

led to the increasing social prestige of Romanies and won the hearts of more and more Czech citizens, instead of setting them against themselves.

Thirdly, internal influences in the Český Krumlov Romany community *looked after* their acquired prestige and did not let new migrants, moving from the 1950's to 1970's from different places in Bohemia and Moravia, damage it. They prevented them from coming and settling in the town, where several Romany families had already settled and lived. Extended families then increased in number in the following generations.

Finally, the good position of the Romany community in Český Krumlov is also reflected by the high proportion of mixed Romany–Czech marriages, which at present reaches up to one third (at the beginning of 1980's it was thirty percent) of all marriages. This constitutes the most convincing proof of the significant change in attitude of the Czech majority and the good public opinion of Romanies.

## VI. Culture and Religion

The position of Romanies in Český Krumlov continues to improve, despite problems such as unemployment.

In past years, many successful Romanies in Český Krumlov offered jobs to unemployed members of their community, including, for example, the firm *Dunka*, the pub *Cikánská Jizba* and others.

The religious services in the Český Krumlov region are overseen by deacon and chaplain Vojtěch VÁGAI: a Romany, who works in the Saint Vitus Church in Český Krumlov or in the monastery and other parochial districts in Větrní, Kájov and around.

Local Romanies normally do not differ from others in housing culture, clothing or other material life styles. On the other hand, their family and social relations within their community have a distinct character, particularly as regards the preservation of their culture and folklore, music and dance.

Three bands (Cindži Renta, Mulatčag and Orient), a children choir Gilori (The Ditty) and other musicians and singers perform traditional Romany folklore, which they strive to preserve and develop. The specificity and originality of the Romany culture enriches the cultural life of the historical town of Český Krumlov.

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Bryce BELCHER

# Český Krumlov and the Roma Population after 1989

*Český Krumlov (in German Krum(m)au an der Moldau or Böhmisches Krum(m)au), in the Czech Republic, as part of the Sudetenland, was almost completely evacuated after the Second World War (1939–1945).*

*The Czechoslovakian state could not afford to leave the Sudeten areas empty, so repopulation programs were set up in order to refill the border areas. One segment of this population was Romanies (Gypsies), particularly in Český Krumlov.*

## I. History of the City

One must keep in mind that at that time of the repopulation of the town after World War II, Český Krumlov was more than simply the old town near the river: houses had been built around the town periphery on the hillsides in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century; houses which enjoyed more sunshine, cleaner air, and a safe distance from the seasonal floods of the Vltava River.

The first re-settlers to the town were Czechs and Slovaks coming first from inland Bohemia and later from ethnic villages in the neighboring eastern countries, being invited from the State to come home to the motherland after the war. This fair-skinned population resettled the newer houses around the hillsides, while the darker-skinned folk settled into Krumlov later and moved into the old town near the river. Český Krumlov became known during the time of the socialist regime as a Romany town. But the new residents of the old town did not own their properties, as all former Sudeten properties went into the hands of the state.

They also did not have any money (or reason) to reconstruct the houses or carry out more than the most basic maintenance, such as replacing shingles or re-vamping the heating system. So most of the

houses in the old town simply dilapidated throughout the almost fifty years of the regime.

In addition, before the Second World War, Český Krumlov had undergone a deep economic depression since the Schwarzenbergs had left in the middle nineteenth century, and the houses were already in bad shape to begin with.

A paper mill had been built upstream in 1867, which for many years did not use filters and, tragically, dumped its waste directly into the river. Until the Lipno Dam was built upstream in 1961, flooding was a normal occurrence in Český Krumlov: people generally lived on the first upper floor, while the ground floor was used for food storage.

Brown wood coal was used for heating, and because Český Krumlov is surrounded by hills, the old town became an instant place for thermal inversions during the winter. So if the residents were not being asphyxiated by smog from above, they were being flooded by paper mill effluent from below, or both.

This was taking place in buildings which had not experienced anything more than basic maintenance for nearly one hundred and fifty years, and one can only imagine the result: the Český Krumlov of the 1980's was an utterly different Český Krumlov than what we see today.

The old town did have its own kind of romantic charm, of course, but it was not a very desirable place to live or to stay for very long. The situation in Český Krumlov with the resident Romany population was then approached in an unprecedented fashion.

## II. Jan VONDROUŠ, the First Mayor

The first democratically elected Mayor, Jan VONDROUŠ, recognized the local Romanies as the original inhabitants of the town: the former Sudeten Germans were not entitled to restitution, and there was no real thought of them returning.

The first meeting called by the Mayor of the city to meet with the Romany families (essentially three extended families with a population of around one thousand and five hundred) resulted with the Mayor finally thanking them for coming and scheduled another meeting, in which they were to elect three representatives among themselves. The next meeting was more productive, resulting in an agreement between the Mayor and Romany families that set a precedent for years to come.

The Romanies were to form their own company for garbage

collecting, street sweeping, public grounds maintenance, and the like; the town would help them set up the business and provide loans for equipment.

Also, the town would sign annual contracts for their services; the town would guarantee that if a local Roma wanted to open a business in town (a shop or a restaurant, and so on), she or he would receive fair treatment from the town offices.

Further, the Roma families would provide two young men for police service. If there would be a problem in the Roma neighbourhoods, the Romany policemen would be sent to deal with it; and the heads of the families would prevent their own members from entering into stereotypical activities, such as pick-pocketing from the increasing tourist population.

The final condition was the request of the Romany families, and the key point for future relations: the town promised that it would take all possible steps to prevent members of other Romany families from coming into Český Krumlov and claiming permanent residence.

There was no restriction on the sale of private property, of course. Given the present economic reality, when most outside Romany families would apply to the town for an apartment, there was already a long waiting list for the town's own population.

## III. The Result of the Agreement

The result of this important agreement is that, nowadays, Český Krumlov has been recognized nationally and internationally as a town that has successfully dealt with its minority population.

Much of the Romany population in Český Krumlov is employed, and can be seen maintaining the public green and cleaning the streets from five in the morning every day. Since most of the Roma population has traditionally received little education, this method guarantees that everyone has the opportunity to work.

Today the town is, for the most part, clean and well-maintained. There are several Romany music groups active in the local pubs; there is a Romany restaurant in town (a favourite among locals and visitors), several Romany policemen, and for years there was a Romany on the town council: this in itself is exceptional in Czech towns.

Even today, most of the senior members of the Český Krumlov Romany population express their indebtedness to Jan VONDROUŠ and his early efforts at conciliation for their improved standard of living.

As for numbers, the Romany population of the Czech Republic is roughly seven percent, while in Český Krumlov it is about ten percent. This means that either more Romanies admit to their nationality on the census forms, or that there are simply more Romanies here.

Český Krumlov also has the highest rate of mixed marriages (between white Czech and Romany) of any town in the Czech Republic. Because there is no animosity on the part of the local citizens towards the Romany population, there is no fuel for a skinhead movement, and in turn no fuel for an anarchist movement either.

The result is a peaceful and developing town. One can only hope that this movement will continue, and that the work of the town's earlier leaders, white and Roma alike, will not be overlooked by future generations.

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