



# **THE FORGOTTEN GENOCIDE**

**European Roma Theatre Project**

**International Romani Writers' Association  
Pralipe Theatre**

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January 2005

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## **OBJECTIVES**

How to rehabilitate the memory of the Roma people, a people that has often been forgotten?

How to gather competences and encourage the collaboration of Roma cultural milieus from different European countries?

How to promote and represent the Roma culture in a context of globalisation, cultural uniformisation, and European Union enlargement?

How to contribute, through art and culture, to the identity, the development and the well-being of people?

How to foster dialog between peoples, generations, artists and decision-makers?

THE FORGOTTEN GENOCIDE initiative is not only a call for the duty of memory towards the Roma people, but it also aims at transmitting values of solidarity between peoples and gathering European citizens.

THE FORGOTTEN GENOCIDE objective is to stimulate intercultural and intergenerational exchanges, develop mutual knowledge of the cultures and peoples of Europe through performing arts. Its final purpose is the promotion of cooperation and the creation of a real network of Roma artists in Europe.

THE FORGOTTEN GENOCIDE response to the above questions is a theatre play called "With the guitar of seven strings".

## **ORIGIN ET MOTIVATIONS**

The play is based on a novel from Veijo Baltzar about the persecution of a group of Roma during the Second World War. The novel was born from the will to get people to know and recognise the lot of the Roma during the war. The book will be published by Tammi in 2006.

As a writer, Veijo Baltzar's mission has always been to transcript the soul of his people. With this book, he wants to contribute in bringing into light the partial genocide of the Roma in Europe. The issue has been discussed in many studies, research work and seminars, but it had never been addressed from an artistic point of view. To all people, it is a right and duty to transmit its history to the next generations through artistic means.

There are no people without writers, artists, teachers, researchers or cultural institutions. There are no people without culture. The European Roma people can't be only defined with social or political notions; there are also other higher values. It is a duty for artists to show the example to the younger generations, explain them the significance and the value of art and not only for a people, but also for any individual. Art is a key factor of social well-being and it is essential to set up special institutions in all European countries.

The Finnish National Theatre ordered a first dramatised version of the novel, which will be produced in 2005. A second version is to be produced in Europe: Rahim Burhan, the Macedonian

director of the famous Pralipe Theatre from Müllheim, will direct the play. The premiere will be in Stockholm, in Skopje or in Paris in spring 2007. The play could also be played in Germany, Finland, and Estonia. The work is an international cooperation and will gather Roma actors, musicians and other technicians from different European countries. It will be played in Roma language and translated in English, German, French and Swedish.

THE FORGOTTEN GENOCIDE has received the approval from Ars Baltica, a forum for multilateral cultural cooperation with an emphasis on common projects within the Baltic Sea Region. The intention of the forum is to enhance cultural identity in the Baltic Sea Region and also to realize projects of European significance. Its goal is to implement common projects, which in terms of structure and concept are more than the traditional form of bilateral cultural exchange and also to help these projects to become as existing networks of individuals and organisations.

The idea of a pan-European theatre project took hold during the Ars Baltica Romani Writers' Congress organized by International Romani Writers' Association (IRWA) in July 2004 in Finland which gathered Veijo Baltzar and Rahim Burhan, who are at the origin of the project.

## **TARGET GROUPS AND IMPACT**

The play is targeted to everybody, Roma and non-Roma, younger or older, simple citizens as well as decision-makers.

The project is first and foremost a common initiative of Romani groups addressing their people. The play is a fragment of the history of the Roma and of their souls and once written, it can't be forgotten anymore.

The play speaks for the generations, which have been directly or indirectly affected by the war and the atrocities of the Holocaust.

It is meant to be a testimony from the past for the younger generations for whom it is a right and a duty to know their history and not only through simple numbers, writings from non-Roma or history books.

THE FORGOTTEN GENOCIDE is also a message for the European society as a whole, regardless from origins. We are all concerned by the Holocaust tragedy; nobody should remain isolated and ignorant to racism and discrimination. Dialog is the only way for us to accept each other and respect everybody's values and identity.

In 2004, the European Union welcomed new countries with many minorities existing alongside each other, the Roma minority being one of them. Now Romania and Bulgaria are seeking membership. In this context, THE FORGOTTEN GENOCIDE is also a call for the public authorities and the decision-makers of the European institutions to remind them that they have to keep fighting against discrimination and marginalisation of minorities and that culture is an effective means of prevention and communication.

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

The main partners in this project at this stage are the Cultural Centre DROM, based in Finland and represented by Veijo Baltzar, the Roma theatre Pralipe from Müllheim in Germany, founded by Rahim Burhan, the Roma Cultural Centre in Stockholm in Sweden, the Estonian-Finnish Institute and the Tartu University in Estonia and the cultural centre L'Espace d'un Instant in Paris in France. The contribution of each partner is on a long-term basis. They are committed to achieve precise objectives and they have established relationships with decision-makers and key contact people in the artistic and cultural circles of their respective countries. The partnerships are still evolving and are not all described below.

### **Veijo Baltzar and the Cultural Centre DROM**

Veijo Baltzar is Finland's only Gypsy writer. With his eight novels, he has shed light on the world of the hidden culture of his tribe. A strong Gypsy identity and roots in his own culture combined with in-depth familiarity with the culture of the majority population have provided Baltzar with critical viewpoints on both worlds. His debut novel *Polttava tie* (*Scorching road*) appeared in 1968 and has also been published in Swedish. In 2002, he published a magnificent family saga called *Phuro*. He has also written plays, dramatised poems and film scripts. He has won awards on two occasions (1999 and 2000) at the international Amico Rom review of Gypsy art in Lanciano, Italy.

The Cultural Centre DROM was founded by Veijo Baltzar in Helsinki, Finland already in the 1970s with the aim of preserving and promoting Roma culture and art through projects, courses and seminars.

### **Rahim Burhan and the Pralipe theatre**

Rahim Burhan is a founder of the Roma Theatre Pralipe in Skopje, Macedonia in 1970. The first play *No*, in 1971, was awarded by the city of Skopje and the Republic of Macedonia awards. The Roma Theatre of Rahim Burhan received many credits and prominent awards. The awards received and his political standpoint inspired Rahim Burhan make a decision to perform his plays in Roma language with an aim to preserve the language and the culture of Roma people and help support their self-esteem and help integrate this culture in new Europe. Still, Burhan does not only address Roma, but all people who like theatre and who are open to specific Burhan Pralipe Theatre aesthetics.

### **The Roma Cultural Centre in Stockholm**

Created in 2001, the Roma Cultural Centre in Stockholm aims at establishing a cultural institution to pursue Roma cultural issues and, at the same time, protect and visualize its own cultural heritage. The idea is that the centre should function as a meeting point for Roma and non-Roma people, contribute to educational support for those of the Roma-people who participate in the various activities arranged by the centre. It is partially financed by the Stockholm's city council National Council for Cultural affairs.

### **L'Espace d'un Instant**

L'Espace d'un Instant has been for more than ten years the coordinator of a cultural network active in the field of conservation, translation, publishing and promotion of dramatic writings from the Balkans, Turkey and the Caucasus. It has its own resource centre, translators, a network of correspondents, a publishing house and technical and artistic staff involved in many promotion actions.

For more than ten years, almost a dozen of events have been organised. Thanks to this work, the French-speaking audience has discovered a lot of dramatic works, plays and authors from Eastern Europe.

#### The Finnish Institute in Estonia and the Tartu University in Estonia

The network of Finnish institutes for culture and science begins in Estonia. There are institutes in over twenty European capital cities and even in Japan and in the Middle East. Finland is represented among others in Paris, London, Berlin and in the Nordic countries as well as in Saint-Petersburg.

The institute organises readings, lessons, seminars, expositions, concerts and also meetings with professionals from various fields : a rich and varied Finnish cultural program. Events take place in the premises of the institute or in Tallinn, Tartu and other Estonian cities.

The Tartu University is one of the oldest universities from Northern Europe, founded in 1632 by the King of Sweden Gustav II Adolph. Today, It has over 10 000 students, 10 faculties with 15 departments, 33 institutes and 18 clinics. It has also 5 museums, a computer centre, a botanical garden and a library with 5 million volumes.

## **PROJECT TIMING**

Script writing– summer/autumn 2004

Dramatisation – autumn/winter 2004

Search for partnerships – autumn 2004/summer 2005

Grants applications and sponsors – winter 2004/summer 2005

Translation – spring 2005

Music composition – winter/spring 2005

Rehearsals – autumn 2005/2006

Dressing and other preparations – autumn 2005/2006

Venues and premises – autumn 2005/2006

Premiere - 2007

Tour - 2006-2008

## **PLAN OF ACTION**

The project duration is 3 years. Its effective realisation is foreseen for 2007.

The year 2005 will be devoted to the organisation: financing, search for sponsors, premises, actors and other participants, as well as the translation in Roma language, English, German, French and Swedish.

Rehearsals will start during the second semester 2005, when all participants will be recruited : Roma actors, musicians and other staff from Finland, from the Pralipe theatre, as well as from the other participant countries.

The language of the play will be the Roma language with subtitles in each participating countries : Finland, Germany, Sweden, Estonia, France, Macedonia and the Czech Republic. After the premiere, the company will start a tour.

## **PROJECT HISTORY**

02-04/07/04, Tammisaari, Finland:

Ars Baltica Romani Writers' Congress.

The idea was born during the meeting, originally between the Macedonian theatre director Rahim Burhan and the Finnish writer Veijo Baltzar.

10/09/04, Paris, France:

Meeting with the members of the Cultural Centre L'Espace d'un Instant.

Co-operation with the Centre.

24-25/09/04, Gdansk, Poland:

Ars Baltica Forum.

Meeting with representatives of the Ars Baltica countries.

The new project was granted the Ars Baltica logo.

29/09/04, Helsinki, Finland:

Meeting with representatives of the Finnish Ministry for Education and Culture.

Grant applications.

22/11/04, Stockholm, Sweden

Meeting with representatives of the National Council for Cultural Affairs and of the Roma Cultural Centre.

Sealing of partnership.