

All Party Parliamentary Gypsies, Travellers, Roma and Migration:

'Brexit: The Impact on Roma Communities in the UK'

Cholmondley Room, House of Lords

Wednesday 11th July 2018

A transcript of the presentation given by Mihai Bica:

First of all, thank you very much for giving me this great opportunity. It is both an honour and a responsibility for me. I am a Romanian Roma and I am come from a Roma family from Romania. I was raised by an illiterate Mother, whose Grandfather was shot twice while trying to escape a concentration camp during the holocaust time, and by a very hard-working miner who worked twenty-four years for the same company and in same poor place.

I grew up in an environment where others let me believe that being Roma is a problem and made me deny my identity and hide it until I was about twenty and I never understood why. Then I started working with and for my community. Unfortunately, this put me in a position to witness lot of very negative things and attitudes towards Roma – I have witnessed Roma families being forcibly evicted from their homes, I have seen children placed in special needs education for no appropriate reason, and I have seen families being illegally deported from countries like Denmark or put on planes and sent to their countries of origin by French authorities. It also gave me the opportunity to know more about our history, our culture and about our amazing music and about our unique language. And so, I understood that being a Roma is not a problem. I started working at Roma Support Group in October 2016 and I had a chance to meet hundreds of Roma community members from different European countries. I heard amazing stories about how people travelled and settled in this country. Roma people migrated to UK to escape persecution and discrimination. We have been through hundreds of years' slavery, persecution during the Holocaust time, during the communist time and we still suffer inequality today. In 2010, we have seen French authorities sending thousands of Roma back to their countries of origin by planes. Over the years, we have all witnessed Italy's behaviour towards Roma and we all are concerned about what is going on today with the Italian Government's behaviour towards Roma.

In UK, we are today facing the Brexit. To secure their status in the UK Roma are being asked something that will be very difficult for most of them, to use a computer and sort out their bags full of documents - bags they never sorted because they just don't know what is what. This makes us vulnerable and will put us at risk of exploitation. The majority of Roma community members are functionally illiterate and this is because we have been excluded from education for hundreds of years and unfortunately, we are still facing that. We are really concerned about our future in the UK and for our children's future in this country. We finally found a country where we are doing a bit better. Some Roma people told me that their first day in the UK was the first time in their life that they felt equal to any other human being. We want to do better. We are coming from zero education about seventy/eighty years ago to thirty/forty percent or maybe more these days. This is because we want to do better. All Roma families I have worked with in the last, almost, two years in the UK have their children in schools. All of those children are doing so much better than their

parents or grandparents. This is because the UK has offered us a chance. Now, I am asking all of the parliamentarians here what will you do to ensure the continuity of chance that you have offered us? To ensure a better future for the Roma community? And to add a new colour to the British Culture?

Thank you very much.