma children mostly from the village of Šarišské Michaľany were placed. Commuting Roma children from Ostrovany were mixed only to a minimal extent, either because of disapproval from parents, as they had simply gotten used to the status quo while long term segregation practices were in place, or due to the fact that the transfers of students [into different classes] were being 'masked' by the so-called Informed Consents that the Roma parents had to sign. Thus, they effectively refused to have their children placed in mixed classes together with other students. I trust it is useless to talk about the fact that these Informed Consents were against the law. So, the Regional Court's ruling was not executed fully in this point, either. I would also like to mention the forming and opening of the Multipurpose Classroom, subsidized by eduRoma. And, also, I should not omit the cooperation established between the SAD Prešov transportation company and our school, when the company provided a bus for the children from Ostrovany thus taking care of their transportation to and from the school. This cooperation was established thanks to the school's director Jaroslav Valaštiak and the mayor, Vincent Leššo, and the eduRoma civic association also helped with some technical matters.

*Who has contributed to the ruling execution the most?*

**MD:** If we are talking about the execution of the ruling, I am not sure if we really can call our effort to do so like that. I think it would be more fitting to mention the efforts of the school's director Jaroslav Valaštiak, the occasional help of Mayor Vincent Leško, the active assistance of the Apostolic Churches in Ostrovany and Sabinov, Roma parents' engagement in the Parent Board meetings and the essential help of eduRoma in arranging meetings with governmental figures and in the organization of various curricular and extracurricular activities.

I can also mention the tutoring of Roma children both in the school and in Ostrovany Community Centre by volunteers from Prešov University, which I supervised. From all spare time activities I can mention the trip to Šariš castle organised during the summer holidays, which involved both Roma and non-Roma children; the Summer Sports Day or the trip to the capital city, Bratislava, which was organised with the financial support of the US Embassy in Bratislava. To acknowledge this gesture I initiated the invitation of the US Ambassador to Slovakia to come to our school and the visit really took place. I would also like to acknowledge eduRoma's effort to support teachers' professional growth through a number of training sessions with expert trainers from Prešov University or from the Methodological and Pedagogical Centre in Prešov which took place in a pleasant recreational resort.

*What are the obstacles preventing execution of the ruling?*

**MD:** The most serious ones are, and result from, the overall political, social and economic situation existing in Slovakia, from the level of interpersonal relations and from rejecting of all that is different. Unfortunately, prejudice, underdeveloped multicultural awareness and I am not afraid to say even racism are common in Slovakia. Different criteria are used to judge different people; equal opportunities do not exist in education and neither in housing, employment, societal life and social level. Rather than for solutions, people are looking for reasons why not to do something. When it comes to the execution of the Regional Court's ruling at our school, i.e. when it comes to eliminating segregation of Roma children, what failed was, above all, the willingness to carry out the ruling, together with self-importance, pride and the stupid supremacy – even arrogance – of the villagers, as well as the lack of will to cooperate on the side of the municipal self-government at certain points. I must say that, even despite the good communication between the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic and our school, the former of the abovementioned

institutions is also accountable for the failure to execute the court's ruling to some extent, as, at a school with an approx. 60% concentration of Roma children, there were only two Roma assistant teachers: Peter Kaleja from the Roma settlement in Ostrovany, where some 90% of the Roma children attending the school come from, and me. And even then we were only hired under the MPC-administered education project for a definite period. Some time ago, the Ministry had promised work for assistant teachers, but the promise was not fulfilled.

I think the work of assistant teachers at elementary schools with a high concentration of Roma students is essential. It is nonsensical to place Roma assistant teachers at schools only through projects. It is important that they work independently of projects, just as the non-Roma assistant teachers who do not speak the Roma language and who – except some very few – oftentimes do not really understand the complexity of Roma students' backgrounds. As I have mentioned the Ministry of Education with regard to the creation of jobs for assistant teachers, I cannot fail to mention that the director of the school asked for a position to be created for a social educationalist, which makes complete sense considering the high percentage of socially disadvantaged students, and he also requested a position to be open for a special teacher. The social educationalist request was denied and the social teacher was only hired part-time.

*What could be done to execute the ruling? What is the school's potential?*

**MD:** Much can be done if the right people are in the right places. If they have firm principles and stand by their decisions, a lot can be done. If things are solved in an open and transparent way and without turning a blind eye, much can be done. If you have a good team of colleagues and if you believe in what you are doing, you can do a lot. Regardless of the ruling. I think the school's potential resides mainly in its students since, if motivated aptly, they can work wonders. I would sum up the school's motto as follows: Knowledge opens the door to our dreams and aims.

At the end, I would like acknowledge and thank the director, Mr. Valaštiak, the eduRoma civic association, the US Embassy, volunteers from Prešov University, expert advisors and some of the teachers who have contributed to the small accomplishments, joys and who have brought smiles to the faces of the students of this school.

## Interview with Mária Cvancigerová

*The interview took place in June, 2016, shortly after Ms. Cvancigerová was re-assigned as the director of the school for the next 5-year term.*

*NB: After the ruling, Mayor Leššo removed Cvancigerová from her position. Later, she won in a case concerning unlawful dismissal and, as a consequence, for several months, a municipality with 3,000 inhabitants was paying two directors of one school.*

*In your opinion, has the school in Šarišské Michaľany executed the ruling pronounced by the Regional Court in Prešov ordering the elimination of segregation of Roma children attending the school?*

**MC:** I will not comment on the situation in the past, I will only evaluate the year since I re-assumed my office. Our school currently educates 434 students, of which more than 300 are from Roma communities. Students from the nearby village of Ostrovany are brought to the school every day by buses early in the morning and taken back in the afternoon. Since September, we have jumped on a train travelling at full speed and we are trying not to slow down but rather maintain the model that had been established. We employ two assistant teachers and one special teacher working part-time. We are working more intensively with eduRoma which provides methodological assistance as well as experts and student volunteers taking care of spare time activities. Many morning and afternoon activities, such as cooperative activities, immersive teaching and learning activities, afternoons with crayons, a day full of singing and dancing, a multicultural day or sporting events are organised in the Cooperative Classroom. The third and fourth grade students have started a joint project the outcome of which is a jointly performed musical fairytale that was performed during the International Children's Day celebrations. As part of a project aimed at learning about cultural sights, our students visited a museum in Prešov together with their teachers and volunteers. They ended this cold and rainy day with hot chocolate and cakes in a cosy sweetshop. Students are jointly involved in various activities, discussions with experts, culture and sporting events, many of them are representing our municipality in football competitions. The older ones are scoring points in district competitions, the younger ones in school rounds of var-

ious competitions such as Hviezdoslavov Kubín<sup>10</sup> or Slávik Slovenska<sup>11</sup>... There is a great number of joint events all of which are mentioned on our website. The ninth grade students praised the skiing course in Ždiar highly. The third and fourth grade students have gained an abundance of experience and brought souvenirs from their field trip which, too, was held in the most beautiful corner of our country – the Tatra Mountains.

*What are the obstacles preventing execution of the ruling?*

**MD:** The main obstacle in the education process and in the entire perception of the fact are the parents who, in most cases, are not interested in their children and the attainment of their children at all. Even if we had an assistant teacher in each class, even if the school had special teachers, psychologists, inclusive teachers, social workers, field social workers and the entire support team worked to promote the common idea, it would never be implemented fully and effectively without the engagement of the parents and if students themselves are not interested. Starting with the fifth grade, interest in education is getting lost. Second stage students start to have different interests (alcohol, cigarettes, partying twice a week until the early hours, underage pregnancies), we see an increase in truancy and the number of lessons missed without permission or a valid excuse. Parents do not respond to invitations for consultations with the class teacher; after [they are sent] several notices, we are chasing them in their homes, but all in vain. Pre-school education – students who did not complete pre-primary education are educated in two 'zero' classes. These children are mostly unkempt and hungry (their first meal of the day is the hot lunch we provide them), they do not have basic hygiene-related habits; these are the children who do not speak or understand the Slovak language, who are holding a pencil or coloured pencils in their hands for the very first time here. How long will it take them to catch up with their friends who have attended kindergarten since they were three years old? A friend whose family speaks the language that is understood by his or her teachers and classmates? A friend who knows many rhymes, songs and riddles? A friend who is able to draw his or her dream car or dream doll, or who can count all the people in the classroom or name all the colours

.....

10 Translator's note: A national recital competition for children and youths

11 Translator's note: A Slovak Nightingale – a national competition for children in folk singing

correctly? What is the role of a teacher in a class like this? The teacher is a mum, a dad, a psychologist and often a physician, too. [It is] Extremely difficult and exhausting work. Every [child] is different, with different needs, different approaches. The effort, which must be made every day, an abundance of alternative possibilities if only... to get to know a great number of rules, methods, forms, to tackle [working with] the interactive board and the possibilities it offers, etc. Each small accomplishment represents a challenge and a hope for us – the hope that there is a successful young person at the end of the tunnel. Appreciation should be shown to everyone for whom this work is more than a mere job, to acknowledge the fact they are doing it with love, giving it all their heart and soul.

### Interview with Vincent Leško

*Mayor of the Municipality of Šarišské Michalany and a founding authority of the school in the said municipality. The interview took place in June, 2016 in the form of a public internet discussion on the eduRoma webpage.*

*In your opinion, has the school in Šarišské Michalany executed the ruling pronounced by the Regional Court in Prešov ordering the elimination of segregation of Roma children attending the school?*

**VL:** Everyone needs to remember that it is utter nonsense to mix children from disadvantaged backgrounds with other students (with some small exceptions based on their grades). I concede children can be brought up together, but not educated. We need to realize we are bringing up and – above all – educating the generation which will lead and manage this country one day, regardless of the level of management they are at. This should be the basis for the system of education. And then it would be completely irrelevant whether the child is white, black, or pink.

*What are the obstacles preventing execution of the ruling?*

**VL:** If they are educated jointly (I do not talk of the skin colour) and they are assessed according to the same standards, i.e. if they make progress like other children, i.e. they master the prescribed schoolwork, no one would dare to raise objections. If they are not able to keep up, then it would be better if they are educated according to a different, less demanding curriculum, and they do not slow down the others. Moreover, they can share the joy of having completed elementary school

successfully, but I would not dare to compare them with students who have been educated in accordance with the regular curriculum, when it comes to real knowledge.

*But this is the very approach for which the school you are a founding authority of was found guilty of segregation – for separating one group of children who were provided lower quality education than other students. What is your opinion on that?*

**VL:** This problem will never be solved unless stricter sanctions for parents are introduced. We are afraid of positive discrimination. All who work in this field are scared sh... of being accused of being racist. Yet, my little Roma children, remember that the ‘pickle you are in decides the flavour you get’ – just as pickled gherkins. And all that is the doing of our mommy and daddy. They are well supported in this by various NGOs, such as XY and the like. They [the NGOs] keep on telling them what their rights are but they fail to remember their obligations first.

### Interview with Denisa Mitrášová

*Denisa has been working at the school in Šarišské Michalany as a volunteer since 2014, leading remedial classes for Roma children. The interview took place in June, 2016.*

*What is your perception of the ruling pronounced by the Regional Court in the trial against the Elementary School in Šarišské Michalany (ES ŠM) in 2012?*

**DM:** I think the ruling against ES ŠM was fair and correct.

*Why do you think it was pronounced?*

**DM:** Because it was found that the Roma children attending the school had separate classes and separate school yards and, unlike non-Roma children, they were getting packed lunches.

*How do you see the case now, with the benefit of hindsight?*

**DM:** Well, I think the school makes effort to bring children together more than before the ruling.

*In your opinion, what are the points in which the school has executed the ruling?*

**DM:** ES ŠM has introduced mixed classes after the ruling was pronounced, the chil-

dren share the same school yard and they have hot meals provided to them.  
*What makes the model of education currently applied by ES ŠM more 'inclusive' than the one before the ruling was pronounced?*

**DM:** In my opinion, the introduction of mixed classes is more inclusive.

*In your opinion, what more could be done to execute the ruling? Could you explain the school's potential?*

**DM:** I think all classes at the school should be mixed, for both Roma and non-Roma children to have a chance to grow up together and get to know each other.

*In your opinion, what are the obstacles preventing execution of the ruling?*

**DM:** Maybe reluctance on the side of the non-Roma parents and reluctance of some teachers.

*In your opinion, how should cooperative teaching be organised and where are the reservations in the way it is applied in ES ŠM?*

**DM:** In my opinion, cooperative teaching should be based on the principle of equal treatment of all children and this is where I see reservations in its application in ES ŠM.

*Why did you decide to volunteer in ES ŠM?*

**DM:** I decided to become a volunteer because I like working with children and, being Roma myself, I am glad if I can help Roma children.

*In your opinion, what is the eduRoma volunteering philosophy like?*

**DM:** [Their] volunteering philosophy is to help and to fight against segregation.

*How long have you been volunteering in eduRoma?*

**DM:** I have been volunteering in eduRoma for 2 years already.

*How would you improve the volunteering programme?*

**DM:** I like the volunteering program the way it is now.

*What do you like the most about volunteering?*

**DM:** I most like that I am helping those who need it.

*In your opinion, what potential does the volunteering programme have with regard to execution of the ruling?*

**DM:** It is trying to desegregate children and connect them with non-Roma children.

### **Interview with Vlado Rafael**

*Director of the eduRoma civic association which launched the initiative to eliminate segregation of Roma students in the school in Šarišské Michaľany in September, 2013. The interview took place in August, 2016.*

*In your opinion, in which points has the school executed the court's ruling? Please specify.*

**VR:** If we consider the perspective of the ruling, which ordered the school to end segregation of Roma students, then we can say the school has formally executed the ruling. Most of the Roma students attending the school are no longer intentionally placed in separate classes, on separate floors or in the school yard. If some Roma students are separated in some classes, this is mainly caused by the fact that, currently, 2/3 of the students attending the school are Roma and 1/3 are non-Roma. Moreover, there is the number of students in classes that is mandated by law. Thus, it comes naturally that not all children can be mixed. Therefore, we have helped to establish a cooperative classroom in the school, which secures the possibility for the students of particular grades to meet, integrate and work jointly on various art projects. I was surprised by the shift on the side of teachers and school's management, the fact that they are actually organising joint school trips today – that is something that was not common back in 2013.

*What are the obstacles preventing execution of the ruling? Please justify your answer.*

**VR:** The problem is we have also found other violations related to discrimination against Roma children that the court has not discovered yet which are closely connected with the execution of the court order's provisions. Therefore, over the period between February, 2013 and August, 2016, we have been pressing for other problems to be solved, too. These problems include: packed lunches for Roma children and their integration in the school canteen, and the related problem of unlawfully shortening of lessons with the aim of separating Roma and non-Roma students during their canteen visits. The school managed to solve this issue partially, as seventh and eighth grade students are still getting packed lunches. After reconstruc-

tion of the school kitchen is completed by the new management of the school, the situation should be remedied starting from September, 2016. We solved the illegal usage of informed consents for the enrolment of Roma children in regular classes in the summer of 2014. The problem, however, was in the very setting of the School Educational Programme, which we dealt with during the 2015 school year. The actual problem was that the School Educational programme did not include any relevant philosophy and predetermined that Roma students would take manual skills classes when it came to spare time activities. The desegregation process at the school was also slowed down by the fact that the school officially had two directors for almost two years. This fact had a negative impact on the operation of the school and polarised teachers and parents alike. The problem was only solved in June, 2016, when Mária Cvancigerová won the selection procedure and was re-established as director of the school for the next 5-year term. The already former director of the school, Jaroslav Valaštiak, retired. However, other problems emerged in 2016 that are still being solved today: 1) As a result of population growth in the group of Roma children at the school in Šarišské Michaľany, the mayor of this municipality has abolished the joint school district in order to prevent the arrival of new Roma students from the nearby municipality of Ostrovany at the school in Šarišské Michaľany. The second mayor – the one from the municipality of Ostrovany – wants to build a container school for these students directly in the Roma settlement, next to the infamous segregation wall. The fact that the state lacks the authority to control and objectively evaluate such cases also represents a significant obstacle. Similarly, there's no one to advise schools in cases like these. After all, even the Regional Court which has found the school guilty of segregating still lacks the tools to enforce judgments like this in school practice!

*What more could be done to execute the ruling? Please specify the school's potential.*

**VR:** Sure, you can organise various teacher training events and take note of the number of such events that you have organised for them over the years. Obviously, training is important, but they simply do not suffice when it comes to the execution of a ruling like this one. We wanted much more. Right from the start, our main aim was to intervene in the formal education process and focus on particular and – above all – material and visible changes. In an ideal situation, the entire potential of the school and of the municipality would be utilised in connection with the judgment. Then, you can have a situation when you would be able to discover

and engage local leaders who would act as the bearers of further changes at the school even after you leave. Assistant teacher Monika Duždová, who had to brave really exhausting pressure coming from her colleagues in 2013/2014 as a result of her enthusiasm, was such a potential bearer. At present, the reinstated director of the school in Šarišské Michaľany seems to be such a potential bearer of change. We have a professional relationship with her. Also, some of the young teachers teaching in the cooperative classroom seem to be good candidates for that. However, even in spite of the visible progress achieved when it comes to executing the court ruling, we were unable to utilise the potential of the school and that of the municipality due to three main reasons: a) the very topic of segregation and discrimination in general divides society and it is very unpopular mainly when it comes to smaller villages and towns in Eastern Slovakia; b) since 2013 until today, our work has been met with great reluctance on the side of local politicians; and c) until today, we are missing support for those changes that would come from state and school authorities. The way I see it, in any changes that are necessary, the potential of the school can be utilised only if the municipality and the school – i.e. its director and teachers – really want to cooperate and are truly interested in changing things for the better.

*Who has contributed to executing the ruling the most? Please justify your answer.*

**VR:** The truth is that there are many people who have been helping us to gradually solve this problem and who have never refused to help us when we asked for it. But when I reflect on the entire turbulent process that our team has been going through on a daily basis between February, 2013 and August, 2016, there are few names that come to my mind of the people who made it possible for the court's judgment to be executed. eduRoma's initiative has always – in good times and bad – been supported by two experts, who have become our good friends, too: Alica Petrasová from the Faculty of Education of Prešov University and Ivan Pavlov from the Faculty of Education of Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica. It was thanks to their personal enthusiasm and professional drive that we were able to deal with this seemingly unsolvable case – and do it expertly. Of course, the former director of the school Jaroslav Valaštiak and the current director Mária Cvancigerová have both played an important part and contributed to executing the court's ruling. And we would definitely not have been able to work on this case with such drive and at such stretch if it weren't for the support and trust of our friends from OSF – namely Kate Lapham and Edlira Majko.

### Interview with Senior Chief School Inspector Viera Kalmárová

Since 2015, the State School Inspection has been cooperating closely with eduRoma in monitoring Roma students' segregation at Slovak schools. Senior Chief School Inspector Viera Kalmárová was interviewed in September, 2016.

*Could you please tell us when and why the State School Inspection decided to officially monitor and point out the issue of Roma students' segregation at Slovak schools?*

**VK:** The answer is both easy and hard at the same time. Continuously, the Inspection has been following the issue of segregation since the spring of 2015. That was the easier part of the answer. And the reasons? It is perhaps not very tactical to say that one of the reasons is the subjective motivation of people who are in the position to decide about the policy orientation of the Inspection, but, since the innermost motivation did indeed play a part in this, it wouldn't be right to omit it as one of the influencing factors – if only for the reason that subjective motivation always lends authenticity to any effort. Thus, in our case it means that we are doing things because we believe in them. A similarly important motive is a profound identification with the concept of rights and freedoms which I see as the backbone of modern European civilisation. As long as it is common in Slovakia that a part of the country's population is segregated in education on the grounds of their ethnic or social background – and this segregation does not only come in subtle forms but even in the most primitive ones (divided schools, pavilions, school floors, classes or canteens), we are basically admitting that we have failed as a civil society. And if we have failed in this area, where else can we fail next? Another reason which is closely connected with what I have said is the fact we see each student as a unique being who deserves to be treated in a way that respects his or her needs. Such understanding of the uniqueness of every person is clearly in contradiction with the tendencies that lead to the strengthening of the feeling in Roma children that they are socially excluded, which later turns into the feeling of being an 'unwanted alien' in society – an unwanted who will later pay it back to this society accordingly.

To conclude, there is this very pragmatic and summarising perspective. Segregation practice must be rejected consistently and thoroughly, if not from the perspective of human rights acceptance then, at least, in terms of fundamental knowledge which says that the failure to solve the problem of excluded Roma communities is a time bomb in Slovak society.”

*How are such inspections carried out in schools and who executes them?*

**VK:** In terms of organising an inspection that aims to establish whether some school applies a segregationist approach in education, it is important whether the inspection already works with indicia which specify the scope of issues attention should be paid to, or whether inspectors enter the school without any input information. The most complicated cases so far were handled by a special team consisting of erudite experts (3 special teachers, at least one school inspector specialising in the type of school inspected, an invited expert – a psychologist and – working concurrently or alternating with each other – an employee of the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities or Mr. Vladimír Rafael, director of eduRoma, who acts as my advisor in this field). I have chosen this combination of inspection team members to ensure that the inspection's perspective on the same problem in the initial phases of the assessment of the situation existing in our schools concerning equal access to education for all children was consistent, and also because the courage to call things by their proper names could be inspirational for colleagues who have been previously looking at things from a different perspective.”

This year, the Inspection will globally focus on topics concerning application of equal access to the education principle in the process of students' enrolment in special elementary schools. This choice of topic was influenced by the information that a percentage of Roma students attending special schools is disproportionately high, in the context of the fact that it was clearly proven that some of the diagnostic methods used to decide whether a child should be placed in such schools are inappropriate.

*What have you found out in this area up to now? What are the most frequent forms of segregation at schools?*

**VK:** As I have mentioned, most frequently we have discovered segregation of Roma students in separate classrooms and buildings with no legitimate reason. In one case, segregation in education was complemented by the practice that Roma children were having their meals in other premises than other students. Another story was the case when Roma students were placed in a special class when procedures necessary for such a decision had not been carried out.

*In your opinion, which are the broader causes of the application segregation practices in schools?*

**VK:** Personally, I do not think that the presence of segregation practices in Slovak schools is, exclusively, a result of racial or ethnic prejudice, which, however, does not mean I am ruling out the possibility that these may have some impact. In the long term, it is rather the failure to address some issues resulting from social exclusion experienced by some groups of inhabitants. It would be naive to expect schools to solve this social problem in a comprehensive way, so, when there's no personnel, economic or programme support, schools, of course, choose the easier way by separating well-socialized children from children coming from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, possibly without realising they are actually perpetuating the problem by doing so. I have even encountered a situation when the director of one of the schools in which extensive application of segregated practices in education was found as he boasted, in the presence of the Public Defender of Rights, how he had secured two more years of segregated education at the lower vocational training stage, which is normally provided by secondary schools, for 'his' Roma students who had been subjected to segregated education for some nine or ten years already. This basically means that the 17 – 18 year-old Roma students have never shared a classroom with students from a different socio-cultural background. This announcement was so shocking that neither the Public Defender of Rights nor I were able to react to it there and then. And that's where I see another major problem – that there are cases when not even the head teachers who should represent authorities in pedagogy are able to realise the irreversible damages that arise as a consequence of segregated education and, on the other hand, who do not see the benefits brought by inclusive education.

*Have you noticed any progress in this area recently? If so, can you please indicate where it occurred? In your opinion, does the state have tools that would be efficient enough to help teachers remedy the existing situation in schools? What, in your opinion, could change the situation in the years to come?*

**VK:** The major breakthrough came with the ruling in the Šarišské Michaľany case and, of course, also in relation to the content of the formal notice given by the European Commission regarding the start of infringement procedures against the Slovak Republic for breach of the 2000/43/EC Directive in April, 2015 in relation to introducing countermeasures to segregation in education. It's good that things are being solved but it is also sad that it has to be done under a certain amount of pressure. What has changed? The law concerning education of students from socially

disadvantaged backgrounds has been amended to ensure that, with certain exceptions, these students are educated together with other students in regular classes. The question remains, though, what regular classes with other students should Roma students attend when all the students in the school are Roma? Thus, the problem that remains is the existence of schools attended by Roma students only, which are found not only in cases of schools built in close vicinity to Roma settlements, but also in towns where there are more schools within the town. Therefore, it will be inevitable to also address the question of school districts, mainly when it comes to schools that school districts do not apply to (private schools). A change in teachers' and school directors' attitude to inclusive education, which should be systematically and massively promoted by the state, could also represent an important solution to the existing situation.

*Pointing out discrimination in schools must, undoubtedly, be a very unpopular topic. What is it that you have to struggle with most when it comes to interacting with school directors or state administration representatives?*

**VK:** Many school directors believe that when they practice segregated education, it is beneficial both for the Roma students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and for the majority population students who have no handicaps. Of course, it is mainly for the benefit of the relatively easy life of the school which does not have to 'fight' against the ill will of the well-socialized children's parents. There is no threat that these parents would have their children transferred to other schools where they would not share classrooms with Roma and the school thus is not at risk of losing funds fixed to the number of students attending the school. At the same time, it is, of course, easier to work in homogenous groups than in classes where students are on different levels and have varied learning potential. Thus, it would be essential to fight this very type of thinking.

And the state administration? I saw the attitude and the activities of the former State Secretary of the Ministry of Education Romana Kanovská as a very positive contribution to solving this complex issue. Similarly, the latest statements of the current State Secretary Peter Krajňák in the case of the Private Special School in Rokycany (he acknowledged on behalf of the Ministry that reasons exist to exclude this school from the network) suggest he treats this topic with the seriousness it deserves. But I would rather not comment on the attitudes of some of the local state administration authorities' representatives.

### Interviews with Cooperative Class Teachers and Students

Once a week, 15 third graders meet and get involved in cooperative activities, thus forming a 'mixed group', in which 7 children are from the marginalised Roma community in Ostrovany. Students from 3.A and 3. B were selected as they had shown interest in the group, the Roma children from the marginalised Roma community being given preference. It needs to be said, however, that the children taking part in cooperative activities are usually the same - the children are classmates or they know each other from PE lessons. The activities are organized after school, i.e. they are not carried out as a part of the children's regular schedule. Supervised by a teacher, children in the Cooperative Classroom engage in arts (their works later decorate school premises). 4 teachers (named below) take weekly turns to work with the children, yet, provided they have a free lesson, they are all present in the Cooperative Classroom. Since January 2016, the club also offers drama activities, which will result in the staging of the Little Red Riding Hood fairy-tale. Currently, the following teachers work in the Cooperative Class: Mgr. Katarína Kurimská – 4. B form teacher, Mgr. Lenka Malíková – 1. C form teacher, Mgr. Slávka Čačková – 3. B form teacher, Mgr. Štefánia Petriková – 4. C form teacher, and PaedDr. Alena Farkašová – special needs teacher. Cooperative activities were launched with the support from eduRoma at the beginning of the 2015/2016 school year and have been organised ever since.

### Interview with Katarína Kurimská

Katarína teaches 1<sup>st</sup> stage students at the Elementary School in Šarišské Michaľany. The interview took place in June 2016.

*How did you accept the ruling pronounced by the court in the case against the Elementary School in Šarišské Michaľany in 2012?*

**KK:** I was very disappointed, as it seemed as if it was aimed at us, the teachers. Yet we are really trying hard to give all we can to the children – and here we were, accused of segregating the children. The ruling simply seemed to be pronounced against us.”

*How do you see it now, with the benefit of hindsight?*

**KK:** All of us teachers, we strived to communicate, first and foremost, with the children and with their parents, as we do not think we were segregating the children. And even despite the ruling having come out the way it did, we never really had

exclusively Roma or non-Roma classes. Obviously, the ratio was never 50:50, but then, that would not be possible anyway.

*Do you see any solution for this situation?*

**KK:** You need to realize that, every year, we have more than 40 new children from Ostrovany and up to 20 children from Michaľany. So this number cannot be really influenced in any way. Perhaps if the [proposed] school really was built in Ostrovany and some children went to school there. The thing is the little children from Ostrovany commute to Michaľany and the little children from Michaľany commute either to the village of Medzany or to the town of Sabinov. Thus, the children who want to go to school in Ostrovany are forced to go to Michaľany and the children who want to go to school in Michaľany have to travel elsewhere because of their parents' wishes – as the parents do not agree. That is the problem for children get used to anything, children are great.

*In your opinion, in which points the school has executed the court's ruling?*

**KK:** Well, we tried to transfer more children into the 'non-Roma' classes, which we never had, but we still tried to transfer more of them. Also, we continue to organize various events for all children, just as we had been doing before. We are only continuing what we were doing before as we were doing things aimed at bringing children together even before the judgment. So, we have continued to organize joint school trips, we have joint arts and PE classes, we hold joint events as, if we have a grade, the grades are together and we only have two gyms.

*How much time have you given the children that were transferred to adapt in the new class?*

**KK:** A year. One school year. We evaluate [students' performance] at each classification meeting. It can't be done on a monthly basis; it is always done after the first year. It has always been like that. We have also been communicating with parents, as Roma children refused to be with the non-Roma children, that was the problem. When 3 – 4 children were in the non-Roma classes, they refused to attend those classes... Thus, we had to take them back and return them to their [previous] classes, but we communicated this to their parents. Nothing could be done. And imagine how much a year of playing truant would harm the students. So we were talking about it and we realised we had not been helping the children, we had been harming

them instead. If the children were here and someone worked with them on a daily basis, things would look different...

*How do the children react when they take lessons together?*

**KK:** As soon as they are together as a class, they can get along with each other very well.

*In your opinion, who has contributed the most to the execution of the ruling?*

**KK:** Every employee, as all employees are working with the children, it is impossible to name someone in particular. Even the cleaning ladies, cooks, everyone, really, everyone is trying to treat all children the same.

*What activities does the school organize?*

**KK:** OK, let's start from September: we had [visits to] libraries, folk tales (each class prepares a thematic presentation, then we get together and each class presents their work), we were making bookmarks (we select a topic, e.g. a name of an author and we make bookmarks), a Christmas party, St. Nicholas' Day, Earth day, carnival, sledging in Drienica, International Children's Day, plastic sack 'dress' fashion show (each class was supposed to design a dress made of plastic sacks which they later presented to other classes), a skiing trip, school trip to the countryside... I don't know what more can be done. Well, for sure there are other things that can be done, for instance we can organize an activity every day, but I think we are doing enough – even if it isn't every month, we definitely organize events and activities every quarter. We are doing our best to make it good.

*In your opinion, what are the obstacles preventing the execution of the ruling?*

**KK:** If I were to speak for myself, I maintain that the ruling should not be like it was, so it is hard for me to say what the obstacles are. We had always tried to bring the children together, even before [the ruling], in my opinion there was no segregation here. But the number of students and the disproportion in those numbers are both obstacles; that's for sure. For example, now there are more children from Ostrovany than from Michalany yet the children from Michalany are leaving to attend schools elsewhere. So the number [of students] is the biggest obstacle. Because if, for instance, there are 9 students from Michalany and some 30 from Ostrovany, we cannot divide the 9 students and place three in each class.

*And what about the teachers?*

**KK:** Well, you know, there are 30 of us here, so it is quite clear we can't all be of the same opinion. But, at the end of the day, our opinions are very similar.

*What is the key according to which mixed classes are currently formed?*

**KK:** Every student is unique and three quarters of the children need an individual approach and a slower pace of learning, but when a teacher sees that a student is not happy with the slower pace, that he or she is working really hard and is capable of working faster, that he or she will not slow down other children, then a proposal for transfer is made.

And then – each class is unique, too. Not every class accepts children who have been transferred. I always say that boys' groups are better than girls'. It is also important whether the transferred student has a good background at home, whether they receive any support at home or if they are left to struggle on their own – and then the children stop coming to school and we see truancy. Moreover, small children need to have a 'mommy' figure at school, and when they lose her (due to having a new teacher) plus new classmates, they stop coming to school.

*What about the parents, do they know about this?*

**KK:** Yes. But there it is not a problem if [a child] doesn't go to school. They would say they feel sick or the children come by bus but go away afterwards.

*Do parents come to parent-teacher association meetings?*

**KK:** No. See, maybe one per cent of them [do come]. I deal with this in by going to Ostrovany, I visit them, etc. As you know, many of them have young children and it is really difficult to arrange for them to be able to come when you have [other] little children.

*How do you promote positive relations between groups of students of different ethnic origin?*

**KK:** Well, let's say you have some 24 children in class, of whom three, four, five, or six are... Roma. How are you supposed to manage the class in such way that you still follow the curriculum, meet its targets and all that? If there were 10 children in the class and the ratio was, say, 7:3, it would be completely different, for the teacher would have more time to work with them.

### Interview with Slavomíra Čáčková

Slavomíra is a teacher at the Elementary School in Šarišské Michaľany. The interview took place in June, 2016.

*How did you accept the ruling pronounced by the court in the case against the Elementary School in Šarišské Michaľany in 2012?*

**SČ:** My reaction to the ruling was neutral; I didn't know what it would mean for us, the teachers here, what the future holds. But immediately after the judgment [was issued] we were under stronger pressure.

*Why do you think such a judgment was pronounced?*

**SČ:** Maybe revenge on the school? I don't know.

*How do you see the case now, with the benefit of hindsight?*

**SČ:** In the school, Roma students are to the fore in everything.

*In your opinion, in which points the school has executed the court's ruling?*

**SČ:** In all points. It can be said everyone is involved, as we have activities in the school where all of us are involved and they are for all children, and we also have different clubs and one chooses children and works with them later.

*What more could be done to execute the ruling? Please specify the school's potential.*

**SČ:** I don't know. We, the teachers, are doing all we can. And as for the decisions of superior authorities – well, we are unable to influence these. How can one influence the number of children, for instance? Another way out of this also exists – even if the school in Ostrovany was not built, a two-shift operation could be introduced and the children would come in the mornings and in the afternoons. I know some municipalities solve it this way – they have a two-shift operation.

*Please express the motto of the school in one sentence only.*

**SČ:** I don't know.

*How do you promote positive relations between groups of students of different ethnic origin?*

**SČ:** Through joint school and after-school activities.

*What is the key according to which mixed classes are currently formed?*

**SČ:** Class teachers propose apt students from Roma classes to be transferred to mixed classes; or, if Roma parents request their children to be transferred to mixed classes.

*What is the teachers' perspective on the mixed team of students? What do they observe during lessons?*

**SČ:** Teachers take it normally, after all, it is our job, but working in such a class is extremely hard and challenging. It is not possible for a teacher to do the job of three for a period of 45 minutes. The first group are very good students who are making progress and who need the teacher to create something new with them. The second group are students who need a slower pace and to whom things need to be explained repeatedly. These, too, need a teacher to work with them. The third group are very weak students who could not do anything without a teacher.

*What makes the model of education currently applied by ES ŠM more 'inclusive'?*

**SČ:** As a teacher, I do not see any difference, as I teach the same children, in the same school, and in the same way I was teaching six years ago. But, for example, the children took a school trip to the countryside and a skiing trip together and all went fine.

*For you, what is the significance of cooperative teaching?*

**SČ:** It is all freer, more innovative, children have more opportunities to be creative and independent; the focus is on the actual creative processes the children are involved in. Thus, I am actually giving the children a chance to think actively and design lessons. Children are more motivated, since traditional teaching is, we can say, rather boring. Children are motivated and, thus, they are coming to school, as they are looking forward to doing things, to creating.

*How does cooperative teaching work?*

**SČ:** I assign them [the students] a topic and divide them into three groups. Each group gets their task and they start working. When they are done with the work, each group presents in front of the others. I am trying to introduce either cooperative teaching or group work techniques to our class work, so we are learning it little by little.

## Interview with students attending the Elementary School in Šarišské Michaľany

Interview with two ninth graders – a non-Roma boy called Samuel and a Roma girl called Lenka. The interview took place in June, 2016.

*How did it feel when your school was suddenly talked about in the media?*

**Samuel:** I did not feel it in any way.

*And what do you think gave rise to it all?*

**Samuel:** Like what? That the school was in the media? Well, first of all, it was said that our school had two directors and before that, perhaps because some Roma were misbehaving, destroying things and fighting with one another...

*How would you describe the atmosphere in the classrooms?*

**Samuel:** Everything's fine. Once in a while, there are some quarrels, that happens, but other than that, it's fine.

*What would you improve in your class?*

**Lenka:** Nothing.

**Samuel:** Like she said; nothing. We are all fine here.

*You have been transferred to the ninth grade. Did you make some friends in the [new] class? (Note: This student was transferred at the beginning of her ninth grade to the so-called mixed class.)*

**Lenka:** Yes, I did and I feel good there. I am in the classroom during the lessons but I go to see my old classmates, who are in another classroom, during the breaks.

*How would you assess the teachers at your school?*

**Samuel:** Well, sometimes it happens that they blame the wrong person when something bad happens, mostly it is the same person, and they don't even bother to investigate who did it. That I don't like. In our class, teachers treat everyone the same. Like, for instance, they explain the schoolwork, well, like normally. They even help the weaker ones. What else should I add? It's fine.

**Lenka:** I think they explain it well, even though I did not understand everything at the beginning, but it's OK now.

*The 'at the beginning' you mentioned – when was that?*

**Lenka:** I was transferred to this class in the ninth grade. I had been attending a class with Roma students for 8 years and now I am in another class.

Samuel: But they [the teachers] were making the effort, they really were, I have to say. They were trying to treat the students in a way that they tended to them more when it came to explaining the new schoolwork.

*How do you feel at school?*

**Samuel:** Not better than at home. Like, we experience a lot in school and we wouldn't have these experiences at home, and we have friends here. The teachers want to teach us some things for life, which is fine.

**Lenka:** I feel good in the school. I feel like I don't even want to leave for secondary school yet, I like being here with the people who are here.

### 3.1. Current Educational Situation in Šarišské Michaľany vs. The Municipality of Ostrovany

Ostrovany, 6<sup>th</sup> September, 2016 (TASR) – Two ‘zero’ grade classes were opened in the municipality of Ostrovany in the Sabinov District in the new local elementary school (ES) with 31 enrolled students. In total, there are some 400 school-age children living in the municipality and the children attending the first and higher grades commute to elementary schools in the neighbouring villages of Šarišské Michaľany or Medzany or the nearby town of Sabinov. *“The biggest group – some 260 – are children from the Roma settlement who attend the school in Šarišské Michaľany,”* specified Cyril Revák, mayor of Ostrovany.

The premises of the new Elementary School in Ostrovany, established by the municipality, are located in the newly built Community Centre not far from the local Roma settlement. The children had a chance to try the new school desks and learned basic information about the operation of the school from their teachers. Some children struggled with communication as they have not really mastered the Slovak language yet. Thus, their parents interpreted the teachers’ words into the Roma language for them.

Revák said to TASR that the school’s founding authority is the municipality. The building, built as a community centre, was constructed with a financial contribution from the EU, the Slovak Republic and of the municipality. *“We have adjusted the upper floor premises of the Community Centre so that they are fit for the education of children, with the consent of the relevant Public Health Authority. It all cost some 256,000 Euro, of which some 13,000 Euro were provided by the municipality.”* added the mayor.

If the Community Centre project is launched successfully, the municipal self-government intends to use the premises to educate ‘zero’ grade students in the mornings and for community activities in the afternoons. Revák believes that the place is suitable for other children, who are attending different schools and who can study or take remedial lessons there in the afternoons, too. The school currently employs two teachers, one of whom, Katarína Kurimská, is also acting as Deputy Director.

*“The children were placed in the ‘zero’ grade on the basis of psychological examinations. They have either not attended kindergarten at all or they were attending pre-school education facilities only sporadically. The ‘zero’ grade will help them with communication so that they manage to cope well in the first grade,”* said Kurimská. Both teachers had

been teaching in the Elementary School in Šarišské Michaľany until recently, so they are very well acquainted with the situation in Ostrovany. *“I think it is really great for the children to have a school right here, in their municipality, and I believe they will benefit from it,”* added the Deputy Director.

Starting from ‘zero’ grade, the new school in Ostrovany will be attended exclusively by Roma children. The school in Šarišské Michaľany also had Roma classes, but it was ordered by court to end the practice of separating Roma students, so they started to create mixed classes. Following the verdict, some of the parents had their non-Roma children transferred to the school in Medzany.

# 4.

## 4. CRITICAL EVALUATION

In conclusion, it can be argued that the elementary education system is not adjusted to the fact that a significant underprivileged group of students with cultural and symbolic competencies that are at a lower level than that routinely anticipated by the problem-free education process is entering this process of education (modified according to Kusá, pp. 227, in: Tižík, 2013). The case of Šarišské Michaľany thus serves as yet further proof that Roma people's access to education is hindered by the fact that the Slovak system of education routinely anticipates students entering the said system to be ready for school discipline and to possess a certain set of skills and knowledge that teachers can build upon. However, the teaching reality is different. In reality, social and also the related cultural marginalization as well as isolation of students coming from ethnically non-Slovak environments deepens instead. It is becoming apparent that the educational practice fails to address the issue of discordance between Roma students' mother tongue and the language they are educated in. The social and cultural background within which their primary *habitus* and language code is formed is, in some cases, an entire civilisation away from the standard school environment. This, on one hand, increases pedagogical pessimism in their teachers and, on the other hand, induces efforts on the part of the students to escape from the unfamiliar school environment where they have to do things and behave in a way which, in terms of their actual social and economic experience, does not make sense to them. Growing pedagogical pessimism results in a situation when teachers see the solution in repression rather than in prevention and openness.

Rather than searching for a way to change the status quo, the school looks for arguments to justify segregation and explain 'why things cannot be done in any other way'. So far, not even pressure coming from the outside (the court's ruling) seems to be efficient and the school is looking for arguments to justify its approach and prove it is correct. Growing awareness of political correctness leads to a search for acceptable excuses and self-justification. Both the school's management and teachers see the establishing of the new elementary school in Ostrovany as the only effective solution.

Despite Durkheim's school model<sup>12</sup>, however appealing as it may seem, it is apparent that the current school – at least in our conditions – does not represent a socio-culturally homogenising institution. Bourdieu's theory, which sees school as an institution that reproduces existing socio-cultural inequalities in society, is more fitting. According to Bourdieu, a school is endowed with prevailing, dominant cultural characteristics and forms the cultural environment which replicates prominent traits of the dominating social class. Consequently, in students from this dominating class, the school serves to strengthen their cultural affiliation while students from other, non-dominant classes encounter symbolic cultural violence (Bourdieu – Passeron, 1979). If understood symbolically, the term violence indeed applies to our schools which are attended by Roma students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. However, this violence is not followed through but usually ends in pedagogical resignation and searching for reasons why it is impossible to fully include these students in the education process implemented in the standard schooling model instead.

It would thus be justified to consider changes in the field of school education so that it is capable of securing a levelling space for all students in the class by means of internal differentiation throughout the entire period of compulsory education. Within the inclusive education model, schools and educational institutions should strive to approximate their students' environment, both physically and culturally, to the greatest extent possible. This, however, does by no means mean that standard requirements should be abandoned – instead, schools should look for the ways to bridge the social and culture gap existing between the school's culture and all students' domestic environments.

Based on the arguments above, this type of “unaccomplished symbolic violence” results not in cultural assimilation, the threat of which Bourdieu points out, but rather a form of cultural exclusion which leads to the situation when Roma students

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12 The French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858 – 1917) believed societal structures are so strong that they control the actions of individuals. A society is healthy when it is able to subordinate individuals' desires to its ethical norms. Therefore, the role of school, besides that of educating individuals and developing their potential, is, primarily, to adapt students to the requirements of adults and develop in students qualities which are required by the society. Thus, individuals are introduced into a world of pre-defined values and norms. Hence, a school mainly serves the purpose of social control.

from socially disadvantaged backgrounds are mostly placed outside of standard education and social self-actualization frameworks. Yet it would be wrong to blame teachers for this situation, as teachers represent an integral part of the system which has been evolving, in accordance with Bourdieu's theory, in this region for more than three centuries. This is also a reason why, when it comes to teaching this group of students, they do not even think of the need to implement some major changes on the side of the school, as shown in our interviews. This, however, means that the teachers, in their capacity of institutional representatives of the school, put themselves on the level of students' parents.

The introduction of inclusive education principles represents a controlled process of changing the education system as well as the continuous effort to further new values which see diversity in society and in schools as positive and use it to promote social cohesion and overcome all forms of discrimination. The human rights aspect is an integral part of introducing inclusive education discourse which ultimately aims to improve education opportunities for all, yet with special focus on the marginalised, excluded, disabled or disadvantaged. The main instruments of change are the democratisation of decision-making and communication processes, cooperation and forming of partnerships on various levels.

Reasons for eliminating segregation and its effect in education (education policies) have a significant impact both sociologically and economically. The forming of a social platform allowing for the forming of partnerships and cooperation among all education process stakeholders, education policy makers, the Ministry of Education and subjects falling under its authority, state authorities, non-governmental authorities and local Roma communities would be such an impulse for change. The vision should translate into a complex strategy and individual measures.

The study has revealed the lower expectations teachers have in relation to Roma students and the lack of strategies to cope with their educational needs. Teachers find it hard to handle the problematic behaviour of students. As a result, conflicts and rowdy behaviour arise among students on the one hand and teachers are losing interest and motivation on the other hand. The story of this school is the story of a municipality with insufficient expert and human capacity to solve questions of social inclusion and social cohesion. Yet it is also an example of a flawed system which has failed to create efficient and effective control and support mechanisms. Both municipalities (Šarišské Michaľany and Ostrovany) need the assistance of state institutions and they need to know whom to approach and what help to ex-

pect. Ad hoc visits by politicians proved to be as ineffective as the non-systemic initiatives of the schools or those of municipal authorities.

Segregation or separation of Roma students and their subsequent placement in homogenous groups (including 'zero' grades) with the aim of adjusting more to their educational needs is a measure that is both inefficient and pedagogically inappropriate. As foreign and even some domestic experience (e.g. that of the Elementary School in Spišský Hrhov) indicate, the elimination of processes aimed at dividing students at elementary schools is the right way to go when it comes to mitigating inequalities. More and more often voices are raised that question the competition among schools aimed at increasing the efficiency of the education process and instead point out the benefits brought by a cooperative approach (see e.g. Petrasová, Porubský, 2013).

Experience shows that those who have planned the introduction of inclusive education processes do not help to remedy the existing situation. Education policy (the state's) expectations regarding the introduction of inclusive education principles are only formulated too generally, which allows for various interpretations. It is becoming apparent that only relying on the implementation of three nation-wide projects does not suffice.<sup>13</sup> Proof can be found in the very case of Šarišské Michaľany Elementary School, which was included in a national project entitled 'Education of Teaching Staff for Inclusion of Marginalized Roma Communities' between October 2011 and October 2015. Direct observations and interviews with secondary education teachers have shown that teachers are reluctant to abandon the deep-rooted educational concepts and that it will take them a long time to understand that they are the ones who are expected to work continuously to improve their profession as they, too, are responsible for the introduction of innovations in the system of education.

The Elementary School in Šarišské Michaľany is an example of a school which, having been left on its own, failed to stop the deepening segregation even despite the fact that the school's management introduced a number of aids to integration (e.g. an assistant teacher or all-day education system).

The actual experience of the Šarišské Michaľany Elementary School in their execution of the court's ruling of October 2012 points out which are the challeng-

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13 Cf.: [www.eduk.sk](http://www.eduk.sk).

es that Slovak schools striving to educate their students in accordance with Slovak anti-discrimination legislation have to face. Without clear guidelines, left outside the scope of the attention of relevant authorities and with no funds allocated to support desegregation and inclusive education, the Elementary School in Šarišské Michaľany is forced to look for ad hoc solutions.

It is becoming apparent that systemic coordination and strategic support from the state and from the institutions within its direct control is necessary for the school in Šarišské Michaľany to be able to implement pro-inclusive measures. The following are some of the areas where the direct involvement of the abovementioned is essential.

*Area: Diagnostics and Intervention*

It is important that:

- diagnostics and intervention in teaching practice be used in accordance with the most current knowledge in the fields of pedagogy, psychology, social pedagogy and special pedagogy (e.g. dynamic testing);
- multidisciplinary team intervention be secured, with the team consisting of, e.g. a teacher, an assistant teacher, a special teacher, a guidance counsellor; and external consultants such as a psychologist, a social worker, a paediatrician, etc.;
- school results and individual students' attainment be monitored, student data be worked with more and particular quantitative measurable indicators aimed at defining improvement in Roma students' attainment;
- social inclusion and cohesion strategy be drafted on local, regional and national levels and methodology for identification and intervention so that schools are prepared in the event of future threats.

*Area: Consultancy*

It is important that:

- quality career guidance services be secured for students and education aspirations be strengthened in students from families which fail to shape them in this area;
- external experts be involved.

Guidance counselling systems form an important part of the inclusive education system since it is students-, parents- and teachers-centred. Guidance counselling

personnel include guidance counsellors, school psychologists, special needs teachers, curative teachers, social teachers and prevention coordinators. The most important parts of guidance counselling include early screening and development stimulation, diagnostics and repeated diagnostics, psychological and social assistance, special teaching intervention and family support, organisation of training sessions and seminars, preparation of teaching resources, preparation and distribution of materials and dissemination of information related to the education process, providing support for schools and families, and assisting students in their entering the labour market. Institutions providing guidance counselling services cooperate with other institutions and experts, in particular with psychologists, paediatricians, child psychiatrists, and other experts on education, social work and rights (modified according to Schmidtová, Lechta, 2010).

#### *Area: Research*

It is important that:

- research activities aimed at inclusive education issues be promoted (e.g. monitoring of measures to eliminate inequalities, drafting a methodology to monitor the progress of various groups of students, etc.);
- links between science, research and teaching practice be secured (it is, for example, important to apply action research methods in order to establish efficiency of individualised and differentiated approaches in heterogeneous groups of students).

#### *Area: Publicising and Promotion of Inclusive Education Towards the Public*

It is important that:

- accountability of stakeholders at all levels (schools, founding authorities and state) be increased;
- activities aimed at initiating society-wide discussion on education in an inclusive school environment be organised;
- the public be informed about the introduction of inclusive measures and about best practice examples at schools;
- the public be informed about the risks related to the inclusive education introduction and about the risks connected with excessive selectivity within the education system.

#### *Area: Complex and All-day Support System for Students*

It is important that:

- students and the community be provided a variety of support services in the fields of education (compulsory and extracurricular – school preparation, remedial classes, tutoring), health-care, public awareness and social issues.

#### *Area: Cooperation with Families and the Community*

It is important that:

- community resources and services be identified and integrated to support school programmes aimed at promoting mutual cooperation between the school and the community.

#### *Area: Pre-graduate Training and Further Education of Teachers*

It is important that:

- instruments for continuous monitoring of teachers' needs to form an inclusive environment at schools be created;
- trust between external experts and teachers be built and their opinions on the usefulness and operation of the existing concepts be harmonised;
- an environment favourable for the drafting of methodological materials utilising well-tried strategies which promote inclusiveness at schools be formed.

Democracy is a process in which public discourse is used to negotiate conditions allowing individuals to lead a good life in society. The story of Šarišské Michaľany Elementary School or From Segregation to Inclusive Education is an attempt to offer an inspirational contribution to the said discourse on the topic which, for many, may sound like an ever-repeated chorus.

The 'story' of Šarišské Michaľany Elementary School clearly shows that the school, in its effort to eliminate segregation and introduce inclusive education principles, received the biggest support from eduRoma, an NGO which implemented the project to establish cooperation between the teachers and the local community and initiated the creation of the Cooperative Classroom. eduRoma currently organizes extracurricular activities for the school's students through its volunteers.

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This publication is inspirational, shocking, sad and woefully merry at the same time. Regardless of the adjective we use to describe it, it is a reflection of our society. In the book, the authors use the case of one school which ended up in court as a result of the approach it implemented towards its poor Roma students. The school was left alone to (mis)manage the execution of the court's ruling. Even despite eduRoma's efforts and support, the situation in the school is just as the authors describe it. This text takes us under the surface, giving us a chance to look behind the school gates, into the school staffroom and into the classrooms, a chance to see reality in its true form. The school documents the system's unreadiness to educate these children. It is an example of the stance our society maintains when it comes to those children who were unlucky enough to be born into poor families. Solutions do exist but we do not want to hear them, since that would mean we would have to abandon our comfortable and cosy stereotypes. This publication is not about the case of Šarišské Michaľany Elementary School. It is about all of us.

*Rastislav Rosinský*

The story of Šarišské Michaľany Elementary School is a sad yet accurate illustration of the status quo when schools are carried by a counterflow and when we are unable, on the systemic level, to handle problems that schools should be involved in solving first and foremost. Repressive legislation in the form of remedial court orders does not suffice here. Alica Petrasová and Ivan Pavlov offer a detailed insight into segregation practices in our schools without judging them. Through interviews with the 'affair's participants the authors reveal the subjective truth of each of these participants, thus painting a complex picture of societal inability to solve the problem posed by the actual exclusion of one minority group from equal access to education in the 21st century. Yet the authors offer more than a mere description of the problem. The case of Šarišské Michaľany shows how important it is to steer towards the European perspective on the social function of education and its values.

*Štefan Porubský*

