



## THEME 2: Intercultural Dialogue

### Collection of materials

#### Bulgaria

##### Tf 220 Taking the law into their own hands in a Roma ghetto

The following article appeared in the Bulgarian daily newspaper Trud on 04.06.2005 under the headline "Arrests after punch-up in ghetto": (Authors: correspondents at the newspaper)

*"Twelve destroyed wooden dwellings, smashed-up furniture, a wrecked car, burnt hay, a man in hospital and 12 slightly injured.*

*That's what a punch-up led to in the Roma district of Vraza last night. 32 people were questioned at the police station and 15 of them were detained for 24 hours.*

*The drama took place just before 8.00 in the evening in Dospat Street, on the outskirts of Vraza. Police intervention prevented further injuries.*

*"I'm a building worker and was on my way home from work. There were a lot of jeeps in the street. Some young men, with cudgels in their hands, jumped out of the cars and started to beat up people who just happened to be standing nearby. My house and car have been almost completely destroyed", 43-year-old Iliya Dankov reports with tears in his eyes. The Roma was hit on the head with an iron bar and stabbed in the ribs with a knife. His mother Veneta (63) was also pushed down and kicked. "I managed to run away, but a stone hit me on the leg", 13-year-old Tichomir weeps.*

*„They were like wild animals. They were swearing and shouting: ‚We'll make soap out of you!'. We were terrified and ran off into the woods, but they caught up with us“, reports Emilia Kovatcheva. Marieta Todorova (21), who is expecting her first baby, was also beaten up. 7-month-pregnant Jordanka Stefanova also wasn't spared. Little Marieta (9 months) had already been put to bed when a stone came crashing in through the windowpane, sending pieces of glass onto her bed.*

*The cause of the punch-up between Bulgarians und Roma was a court hearing. A few days earlier Roma Vesselin Kovatchev and Angel Mitov had been sentenced to 4 und 8 months' imprisonment.*

*On 28th May the two, who had been drinking heavily and were drunk, had been sitting in the bar owned by Emil Georgiev from Vraza. When the barkeeper had refused to serve the pair any more alcoholic drinks, Vesselin and Angel smashed in 3 large windowpanes. The sentence for such an act can be anything up to 5 years in jail. However, as the damage had not been very great, the two got off with a relatively mild sentence. The owner of the bar, Emil Georgiev, was dissatisfied at the punishment imposed, and that's why he organised the punch-up in the Roma district of town. He got together a group of friends, and when it got dark, they attacked the Roma. During the battle one of the Bulgarians was also injured on the head. At present he's still in hospital.*

*The story before that: On 27th May 2 mobile phones were stolen from Emil Georgiev's car. The next day there was a fight in his bar. „We're assuming that Emil asked the two Roma about the mobile phones. It's also possible that they didn't pay their bill. I don't know“, says the barkeeper's mother. There are people who say that Emil Georgiev was also threatened with his place being burnt down. The Roma had intended to burn down the bar if Emil's witnesses were going to tell the court who had broken the large windows in the bar.*

*Roma can't get enough alcohol and don't pay at the end. They go shopping and promise to pay later. And if the shop owners want to see their money, the Roma begin to wreck the shops. There are many cases like this in the shops in this neighbourhood. „We're totally fed up with them“, run the comments from residents in the district.*

*The facts in this case were provided by the police, and sentencing is expected in 10 days' time."*

Translated from the original German by: Sandy Pirie