In search of a social contract: Roma in the 20th and 21st centuries

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Abstract

The whole history of the Roma people reflects a constant quest to find a "good place for life". Two possible ways of achieving this goal are used consecutively or simultaneously. In an attempt to secure their well-being, some Roma communities change the place where they reside and spread out across huge territories throughout the world. Others are creating their own organisations and structures in order to negotiate their social position and to enact social contracts defining their place in societies with the countries in which they live, or in supra- or multinational contexts. The new realities of the European Union provide a new opportunity to re-negotiate the place of Roma in a post-national context. The failure of contemporary European policies towards Roma raises the question of whether it is possible at all to achieve a post-national social contract in regard to Roma and if so, what the price for it will be.

KEYWORDS: Roma, social contract, nation building, community-society, ethnography and anthropology

Introduction

Interest in the Roma (widely known as "Gypsies" in the past) in different public and cultural spheres dates to their arrival in Europe, and for more than two centuries this interest has had its academic dimensions. The problem of widespread public stereotypes that are associated with the Roma is ever constant. Perhaps the most popular and enduring stereotype of this kind is that of "free Gypsies" who are people without a fatherland, without their own state and who live outside any accepted public frameworks and standards, and are 'supposed keepers of a much missed and much romanticised pre-industrial way of life' (Hancock 2010: 95). In the Middle Ages, this stereotype was clearly negative; in the Romantic era, in some places, it also began to acquire positive connotations, but overall the notion of the Roma as a people "outside" or on the "margins of society" remains to this day, in many cases even in academia.

In recent years, the "Roma issue" has evolved into a burning topic of pan-European public discourse. This inevitably translates into increased interest towards the Roma in academia. Against the backdrop of a vast number of publications over the last two decades of a scholarly and quasi-scholarly or applied character dedicated to Roma in Eastern Europe and their human rights, social, economic, housing, educational, or health care problems, there are not many comparative anthropological, ethnographical, or historical works in the field of Romani studies. A large majority of historical studies are devoted either to country-specific topics or are focusing on the tragic fate of Roma during WWII, state policies towards Roma during the communist era, and issues connected to centuries-long discrimination; anthropologists are dealing mostly with one specific community in one specific country and/or with one specific issue. There is only a limited number of works, mostly written in countries of former socialist camp, which presents complex history and ethnography of different Roma communities in their own countries (e.g. Horváthová 1964; Ficowski 1985; Demeter et al. 2000; Vukanović 1983).

Roma, whose historical areas are the countries of Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe, are a challenge for researchers. Largely outside or only on the margins of the academic interest remain issues such as the Roma struggles to negotiate their social position and to conclude social contracts defining their place in society with the countries where they live, or in supra- or multinational contexts, or in other words the appearance of and the early development of social and political projects as proposed by Roma themselves. This article's main aim is to initiate a conversation about and to fill at least partially this gap in academic knowledge.

Point of departure

The departure point is the fact that *Roma* are not a hermetically isolated social and cultural system. They are an "imagined" (in the sense formulated by Benedict Anderson), internal heterogeneous community, and their identities are hierarchically constructed at different levels (Fraser 1992; Tcherenkov & Laederich 2004; Kenrick 2007; Liégeois 2007). They are descendants of early migrants (of at least a thousand years ago) from India and have for centuries lived in one, quite different form from the shape and social structure of other European societies, which we defined in our earlier works as an 'Intergroup Ethnic Formation' (IGEF) (Marushiakova & Popov 1997: 45–60). This IGEF is divided into several separate (sometimes even opposed to each other) groups, subgroups and metagroup units, each with its own ethnic and cultural features. Their multidimensional identities as subgroup, group, and metagroup, and as Roma at the national or supranational levels, are at different hierarchical levels and, depending on different kinds of factors, one or another of these levels could be the main, leading or determining one. Roma live in almost all European countries and beyond, and parts of them have a long history of migration from one region to another, from one country to another. They speak different dialects of their *Romani* language (Matras 2002), profess different religions (mainly different Christian denominations and also Islam in the Balkans, Crimea and Near East), and are characterised by quite diverse ethno-cultural parameters. Some of them have lost their language and have accepted other ones (Turkish, Greek, Albanian, Bulgarian, Serbian, Romanian,

Hungarian, etc.) as their own; other Roma groups cultivate non-Roma preferred ethnic identities (they prefer to identify as Turks, Greeks, Albanian, Bulgarians, Serbians, Romanians, Hungarians, Ukrainians), and some of them have even attempted to create their own new, entirely different ethnic identity, for example, the *Balkan Egyptians* and *Aškali* in Macedonia, Serbia and Albania, *Millet* and *Rudari* in Bulgaria, etc. (Marushiakova & Popov 2001a; Marushiakova & Popov 2015a).

The Roma, as said above, are not living in hermetically closed and socially isolated communities. They have always existed in at least *two dimensions*, or in two coordinate plans. This fundamental principle is based on the juxtaposition "community – society" (*Gemeinschaft – Gesellschaft*) (Tönnies 1887). This distinction and terminology are used in our case, however, not in the meaning as initially implied by its author, but with altered content cleared from its evolutionary hierarchy – as relations between two simultaneously existing typological phenomena intertwined in one inseparable unity. In our case, *community* means Roma as IGEF, clearly distinguished from its surrounding population, which includes various group, metagroup and subgroup subdivisions; and *society* means *Roma* as ethnically-based but integral part within the respective nation-state, whose citizens they are (Marushiakova & Popov 2011). Between these two forms of existence of the Roma are not insurmountable barriers, and often they can pass from one to another, such are for example the aspirations of Roma activists to enter macro-society public structures through Roma organisations and Roma political parties, i.e., as representatives of a separate and distinct community.

The available research on Roma comes from different disciplines, united primarily on the basis of the studied subject. The important results achieved by Romani Studies scholars, studies in the fields of Roma history, social structure, identity and national building or political participation, however, are still mostly at the level of a mosaic piece; some pieces are disputed and also some blank places are left and which are not united into a synthetic whole. The academic research to date succeeded in producing a large amount of studies on the one hand about individual Roma communities and their mosaic in different countries in past and present from the point of view of closed, separated communities; there are also significant studies on Roma as part of the society, who are a subject to state policies at different levels from historical and contemporary perspectives (to mention only few of them: Lucassen 1998; Crowe 1996; Willems 1998; Lemon 2000; Barany 2002; Klimova-Alexander 2005; Vermeersch 2006; Tscherenkov & Laederich 2004; Kenrick 2007; Sigona & Trehan 2009; van Baar 2011; Matras 2014).

Through our work in general and in this article in particular, we aim at introducing a new research paradigm and its actual application at all levels and in all aspects of the study in which the *Roma* are perceived and studied as an ethnically specific community, which is simultaneously an integral part and constituent element of the past and contemporary societies and of their respective civic nations. What is needed is to break through the boundaries between the approach to them only as community or only as part of society, as well as to extend the research beyond the current state of the art. The underpinning long-term strategic goal is to combine research of the Roma from the perspective of internal characteristics and developments of individual communities together with studying

them as part of the macro-society in which they live, as well as at the level of individual countries and historical regions.

In addition to this, it is necessary to consider the processes influenced by the modernisation that proceeds inside Roma communities and is aimed at the overcoming of the internal heterogeneity and at the consolidation of the community so that such a Roma community could take a new, more equitable place in society. An expression of such ambitions is the appearance of societal movements, some of them with political ambitions. Some previous works are devoted to this issues as well (Crowe 1996; Barany 2002; Kenrick 2007; Liégeois 2007), but are primarily based on interpretations of a limited number of second-hand sources and do not use any original first-hand historical sources. Exceptions in this respect are some local studies focused on individual countries (e.g. Achim 2004; Acković 2001), which however lack a comparative character and contextualisation of the studied phenomenon in a more general picture.

Historical data

From a chronological point of view, the beginning of our analysis should be the time around the end of World War I or slightly before; the end should be the time after the collapse of the Eastern bloc when the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia broke down and in their place appeared new state formations, most of them joining or entering the process of accession to the European Union.

The first documentary evidence of the appearance of a new civic awareness among Roma and of the first attempt to negotiate a new social contract is from the 19th century in the Ottoman Empire. It is the letter of Ilia Naumchev published in 1867 in the newspaper *Macedonia*. In his letter, Naumchev repeats the pattern of the other Balkan nations that negotiate their place in late Ottoman society and pleads for a public recognition of the Roma as equal to other Balkan nations, and for the creation of their own Roma church, and in a longer perspective of their own society, i.e. state (Marushiakova & Popov 2001b).

The next documented manifestation of the Roma's struggle to negotiate their social position and to conclude a social contract defining their place in society is the establishment of the *Association of 'Egyptian nation' in the Town of Vidin* (1910) in the independent (from 1878) Bulgaria. The foundation of this organisation stemmed from the need to negotiate the new citizens' situation in Bulgaria. Independence changed the interethnic relations on the territory of the new country; whereas the position of ethnic Turks was established by peace treaties, the Roma were omitted from the arrangements. The Roma needed to secure the rightful status for their communities in the newly independent state and to introduce novel legal parameters to the relationship between the Roma, on the one hand, and the state and local authorities, on the other (Marushiakova & Popov 2015b). Already in these two cases, we can see a repeating pattern in the Roma movement, which continued to be relevant also later and which are visible even today – striving to highlight their ancient and noble origin, stressing the need for education, demands for equality with preservation of their ethnicity and language.

The end of the First World War led to the collapse of the three great empires in Central, Eastern and South-eastern Europe, within which the vast majority of Roma used to

live: the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, and Russian empires. In their place, new nation-states emerged (some of them, in the Balkans, had been founded slightly earlier, in the 19th century). For various reasons (primarily the lack of their *own* territory and a civic elite able to develop and impose on the target population their *own* national idea), the Roma did not create their own state and remained in the new nation-states, i.e. the Roma ceased to be just one of many different peoples inhabiting the former great empires and became ethnic minorities in the new nation-states (with the exception of the USSR and to some extent Yugoslavia, where some of the features of multinational empires were partially preserved).

In these new conditions, the states' attitude towards Roma changed, and Roma started to be politically institutionalised and subjected to a variety of controversial policy practices in different countries aiming, on one hand, at state control and limiting their participation in social and political life in the countries, and on the other, at integrating and/or assimilating them.

At the same time, in response to the new conditions, the desire of Roma for a civic realisation in these new social conditions was also sparked. Thus, the early decades of the 20th century witnessed the creation of several Roma civic organisations under the conditions of the newly emerged nation-states in South-eastern Europe. In Bulgaria, in 1919 a *Sofia Common Moslem Educational and Cultural Mutual Aid Organization "Istikbal"* (Future) was founded. It was led by Shakir Pashov, who in 1934 made an unsuccessful attempt at registering a new, country-wide organisation, namely, the *United Mohamedan-Gypsy National Cultural and Educational and Mutual Aid Union in Bulgaria* (Marushiakova and Popov 2015b). The first Roma organisation, *Infrateria Neorustica*, in Romania was established in 1926 in Calbor, Făgăraş county; in 1933, the *General Association of the Gypsies in Romania* appeared, headed by Ion Popp-Şerboianu (archimandrite, author of a book on the history and language of the Roma in Romania) and the alternative *General Union of the Roma in Romania*, headed by Gheorghe Lazareanu-Lazurica and journalist Gheorghe Niculescu (Achim 1998; Achim 2010). In Yugoslavia, in 1927, the *First Serbian-Gypsy Association for Mutual Assistance in Sickness and Death* was founded; in 1935, an *Association of Belgrade Gypsies for the Celebration of the Aunt Bibia* was established; in 1939, an *Educational Club of the Yugoslavian Gypsy Youth* was formed (Acković 1994). In 1939, a *Pan-Hellenic Cultural Association of the Greek Gypsies* was founded in Athens (Liégeois 2007) with the main aim of re-negotiating their civic status in Greek society. In the background of this organisation was the exchange of population between Greece and Turkey after the Lausanne agreement, in which the fate of Roma was not considered in the process of negotiation and in the text of agreement, but as a result, across the country, separate Roma groups were displaced, some were deprived of citizenship, and other indignities were visited on them (cf. Gürboğa 2016).

All these organisations were established independently of the ruling powers in the respective countries, without any state support, and their main goals often contradicted the existing state policy. In the aftermath of the Ottoman Empire, the Roma wanted to become equal citizens of the new ethnic and national states and of their social environment without losing the specific characteristics of their community. This was the main strategic goal of all Gypsy organisations that were founded in the Balkans back then and that remain active today.

At the same time in the USSR, a new phenomenon appeared: the creation of Roma organisations at the initiative of the *Party and State* and under their total control, as this creation was part of the then launched active state policy for the social integration of Roma within the broader state-wide framework of *korenizatsiia* (nativisation or indigenisation). Thus, in 1925, an *All-Russian Union of Gypsies* was created, headed by Andrei Taranov as its chairman and Ivan Rom-Lebedev as the organisation's secretary. This organisation actively supported the Soviet state policy towards Roma (Crowe 1996; O'Keeffe 2013).

Not only in the USSR did the Gypsies discover a promise for their better future and the desired social contract in the communist's ideas and in the proletariats' internationalism. The communist ideas also became widespread among some Gypsies resettled in Turkey, as result of the movement of people after the Lausanne agreement, who became tobacco factory workers in their new homeland (Yılgür 2015).

In the interwar period, another new social phenomenon arose, before also being developed later in other parts of the region of Central, Eastern and South-eastern Europe – the establishment of pro-Roma humanitarian and aid organisations. In the First (interwar) Czechoslovak Republic, such a civic, non-Roma organisation was created for the first time in 1929 by the Czech physicians from the city of Košice (currently in Slovakia), namely, the *League for the Cultural Uplift of Gypsies*. In 1930, it was transformed to a *Society for the Study and Solving the Gypsy Question*, which engaged in numerous activities aiming at Roma social integration and which supported establishment of various Roma organisations, such as the *Sport Club of Slovak Gypsies "Roma-Košice"* and the *"Lavutarisz" Cultural and Social Society of Gypsies in Slovakia* (Jurová 2014). At the initiative of pro-Roma organisations and with the financial support of numerous institutions, the first Roma school was established and officially opened on December 22nd, 1926 in Uzhorod (then in the Czechoslovak Republic, today in Ukraine), followed by the creation of other Roma schools and Roma classes in Eastern Slovakia and Transcarpathia (Jurová & Zupková 2008). The creation of these organisations and institutions could be perceived as another type of social contract proposed to the Roma and accepted by some of them – a social contract between majority and a minority.

A new, very different idea for a social contract to renegotiate the status of Roma who left their countries of origin appeared in the same period in Poland: to create a separate state for the Roma. Attempts were made for its institutionalisation by the public proclamation of the so-called "Gypsy Kings" from the Kwiek family (Dimitri, Grzegorz, Michael II, Vasil, Janusz, Jozef). These kings, following the pattern of the Zionist movement, attempted to find a place for a new Roma State using different political paths and considering different regions across the world (Ficowski 1985).

Parallel to this, the Roma civic movement in the 1930s and 1940s was marked by the rise of another new phenomenon: the arrival of evangelicalism and the establishment of Gypsy evangelical churches and/or societies that enabled improving and raising the Roma positions in the society. In the interwar times, we can see the first steps of evangelical church activists taken to establish Roma (and pro-Roma) societies headed by Roma pastors. The establishment of the "new" denominations different from Eastern Orthodoxy and Islam had begun in South-eastern Europe as early as the 19th century and continued under the newly independent states. Gradually an interest in them arose among Roma, stoked up by mission-

aries. The first mission among the Roma was founded in Bulgaria, in the village of Golintsi (nowadays, a neighbourhood in the city of Lom) (Marushiakova & Popov 2015b). Similarly, in Latvia in 1930, Jānis Leimanis founded a *Society of Gypsy Friends*, which actively worked in the 1930s for the evangelisation of Roma and their overall social advancement (Manuš 1981; Tihovska 2014). The phenomenon of searching for their place in the society through conversion to different evangelical denominations has become extremely powerful and widespread, following the collapse of communism throughout the region.

The period between the collapse of the empires and Second World War was also the time of the first appearance of an attempt for the internationalisation of the Roma issues and of institutionalising the category of the *International Gypsy* at a supranational level, pursued at that time by the International Criminal Police Commission (Donert 2007), but clearly in this case the negotiation for any kind social contract with *International Gypsies* with respective national states was not envisaged. The era of WWII and its tragic consequences for the Roma interrupted their search for a new social contract.

The end of the Second World War and the subsequent years were again a time of radical change for the countries of the region. A new type of state-political system was established, which according to its own description, was defined as a "socialist system". Overall social and economic changes were carried out, and Roma, in various degrees and in different periods, became the target of active state policy, and many of them became it sincere supporters and promoters. When the so-called *socialist camp* is mentioned, frequently the impression is that it refers to a monolithic totalitarian system, directly under Moscow rule, where a common policy dominated in all spheres. To a certain extent, this was the case, yet many differences and specific features in the individual countries remained, especially in the field of internal national policy (cf. Marushiakova & Popov 2015a).

The common ideological framework dictated surmounting the nomadic way of life, which was defined as vagrant and parasite, eradicating poverty and illiteracy; all these together were declared to be of capitalistic heritage that should be abolished. In order to attain Roma civic and social integration throughout the region, four major fields for action were identified: *housing* (dispersal of hamlets and compact settlements, resettlements and providing decent housing in the midst of the majority population), *full employment* (because in a socialist country to be unemployed was illegal), *health*, and *education*. The final result of these policies was similar; by the 1960s and '70s, the most severe problems were solved: the nomadic Gypsies had been settled, the total illiteracy, alarming health status, the most catastrophic dwelling situations had been eliminated, which would not have been possible without the active support and participation of at least a significant part of the communities. From the available evidence, we can summarise that the reaction of Roma communities and their individual representatives to these state policies varied across individual groups and countries, oscillating between hope, sincere support and rejection. The settling of itinerant Roma is a typical example in this regard. It is known that in most countries this was done by a government act or party decision (decree, law, resolution, programs, etc.), which was one and the same, as party and state were one and the same. In the USSR, the nomadic lifestyle of Roma was banned in 1956, in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia in 1958 and in Poland in 1964, in Romania after 1977 (Marushiakova & Popov 2015a). In the remaining countries in

Eastern Europe, the settling of nomadic Roma was not an act of any special policy towards them; rather, it ran within the framework of the general legislation, i.e. the requirement for a fixed place of residence, a fixed workplace, etc. In Hungary, this process took place during the late 1950s, and in Albania and Yugoslavia in the 1960s and 1970s. What is less known is that in some places (e.g. Soviet Union, Romania) the very first initiatives for the settling of itinerant communities come from Roma organisations or individual activists who perceived the nomadic way of life as a hindrance to full equity and societal participation of their nation, a position that was shared later by numerous Roma activists throughout the region. Simultaneously, ethnographic accounts witness the resistance of some communities to this policy, which led to at least the partial preservation of elements of their mobile way of life even in the times of socialism.

Over time, Roma and their majority societies in Central, Eastern and South-eastern Europe arrived at a mutually acceptable social-contract. During our field research in socialist times in Bulgaria and Slovakia, among different communities, we recorded a belief in the bright future of communism, which would solve all interethnic tensions and eliminate all prejudices. The positive attitude towards the socialist social contract is perhaps best expressed in a song of the famous Roma singer Muharem Serbezovski, called *Lačhi, Lačhi Jugoslavija* (Good, Good Yugoslavia). This song was extremely popular in the Yugoslav era and remains so among Roma migrants from there wherever they live now. It is sung, distributed via YouTube, often combined with pictures of different republics of Socialist Yugoslavia. The lyrics of this song reads:

> Andaro Penđap Romane čerge avile ... Arakhla than tala kava kham ande Phuv e Phralikani Lačhi, Lačhi Jugoslavija ... Roma ande čerga više ni soven ... Sastipe bičhalas e Phuranenge so ande amen pe maj Lačhi Phuv ... (Roma tents came from Panjab ... found a place under this sun in the Brotherhood of beautiful Yugoslavia ..., the Roma don't need to sleep under the tents anymore ... God bless our forefathers that they took us to the best country ...).

What provoked discontent and even the dissent of some Roma in individual countries of the region was the policy towards their ethnic culture and representation. The state policy towards Roma in the countries of Eastern Europe in the communist era in this regard was variable and controversial and is best reflected in the attitudes towards the Roma organisations (public and cultural organisations). In fact, the very establishment and development of such organisations were not possible without the approval and active support of the state and party structures, and their direct existence or banning was in a direct relationship with changes in the national policy of the respective countries. In Bulgaria, the *United General Cultural Organization of Gypsy Minorities "Ekhipe"* (Unity) was established in 1945; this organisation set up many local branches, Roma newspapers started, and the Theatre *Roma* was established. Towards the end of the 1940s, the policy changed radically, the Roma press and theatre ceased to exist and the local branches of the Roma organisations became part of the Fatherland Front – a mass public organisation dominated by the Communist Party. Since then, Roma culture was totally neglected, reaching the absurd point of the very existence of Roma being repudiated and their language and traditions forbidden in Bulgaria in the 1980s

(Marushiakova & Popov 2007). In Hungary, the *Hungarian Gypsy Cultural Association* was founded in 1957, but it only existed for two years. The *Gypsy Council* was created in 1974, and succeeded by the *National Gypsy Council* in 1985; the new organisation was an active factor chiefly in the cultural sphere. In Czechoslovakia, Gypsy/Roma organisations existed only for a short time. The *Union of Gypsy – Roma* was created in 1968 in Slovakia, and the following year also the similar *Union of Gypsy – Roma* in the Czech Socialist Republic. The Roma organisations in the two federal republics created a network of local branches, but they existed for only a few years and were disbanded in the early 1970s. In the remaining countries of the Eastern bloc, mass public organisations were not created; only in Poland and Romania sporadically and for short periods of time did several local cultural Gypsy organisations arise in the 1970s. As for the activities of Roma evangelical churches and organisations, their activities were banned or, in the best case, strictly controlled and severely restricted; thus, they were forced to work underground.

The situation was radically different in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and this is a specific case in the development of Gypsy/Roma movement. In 1969, an article appeared in the *Večerne novosti* (Evening News) newspaper in Belgrade written by renowned Roma activist Slobodan Berberski, who was a communist functionary of long standing, a resistance fighter from WW2, and a member of the Central Committee of the Union of Yugoslav Communists. In this article, he announced that Yugoslav Roma would create their own organisation, with the main aim of assisting Roma in achieving the status of a "nationality" (at that time Yugoslavia had a complex state legislation and hierarchical system, dividing the communities into different categories – ethnic groups, nationalities, nations). After the creation of the *Rom Association* (20th of April 1969), the process of developing branches in the various republics began, and after that in separate towns, together with the creation of other Roma associations (cultural, sports, etc.). In the 1970s, over 60 Roma organisations existed and their number was constantly on the increase. Various initiatives, largely cultural events (involving Gypsy ensembles, festivals), were supported by the Yugoslav state; books were published in *Romanes* (Romani language), Roma TV and radio broadcasts began (in Kosovo). In 1986, existing Roma associations united in a Union of Roma Associations in Yugoslavia. The Yugoslav Roma movement quickly came to the fore on the international scene. The delegation of Yugoslavia took an active part in the First World Congress of Gypsies, which was held in London in 1971, and Slobodan Berberski became the first President of the *International Romani Organization.* Yugoslavia was proclaimed to be a positive example for its approach towards Roma, which should be followed by other countries (Acković 1994, 2001) During the first stages of the development of the international Roma movement, the policy of Yugoslavia was an important factor in its support. Despite all these achievements, not everything was in favour of satisfying the ethnic aspiration of Roma in socialist Yugoslavia. In the complex hierarchical structure of nations, nationalities and ethnic groups Roma were on the bottom and received the desired status of nationality only after the breakdown of Yugoslavia.

The desire of the Roma for ethnic equality and equity have had significant side effects on the field of Romani studies. In socialist societies, Romani studies were on the fringes of academia (prejudices and low prestige of the community were invariably also reflected in the priorities of academics). Ethno-national history and the ethnography of the majority,

however, were placed on a pedestal as important and ideological scholarly disciplines, which had crucial roles in building a socialist ethno-nation and socialist festive ritual system based on folk tradition. This, in turn, led to a paradox: the socialist period was a "golden time" for the otherwise marginal discipline of Romani studies. Scholars working in the field among Roma were welcomed willingly and received all necessary assistance from the community. In the atmosphere of numerous studies, folk festivals, and culture events devoted to the culture of the majority, any expression of interest of academia to Roma was perceived by them as an appreciation of Roma culture and a chance for equality. The Roma informants at that time had no feelings of being "lab rats" (something about which the Roma we met during our first trips to Western European countries just after the breakdown of the communist system complained repeatedly). Roma communities in encounters with scholars in countries of the socialist camp perceived themselves proudly and were also seen by academics as bearers and guardians of the treasury of traditional knowledge. The informants willingly transmitted their knowledge to academia to be preserved for the coming generations. As a result, perhaps the most valuable and complex works devoted to the history and ethnography of Roma communities in the countries of the former socialist camp appeared.

This all changed with the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the socialist camp in 1989, which dramatically changed the situation throughout the region. Federal states (Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and the USSR) broke down, and in their place emerged new independent unitary national states (the only exception remains the Russian Federation). The turbulent times brought the cessation of the socialist social contract with Roma, which had been established across the region. The ultimate expression of this became depriving some Roma of their citizenship, as in the case of the Czech Republic, countries of former Yugoslavia, and former USSR (Šklová & Miklušáková 1998; Linde 2006; Sardelic 2015; Sigona 2015), and the expelling of at least part Roma from the territory of new states, as in the case of Kosovo and Georgia (Peric & Demirovski 2000; Marushiakova & Popov 2016: 100–3).

Differences in state policies towards Roma in the individual countries of the region after the breakdown of the socialist camp appeared to depend on their general geopolitical orientations. Orientation towards the European Union and the processes of accession (for most countries already completed) proved a key factor for the developments, directions, and parameters of state policy towards Roma in almost all countries in the region (with the exception of the Russian Federation and Belarus).

The end of the Cold War and subsequent social changes have led to a new phenomenon: the booming of the Roma and Pro-Roma civil organisations and political parties. A prosperous time for the Roma NGO sector was in the 1990s and early 2000s, when at least two to three thousand Roma organisations of various sizes emerged throughout the region; their numbers in the individual countries was directly dependent on the number of Roma living there.

In addition to NGOs, Roma political parties also appeared in many countries of the region in the period of transition. Some of them still exist today, and their representatives, through various forms, (participating in elections in coalition with mainstream national parties or independently) participate in policy making. There were or still are Roma

members of parliaments in Bulgaria, Romania, Macedonia and Hungary, Roma ministers (Serbia, Macedonia) and Roma, and members of the European Parliament (Hungary, Romania). Roma representatives are also elected on the level of local authorities.

Within the region, specific combinations of forms of civic and political participation of Roma also arose. In Hungary, as a result of the adoption of the Minorities Law in 1993, the National Gypsy Minority Self-Government emerged in 1995, currently called the National Roma Minority Self-Government, with regional and local branches (Dobos 2014). In the Russian Federation in 1996, the Federal Law of the Cultural Autonomy of the Nationalities was adopted, and the Federal National Cultural Autonomy of the Gypsies in the Russian Federation was created in 1999 (registered in 2000), also with regional and local branches (Torode 2008). However, it is hardly necessary to emphasise that the real impact on state policies towards Roma in these countries in both cases is quite limited.

Throughout the region, including the former USSR, the period of transition brought liberty of religious consciousness and its expression, which led to the return and massive increase of evangelical missionary activity and the start of numerous Romani Evangelical Churches (Thurfjell & Marsh 2014).

The booming Roma civic society encountered the change of regime with hope, expecting a new post-national social contract, based on the EU standards, which was expected to provide redress for past violations and protection from future discrimination as a basis for calls for measures to improve the Roma situation (Friedman 2014: 3, 15) and ethnic and cultural equality and trans-border nation building. In various documents, Roma started to be defined as a "trans-border minority" or "true European minority" (Marushiakova & Popov 2005; Rövid 2009). Many perceived the agreement between the Council of Europe and a representative body called the *European Roma and Travellers Forum*, signed on 15 December 2004 (cf. Secretariat 2010) to be a first sign of a possible new post-national social contract.

As a result of the active lobbying of individual Roma representatives, and Roma and pro-Roma civil society and other actors, EU institutions formulated a general framework of Roma policies in EU, which can be perceived as a basis for a new social contract. Two main initiatives targeting Roma were adopted, the Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005), which was initially introduced by the network of the Open Society Foundations, and the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies (2011), which was followed by drafting new (or updating old) national strategies throughout Europe. Usually, the "New Time" is opposed to the previous era, or in other words "the Time of Democracy" is opposed to the so-called "Time of Communism", but in terms of governmental policies aiming at Roma integration, there is clear succession and continuity. Of course, there is a major difference in terms of ideological reasoning and phraseology, also leading to changes in the legal frameworks on which this policy is based. Apart from that, however, in both historical periods, the main aim has been integration, and the policy agenda for Roma inclusion was and is mainly focused on the same thematic policy areas: housing, health, education, and employment. The activities planned and accomplished nowadays, as well as the projects directed to overcoming Roma problems (including the new European strategies, programs and projects) are to a great extent well known from the recent

communist past; only the central governments in individual post-socialist states are much weaker and with less political will to implement the policies of inclusion than before.

Apart from the process of European integration (or desire for it), only the Russian Federation and Belarus remain. Accordingly, in these countries the state policy towards Roma is quite limited (if it is possible to speak about the existence of such policies at all), in best case with local support for projects, occasional education, slightly more directed towards preserving and development of the ethnic culture of the Gypsies (support for music and dance schools and ensembles). It is also interesting to note that in both countries the name of the community Gypsies (*cygane* and *cygany*) was not changed to the term Roma, which is considered to be the politically correct term in countries of the EU now.

Despite the mutual agreement on a policy framework on the EU level, the implementation on the ground depends on the capacity, political will, knowledge, experience and abilities of individual national governments. Very quickly after most countries from the region joined the European Union, in the place of initial hope and optimism came bitter disappointment. The withdrawal of the main donors from the region led to a drastic reduction in the number of Roma NGOs (at least those that do not exist only on paper but implement some projects (e.g. in Bulgaria, from about 600 organisations in the past, currently not more than 10 continue with some activities). The number of Roma political parties across the region also declined, and their influence on the well-being of Roma communities appears to be insignificant. The National Roma Minority Self-Government in Hungary is not only under attack by right-wing forces, but is criticised by some Roma as well. Everywhere in the region, the social and economic situation of Roma has worsened, and they have become even more vulnerable than before.

Conclusion

Now, after more than 20 years since the end of communist rule in Eastern Europe, it has become obvious that the attempts to create a new post-national social contract between Roma and majorities is an example of good intentions that paved the road to hell. It is not necessary to go into detail and describe the failure of European Roma policy, because there is almost no study devoted to the state of the contemporary situation of Roma communities in Europe that does not point to the deterioration of their economic and social situation in the over 20 years of transition to democracy and market economy as well as to the increase of inter-ethnic distances, prejudices, hidden discrimination, hatred, and open hostility against Roma.

In the end, it appears that the constitutional and legal instruments that guarantee the fundamental human and minority rights of the Roma are not working for the well-being of Roma communities, and 'the satisfaction at the long-awaited recognition of their ethnic identity' (Guy 2001: xv) remains illusory. The freedom to express freely their own ethnicity and language which Roma received across the region with the new order is also not entirely fulfilled and enjoyed. Increased ethnic hostility again pushes numerous Roma in a situation when it is better to hide their identity in order not to provoke discrimination and racial attacks. Currently, it has become clear that the hope of Roma that in the new social order they will become equal citizens without losing the specific characteristics of their community

has disappeared. Perhaps the best evaluation of EU policies towards Roma is seen their mass migration from the East to the rich West, which turned the unresolved Roma issue in the East in an issue of all-European significance (Marushiakova & Popov 2015a).

Recently, on the EU level, we have seen the trend to discover factors that impede the elaboration and implementation of a single common strategy towards Roma in the heterogeneity of the group, its geographical dispersal (cf. Popova 2014: 18), and in the community itself and its specific culture. The solution – as absurd as it sounds – is urging the Roma to change themselves. This trend has become prominent at different levels; even the European Commissioner for Justice and Fundamental Rights, Viviane Reding, said in an interview for Euronews on January 16, 2014, that Roma communities need 'to be willing to integrate and to be willing to have a normal life,' and the 'Roma integration in Europe has shifted to a right-wing definition of integration where the onus is being placed on the minorities to make the adjustments and accommodations deemed necessary for social cohesion' (Rorke 2014).

Evidently, the prophetic warning of the leading Roma visionaries of the 20th century, Nicolae Gheorghe and Andrzej Mirga, formulated in their policy paper, has become a reality:

> It seems that the political dimension of the Romani issue is nearing a solution as a growing number of states recognise the Roma as a legitimate national/ethnic minority and as the appreciation of the human rights problems faced by the Roma increases …, there is a danger of its evolving into an ethno-class or underclass, and thus further perpetuating its marginality in society (Gheorghe & Mirga 1997).

Confirmation of the fact that these concerns were prophetic were recently expressed by an activist, a Rom from Bulgaria, in his open letter:

> I realise the NRIS (Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies 2012–2020) was created as a sign of the good will and intensions of the European Commission to *integrate* Roma and try to improve their livelihood. But I don't really feel the need to be *integrated* or *socially included* – not that I am an antisocial creature – by anyone. I simply feel the need for my language, culture and history to be recognised and accepted as equal. … I hope you will stop calling me *marginal* in your efforts to help me (Stoyanov 2015).

In this situation, it appears that currently neither transnational institutions nor Roma activists have clear ideas about how to achieve a post-national social contract and whether it is needed at all. Current perplexity in understanding the role of culture as a factor behind socio-economic tendencies and such appeals like 'If addressed properly, cultural capital can be strategically used as resources in social action and could foster cohesion between the mainstream societies and the Roma minority within a borderless European Union space' (Popova 2014: 19) return us to the role of ethnology/anthropology in this regard. As said above, in the times of communist rule, scholars were by perceived Roma as allies, and by the governments and the majority societies as ideological supporters in the building of the "bright communist future" (cf. Iliev 2015). This rapidly changed in the post-socialist era. In connection with the change in ideological background, eth-

nographers lost their societal position. As the Eastern European socialist system was considered to be the defeated one and the Western democracy won the historic race, the recipe for the solution was sought in changes of disciplinary paradigm. In place of Eastern European ethnographers came anthropologists, with their methodological approaches, academic standards, and ethical principles of responsibility towards informants. All of this is accompanied by often heated discussions of whether an approximation of ethnographers with anthropologists is needed and/or possible at all, about relations between Eastern and Western European scholars, etc. (cf. Jakubowska 1993; Hann 2005; Hann et al. 2005; Hann et al. 2007; Mihailescu et al. 2008; Giordano et al. 2014; Buchowski 2004; Buchowski 2006; Buchowski 2008; Marushiakova & Popov 2011; Woitsch 2011). What, however, remained unnoticed is the reaction of the studied communities towards this change. Ironically, the work of current scholars and especially of anthropologists is no longer perceived by Roma communities as improving their status, to their equality and self-esteem, but as activities that are leading towards the exoticisation and marginality of their communities. Not rarely are attempts of scholars who are looking to establish contacts with Roma communities received with distrust and suspicion expressed with such words like 'they only come to make profit from us,' or 'all that they write only increases prejudices' and similar. In the end, it turns out that not only has the old social contract between Roma and the majority ceased to function and a new one has not been found; in the same way, a social contract about the role of the scholars in these processes is now invalid, and the new one, which initially inspired hope does not function.

Discovering and concluding of a new post-national social contract remains forthcoming. It is palpable, however, that the failure of contemporary European policies towards Roma raise the question of whether it is possible at all to achieve it. It is obvious that the price paid for attempts to do so is already too high.

Acknowledgements

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Povzetek

Zgodovina Romov je pripoved o nenehnem iskanju "dobrega mesta za življenje". Da bi dosegli ta cilj, Romi sočasno ali izmenično izbirajo dve poti. Nekatere skupnosti menjajo svoje življenjske prostore in se razkropijo po vsem svetu. Druge spet ustvarjajo lastne organizacije in strukture, da bi si prek njih izpogajali družbeni položaj in družbeno pogodbo, po kateri bi določili svoje mesto bodisi v državah, v katerih živijo, bodisi v nad- in multinacionalnih kontekstih. Nova stvarnost v združeni Evropi predstavlja priložnost, da Romi najdejo mesto v postnacionalnem kontekstu, dosedanje neuspele politike do Romov pa vodijo k vprašanju, ali je postnacionalna družbena pogodba mogoča in če je odgovor pritrdilen, kakšna bo cena zanjo.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Romi, družbena pogodba, oblikovanje nacije, skupnost-družba, etnografija, antropologija

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