

## **INTEGRATING ROMA IN MODERN EUROPEAN SOCIETY. NEW CHALLENGES, NEW OPPORTUNITIES. AN OVERVIEW OF THEIR PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE IN THE LIGHT OF AN ENLARGED EUROPE**

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**Abstract:** The Roma population, with approximately 10 million people, is the largest minority of Europe. Since the end of the communist era in Eastern Europe, mass emigration has occurred, mainly to Western Europe. Today across Western Europe the Roma still face huge problems in regard of discrimination and exclusion. A general change in the way they are perceived is necessary. In the last years, the European Union have put the Roma questions on the forefront of their discussions. Nevertheless, the situation of the minority is still very precarious and demands more concrete research and action.

**Key words:** Roma, immigration, education, employment, human rights, discrimination, exclusion

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### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Why study the roma of Western Europe?**

In early 2017, the European Union still can count upon 28 members. Of these, 10 countries, mainly Eastern and Central European ones, joined in 2004. The last to join were Romania and Bulgaria in 2007, and Croatia in 2013. Many of the criteria to enter this Union have been on technical matters, such as fishing regulations, telecommunications or agriculture. Nevertheless, the protection of minority rights has been a very important issue as well. And seeing as the Roma population is the largest minority in Europe, with approximately 10 million people, a population comparable to the one of Belgium for example, it has been on the forefront of many discussions.

Since the ex-socialist states of Eastern Europe have entered their capitalist era, in 1989, many Roma populations have migrated to Western Europe. This population has been much more visible in the general community, and hence, their issues regarding integration, anti-discrimination, and poverty have been all the more talked about.

But why are minority rights so important in the enlarged Europe? We could answer this question in four different points. Firstly, we could remind ourselves of the atrocities Europe's ethnic minorities have suffered in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Holocaust, and genocides that happened to numerous populations during World War II, were the stepping stones to the creation of many treaties to prevent these events from happening ever again. The United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the European Convention of Human Rights are the most important ones. In these last two, discrimination on grounds of "race", "color", and "national or social origin" are specifically prohibited.

The second reason would be the desire for stability. Indeed, ethnic hatred was the main reason that inspired the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia. So long as minority rights are ignored, there is no stopping the same events from recurring.

The next reason would be regarding Europe's future. Anti-immigrant and anti-minority political messages have been growing more and more popular over the last few years. The successes of Jorg Haider's Freedom Party in Austria, or the increased support towards Marine Le Pen's Front National in France are some of them. This xenophobic trend has been present in Belgium, Denmark, Norway and Switzerland also. In the year 2000 the EU tried to impose sanctions against Austria, but their later retraction only leads to show the absence of a permanent mechanism for monitoring these trends, and forcing EU members to adhere to equality norms.

Last but not least, we need not forget that Europe itself is simply the unison of many different minorities. No State comes close to containing half the population of the EU, and no first tongue constitutes a majority, although English is predominantly the universal second language. It is interesting to note that the EU's diverse population is also shown in its political structure. Through the Union's ruling Council of Ministers, the complex process of making decisions, known as the "qualified majority voting" (Goldston, 2002) works as such: a blocking minority of any member State can veto any action by the majority that threatens their own interest.

So long as the EU keeps on growing, it shall become more and more heterogeneous, with an even bigger agglomeration of diverse political, linguistic, and religious aspirations. When Romano Prodi, as European Commission's president, proclaimed on a visit to Budapest in 2001 that "the equal treatment of minorities is a cornerstone of the new united Europe" (Wright, 2001) he was just stating the most basic and obvious principle of the Union.

### **What is the difference between the terms Roma, Gypsy and Traveler?**

The term Roma, meaning 'head of the family', is the main term the gypsies, travelers, and other communities, have wished to be called. This demand occurred on the 8 April 1971<sup>1</sup>, at the first Roma international congress, at the same time as when they chose themselves a flag and an anthem. The term Roma englobes the different subdivisions:

- *The Kalderashes*; Romas from central, oriental Europe, and the Balkans. This is the numerically most important group;
- *The Gypsies, Kales or Gitanos*, mainly from the south of France, Spain and Portugal;

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nouvelle-europe.eu/cultures/cultures-europeennes/les-rroms--un-peuple-europeen-aux-racines-indiennes.html>

- *The Sintis*; mainly in the north and east of France and Germany;
- *The Tinkers* or *British gypsies*.

We can add two categories to these ones. They are not ethnically Roma but face similar day to day issues. These are the *Irish travelers*, in Ireland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. And the *Yenishes*, present mainly in Germany, Switzerland and Austria.

In this paper we shall mainly use the term Roma, as it is more widely recognized and more politically correct, but we shall use Gypsy as a synonym for it, too.

## **HISTORY**

### **People originating in India**

The key date in Roma history is the year 1417<sup>2</sup>. From then on, historians have been able to trace the different trips and reasons of the migrations. Before this date, all remains myth, and debatable among specialists, some of which dating the penetration of Eastern Europe as early as the 9<sup>th</sup> century<sup>3</sup>.

However, it is possible to guess at the probable roots of the Gypsies from India, considered their land of origin, towards Europe. Starting in India, the Roma passed through Iran, Afghanistan and Armenia. It is at this moment in time when they would have split into two main groups. Half of them going towards Egypt and Palestine, while the rest would have settled in the Byzantine Empire; Serbia, Bulgaria, Wallachia (at that time a province of Romania), and Moldova. Gradually some tribes continued onwards towards Western and Central Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century<sup>4</sup>. At this period many Gypsies would have settled permanently in Eastern Europe.

The very few archeological proofs are somehow compensated by linguistic proofs. Linguists have analyzed the different layers in Romani language as being similar to Persian, Armenian, Greek, Germanic and Slavic languages. These similarities lead to the conclusions about the different migrations the Roma populations would have undergone. Regarding the reasons of these migrations, all is hypothesis.

Before leaving India, the Roma served different princes. They looked after the domestic organization of the palaces and controlled the different craftsmen. The ongoing rivalries between these principalities, and their economical difficulties pushed the Gypsies to keep on traveling and to change their protectors often. This is how we can deduce that the Roma have always traveled, and that the development of their community helped extend their emigrational space.

### **General oppression**

Across the centuries, the Roma in Europe have been systematically stigmatized, and persecuted. How did this situation arise? Through the ages, their people have been able to adapt to the different economical situations they have crossed, working as independent tradesmen, artists and craftspeople. They were somehow masters of their own time, doing on-the-spot jobs, with enough skills to meet the demands of their clients. No doubt many Europeans did not appreciate this way of working. The way they trusted their luck and the

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nouvelle-europe.eu/geographie/balkans/rroms-les-chemins-de-la-dispersion.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://212.72.210.78/sr-www/files/Virtual%20library/Kosovo.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://212.72.210.78/sr-www/files/Virtual%20library/Gypsies...pdf>

spontaneous way their approached strangers caused many conflicts between the nomads and the farmers, even though they both depended on each other. The Gypsies provided tools, veterinary care, music, or temporary manpower, whilst the farmers would provide them with food or other goods in exchange.

The Roma managed to make a living for a long time this way. They would be nomadic, but also stay in one place depending on the different opportunities. In the Ottoman Empire and in Central Europe, the Roma even served in the armies of the invaders. It is then clear that the Gypsies have not been excluded by an inability to adapt to the local economical conditions, contrary to generalized opinion. In fact, it seems that the main reason for the systematic exclusion of this population comes from the way the governments and officials have portrayed the Roma. Firstly in Western Europe, especially in Spain, and then across the rest of the continent, they have sometimes gone to great deal to show the Roma as foreigners, having no culture of their own, and as dangerous, antisocial people. The point being to forge the national identity of the peoples belonging to specific territories with proper borders. This technique was very much used in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when many nationalist struggles aroused<sup>5</sup>.

Up until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the leaders of many western countries tried to eradicate the Roma populations. Under the rule of Pope Pius V, many were shipped to Africa or America as slaves, in order to expel them from the domain of the Catholic Church. And in many parts of Eastern Europe, they were enslaved by princes and monasteries, until they obtained freedom in the 1860s.

When slavery in Wallachia and Moldova was abolished a new migratory wave from East to West, known as the “great Kelderara invasion” started and lasted approximately from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>6</sup>.

After this situation, the governments put their efforts into forced assimilation and eradication of the Romany languages and identity. The measures remained brutal; such as the forced settlement of nomadic populations, the seizure of children by the State (only abolished in Switzerland in 1973), or imprisonment simply for being gypsy (Brearly, 2001).

Germany was one of the worst cases of persecution. In 1899, the Central Office for Fighting the Gypsy Nuisance was opened in Munich and it only closed in 1970. The summon of Roma oppression is by far the genocide they suffered during the Nazi-dominated Europe of World War II. It is said that more than 500,000 Roma (Goldstone, 2002) perished between 1939 and 1945, in concentration camps in Auschwitz and Treblinka or in their home countries (Brearly, 2001). It is called the Porajmos, a somewhat controversial term that is the Romani analogue of the Shoah<sup>7</sup>.

After 1945, and the beginning of the communist era in Central and Eastern Europe, the Roma were forced to settle and discouraged in expressing their identity. The governments wanted to suppress the notion of ethnic difference and create national homogeneity. In general, ethnic minorities were unwanted and encouraged to assimilate to the dominating population. In some cases, segregated education or sterilization of Roma women was instored. The idea being that degenerate people had to be either forcefully dragged into modernity.

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.unesco.org/courier/2000\\_06/uk/ethique.htm](http://www.unesco.org/courier/2000_06/uk/ethique.htm)

<sup>6</sup> <http://212.72.210.78/sr-www/files/Virtual%20library/Gypsies...pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk=1844>

### **Recent emigration**

When Tito's former Yugoslavian borders were opened in the 1960's and 1970's a new emigration wave started. It is called the "Yugoslavian wave". Most recently, the dislocation of the former socialist States of Eastern Europe generally brought great suffering and violence to the Roma<sup>8</sup>. The level of unemployment increased, and attacks towards their people were numerous. This new marginalization produced emigration movements towards the new 'El Dorado', in this case: Western Europe. Because of the crisis in Eastern Europe at that time, these States transiting towards a market economy, prosperity was sought elsewhere, and in general a better standard of living sent many people abroad. Around the same time, the war in ex-Yugoslavia also sent many Roma refugees, mainly from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, to the West.

Livia Járóka, Hungarian politician of Roma ethnicity and member of the European Parliament said in 2008: "The appearance of large migrant groups in Western Europe is the complete failure of the States that they have left. Roma and also non-Roma migrants leave their countries, because of the terrible situation they have to face, namely segregated living conditions and segregated education-systems as well as poverty and social exclusion"<sup>9</sup>.

All in all, the Roma people emigrating from Eastern Europe couldn't necessarily enter Western Europe easily. This is somehow paradoxical because of the way Western States have portrayed communism, and openly received political refugees in the past. For instance during the Cold War, when the Occidental States would grant political refugee status to anybody fleeing the USSR or his allies. But since 1989, the political position of the West hasn't been so inviting. All the more because, since the collapse of the Wall, political refugees coming from the East have quadrupled. They have sought asylum exactly when the Occident doesn't want to accept them anymore<sup>10</sup>.

Many Gypsies coming from non-EU countries trying to enter the EU have faced immigration problems. For example, the departure from Romania because of the deteriorating economic opportunities and exclusion. The same thing in Slovakia where two main emigration waves occurred, first in 1997 to the United Kingdom, and then in 1999 to Finland. Similarly, the Roma population in Greece has increased since the beginning of the 1990s since many fled from Albania and former Yugoslavia<sup>11</sup>.

### **Estimates of the Roma population today**

It is estimated that there are overall 10 million or more Roma in Europe as a whole, and that around one and a half million joined the EU when the 10 new member States joined the EU in 2004<sup>12</sup>. Precise demographic data is not available because many States do not recognize the Roma as a separate ethnic category, such as in France or in Greece. For example, in February 2002, in Greece, a man was convicted of the crime of "disseminating false information" for distributing a leaflet that acknowledged the presence of minority languages in the country. The court reasoned that the leaflet could "incite anxiety among citizens and create the impression that in Greece minorities exist" (Goldstone, 2002).

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.unesco.org/courier/2000\\_06/uk/ethique.htm](http://www.unesco.org/courier/2000_06/uk/ethique.htm)

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+IM-PRESS+20080125STO19645+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.intermag.be/images/pdf/etude\\_roms.pdf](http://www.intermag.be/images/pdf/etude_roms.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=22&type=2&furtherPubs=yes>

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*

Moreover, many Roma do not want to identify themselves as such in official papers because of a widespread feeling of distrust towards national governments. This is due to their general experience of persecution, discrimination, and racism. Therefore widespread under-counting is common.

**Table 1.** Estimated number of Roma in Europe, 2011

(Source: *Gender inequalities in the risks of poverty and social exclusion for disadvantaged groups in thirty European countries*, EU report, 2006)

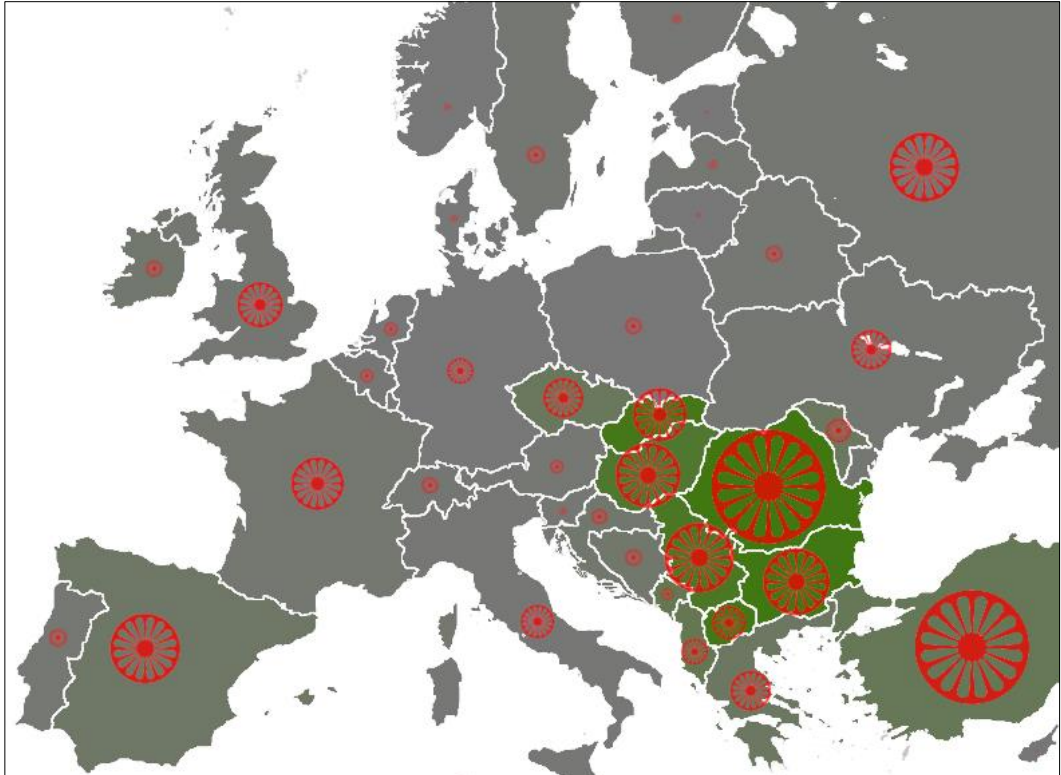
Country	Estimated number of Roma
Austria	15,000 to 20,000
Belgium	10,000 to 15,000 (0.1% of the total national population)
Bosnia and Herzegovina	6,000-9,000
Cyprus	700
Czech Republic	160,000 to 200,000 (between 1.5% and 1.9% of the total national population). However, other estimates say that in the mid-1990s 2.7% of the population where Roma.
Germany	85,000 to 120,000
Denmark	2,000 (0.0003% of the total national population) but there are higher estimates for the mid-1990s ranging from 2,500 to 4,500.
Estonia	No data provided
Greece	250,000 to 300,000. This would be an increase since it was estimated at 140,000 to 200,000 in the mid-1990s.
Spain	90,000 to 100,000 (2.2 to 2.4% of the total national population). Earlier estimates put the figure as high as 500,000 to 600,000 in the 1990s.
Finland	5,000 to 8,000 in the mid-1990s
France	250,000 to 300,000
Hungary	570,000 (6% of the total national population)
Ireland	20,000 to 27,000 in the mid-1990s
Italy	85,000 to 120,000 in the mid-1990s
Lithuania	2,571 (0.07% of the total national population)
Luxembourg	200 to 500 in 1994 (0.05 to 0.12% of the total national population)
Latvia	No data provided
Montenegro	No data provided
Netherlands	30,000 to 40,000 in the mid-1990s
Poland	19,000 to 20,000 (both less than 0.5% of the total national population)
Portugal	40,000 (a decrease since it was estimated at from 50,000 to 100,000 in the mid-1990s)
Serbia	147,604 (according with the 2011 census), but The Council of Europe estimates up to 400,000-800,000
Slovenia	3,246 in 2002, but some estimates go from 7,000 to 10,000.
Slovakia	90,000 in 2001, but some estimates go up to 350,000 (four times higher).
Sweden	15,000 to 20,000
Ukraine	200,000 to 300,000 (less than 0.005% of the total national population) but some estimates went down to 100,000 in the 1990s
Lichtenstein	No data provided
Bulgaria	371,356 – meaning that 4.5% of all women in Bulgaria are Roma- it was estimated from 500,000 to 800,000
Island	No data provided
Norway	No data provided
Romania	By self-identification; 2.5% of the total national population. Others estimate it up to 6.7% It was later estimated in 2004 from 1.8 million to 2.5 million. It is the second minority of the country after the Hungarian minority (6.6% of the total national population).

The figures that follow come from the EU report: *Gender inequalities in the risks of poverty and social exclusion for disadvantaged groups in thirty European*



countries, published in 2006<sup>13</sup>. Their estimations come from national reports supplemented by data from Machiels (2002) or Barany (1998)<sup>14</sup>.

The largest Roma populations are in Central and Eastern Europe, and most particularly in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovenia. In some countries the population has grown, like in Greece, through immigration. In Hungary, the Roma are growing in absolute and relative terms because of a general decline of the non-Roma population even though the birth rate is declining in both situations.



**Figure 1.** The territorial spread of Roma population in Europe, 2011  
(the size of the wheel symbols reflects absolute population size)  
(Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romani\\_diaspora](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romani_diaspora))

## **POOR LIVING CONDITIONS**

### **Housed on marginal land**

All over Europe, and especially in Western Europe, where the Roma have only recently started to settle on a more long term basis, the new-coming Roma have been forced to live on marginal land or in ghettoized areas. In many countries, the State has been put under pressure from various Non-Governmental Organizations to create special areas for the Roma.

Sadly, these special spaces are very generally out of town, on destitute land, with little or no access to fresh water, near rubbish tips, and most importantly out of sight from the general population. This segregation has been pushed to the

<sup>13</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=22&type=2&furtherPubs=yes>

<sup>14</sup> [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal\\_of\\_democracy/v009/9.3barany\\_tab01.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_democracy/v009/9.3barany_tab01.html)

extreme in Madrid, where in 1994 the town built street walls to separate the Roma part of town from their neighbors (Brearly, 2001).

In France, the housing grounds situation is absurd. There are two contradicting laws: the Besson law, and the Sarkozy law. The first obliges every town of more than 5,000 inhabitants to create a space on their territory for the travelers and the Roma. The problem is that to this day, only one out of four towns has respected this law. This means that 80% of the gypsies, or 4/5, find themselves in a situation where they have no legal space to settle. The second law is repressive. It states that any Roma that has settled on land that is not legally prepared for them can be prosecuted and sent to prison. All in all, it is as if you played a game of musical chairs, with 1 chair for 5 people, and all 4 that stay standing up risk 6 months of prison<sup>15</sup>.

### **Ghettoized communities**

One of the largest ghettoized Roma communities in Western Europe is on the outskirts of Florence, in Italy. The last figures date back to 2000, when it housed around 200 families, meaning up to 1,000 people<sup>16</sup>. Most of this population has arrived gradually from Kosovo and Macedonia, fleeing the economical crisis and the war in their region. They have been parked in “nomad campgrounds” -essentially, reserves for newcomers. Originally this was supposed to be a temporary situation but since then, they have not been put into question. The living conditions are very poor, with a low number of sanitary facilities, and a very high risk of fire. On several occasions, children have died in fires unable to be helped by their parents.

Because of the deterioration of the living conditions, and social relations due to this proximity and necessity to share the facilities, drug abuse and fights have been current. Therefore, the authorities have started to control the area. There are even police controls at the entry of the ghetto, for Roma and non-Roma alike.

The main problem with these “Gypsy camps” is that they create exclusion and marginalization. There is no integration possible when the populations do not live on the same territory, do not go to the same schools, do not cohabit. The fact that so many live in these camps, also makes searching for a job difficult. Even if some Roma are not dark-skinned, it might be written on their identity papers, if they have any, that they live in a gypsy camp- thus it would be very hard to get employed<sup>17</sup>.

### **Very low level of education**

The key to Roma future lies undoubtedly in their education. Unfortunately, the minority suffers from a very low level of education. It is said that a third of Europe's Gypsy children never attend school. In Greece 80% of the Roma are illiterate<sup>18</sup>. Many Roma children are either sent straight to “special schools” for the mentally retarded, or else drop out of school very early on.

The “special schools” system has been reported mainly in Central Europe, but also in the West. As an example, in Germany, 50% of the Roma children attend school and of these, in some regions, 80% go to institutions for under-achievers.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.errc.org/db/01/A6/m000001A6.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.unesco.org/courier/2000\\_06/uk/ethique2.htm](http://www.unesco.org/courier/2000_06/uk/ethique2.htm)

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.scribd.com/doc/30112547/ANTI-TSIGANISME-ET-POSSIBILITE-DE-%C2%AB-VIVRE-ENSEMBLE-%C2%BB>

<sup>18</sup> *Europe: Go to school—and stay there; Gypsy children*, 2001, The Economist



This educational segregation is pronounced and said to be increasing in Spain, Denmark, France, and the United Kingdom<sup>19</sup>.

In many classrooms of Europe, Roma children suffer from discrimination. Even if they are lucky enough to attend a regular school, in many cases they do not receive the attention they require. This situation has been monitored in the United Kingdom (Myers, Bhopal, 2009), as in other countries of Western Europe. They are either picked on by other pupils, or by the teachers themselves.

The fact that many misconceptions such as "Roma parents frequently do not regard education as necessary and do not encourage their children to stay in school" (Stiftung, 2002) are still common does not help their educational situation. Indeed, as long as this idea persists, government officials along with the schools, and the general population, will not put enough effort into integration<sup>20</sup>.

Some recent pre-school programs, where the main language of the country is being taught to young children, have been put into place<sup>21</sup>. This is one solution to saving these children from being put into "special schools". But their implementation is difficult. These programs have been set up in some Central European countries such as Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia.

The recruitment of teachers with Roma backgrounds has been a very successful experience. They generally cajole the children, and the kids can see them as role models of educated gypsies, which they often lack. Unfortunately, the most famous figures of Gypsy origin (such as Ava Gardner, Yul Brynner and Charlie Chaplin) (Brearly, 2001) rarely have their roots portrayed in the media, so many are unaware of their Gypsy origins. There is also undoubtedly a need for the development of a Gypsy intelligentsia. Only when more Roma youth will accede to university will this happen, and more youngsters will be able to look up at them, as models of success.

## **SYSTEMATIC EXCLUSION AND PERSECUTION**

### **Mutual distrust leads to exclusion**

The persecution suffered by the Roma across history has helped them forge a common identity as an excluded group. This ultimately lead to a culture of mistrust and resistance towards *gadjes* (anybody who is not Roma). Aside this, the frequent reference to a generalized "other" in opposition to an "us", is very common. And it isn't found in any other insider ethnic discourse<sup>22</sup>.

The way the Roma are portrayed in the media, and in the public opinion is mostly based on misconceptions, and untruths. The most widespread misconceptions would be about nomadism, and their level of criminality<sup>23</sup>.

Firstly, only a small part of the Roma in Western Europe are still nomadic (France, Ireland, Netherlands, the United Kingdom). The vast majority (95%)<sup>24</sup> of Gypsies across the world have been settled for decades or even centuries. This idea of nomadism is linked with the one of freedom, carelessness, and irresponsibility.

Secondly, the fact that Roma populations stay linked to the idea of a high level of criminality, is due to different factors. The statistics of some countries

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<sup>19</sup> [http://www.libertysecurity.org/IMG/pdf\\_Gender\\_inequalities.pdf](http://www.libertysecurity.org/IMG/pdf_Gender_inequalities.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk=1844>

<sup>21</sup> *Europe: Go to school—and stay there; Gypsy children*, 2001, The Economist

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk=1844>

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.nouvelle-europe.eu/cultures/cultures-europeennes/les-rroms--un-peuple-europeen-aux-racines-indiennes.html>

show the over-representation of Roma in some types of crime, notably petty stealing. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that these statistics contain distortions. For one they are based on reported crime, and theft is very often reported, unlike corruption, financial fraud, or domestic violence for example. Robbery usually only affects one person, unlike fraud which could leave hundreds affected. Parallel to this, every time a crime is reported, the Roma suspects are the ones who are most likely to reach the court room, and the most likely to be convicted. They generally receive longer prison terms, and so are over-represented in jail too.

### **The role of the government and the media**

The officials in both local and national governments like in the media, are largely responsible for inflaming hatred towards the Roma. In 1993, in Slovakia, the Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar described Roma as “antisocial, mentally backward, inassimilable and socially unacceptable”. He demanded a reduction in family welfare payments to lower the reproduction of these “mentally retarded” people (Fakete, Webber, 1994). In Italy in 1994, a Northern League member of Parliament described Roma camps outside Florence as “a gathering of thieves and prostitutes, muggers and rapists” and encouraged Roma to be prevented from entering Florence (Fakete, Webber, 1994).

The media also have their role to play in this systematic discrimination. In 1992, two leading German newspapers described the Roma as “pure disease” and “a serious plague”. This language is typical of anti-Semitism (Brearily, 2001). Whilst in Bulgaria the media has portrayed the Roma on numerous occasions as inherently deviant, naming them as “villains”, “incorrigible perpetrators”, and “apt to commit crimes”.

The consequences of this constant stigmatization in the media are strong. Indeed, at a conference in 1996 on the media and Roma in contemporary Europe, a delegate from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe argued that according to the OSCE, “anti-Roma violence was the result of racial discrimination in the media, which then became institutionalized in people's minds”<sup>25</sup>.

### **Labor market disadvantage**

All over Europe, it is very hard for people of Roma origin to find employment. They are faced with numerous discriminatory problems and prejudice. These can be on the basis of physical characteristics or their living place, for example if their address is written on their identification papers such as in Italy<sup>26</sup> for example. Indeed, if they live in a special allotment for the Gypsy communities, or in one of the well known ghettos of a town, a future employer might not want to employ him or her, regardless of their ethnic origin. In the same manor, if a Romani does not declare himself as such when meeting a future employer, and it is later discovered, it could just aggravate the situation, and lead *gadjes* to think that all Gypsies are liars.

The Roma have also faced problems of exploitation by other older immigrant communities. This is a social problem described by Erving Goffman as the “Renegade hierarchy”<sup>27</sup>. Indeed, within different stigmatized communities, the

<sup>25</sup> *ibid*

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.scribd.com/doc/30112547/ANTI-TSIGANISME-ET-POSSIBILITE-DE-%C2%AB-VIVRE-ENSEMBLE-%C2%BB>

<sup>27</sup> [http://www.intermag.be/images/pdf/etude\\_roms.pdf](http://www.intermag.be/images/pdf/etude_roms.pdf)

older ones, such as the Turks in Belgium for example, exploit other recently arrived communities, judging them as inferior.

Aside the exploitation and discrimination the Roma suffer from, their level of qualifications is generally very low. They are often constraint to undeclared work, and then their experience would not be proven.

Because it is so hard to find employment, social aide is often used. Unfortunately this is not a solution. It is generally thought that Roma populations resort to social help instead of searching for work, and abuse the system. In the long run, obviously it does not help the outsiders view of the Roma.

## **POLITICAL PLANS OF ACTION UNDER THE EU**

### **Action at a European Level**

In the last few years there have been more and more European projects and programs destined to defend Roma rights<sup>28</sup>. One for example is an initiative called Equal<sup>29</sup>, which has been put up by the European Social Fund (ESF). Its mission is to promote a better model for working life by fighting against discrimination and exclusion on the basis of gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

The European Union created in 1997 the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia based in Vienna. In 2007 it was reestablished as the European Fundamental Rights Agency<sup>30</sup>. It regularly publishes reports, on domains such as homophobia and discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation, anti-Semitism, islamaphobia, or Roma issues. Its reports are based on precise data collected in the Member States. This agency also publishes the magazine Equal Voices<sup>31</sup>.

In 2000, the EU signed the Charter of Fundamental Rights<sup>32</sup>, which guarantees the respect of six basic principles: dignity, freedom, equality, solidarity, citizenship and justice. It aims to create a space of freedom, security, and equality in the EU. The equality principle for example offers the Roma respect of non-discrimination and the right to cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity.

The Council of Europe has also been engaged since 1993 in the struggle for equality of Roma, especially during the conflicts in ex-Yugoslavia. It has created a special structure for the respect of ethnic and cultural contribution of Roma populations in the Member States. The team is based in Strasbourg and coordinates all activities, including partnerships with various associations and NGOs. Their program of action is to protect minorities, combat racism and intolerance as well as social exclusion. The European Convention on Human Rights<sup>33</sup> offers a clear framework for the implementation of concrete action.

In 1995, a group of experts<sup>34</sup> was established under the Council of Europe to monitor and assess the situation of the Roma. These specialists, permanent or not, have been appointed by their Member States to advice the Council of Ministers on Roma issues. They study, analyze and evaluate the implementation

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<sup>28</sup> <http://www.nouvelle-europe.eu/politiques/politiques-europeennes/que-fait-l-europe-pour-les-roms-et-les-gens-du-voyage.html>

<sup>29</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/equal/index\\_en.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/index_en.cfm)

<sup>30</sup> [http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/home/home\\_en.htm](http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/home/home_en.htm)

<sup>31</sup> [http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/research/publications/magazine/magazine\\_en.htm](http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/research/publications/magazine/magazine_en.htm)

<sup>32</sup> [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/default\\_en.htm](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/default_en.htm)

<sup>33</sup> <http://conventions.coe.int/treaty/en/Treaties/Html/005.htm>

<sup>34</sup> [http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/romatravellers/mgsrom\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/romatravellers/mgsrom_en.asp)

of current policies and practices of Member States regarding the Roma, they draw up guidelines for new policies, and they thoroughly keep under review, the evolution of the Roma situation. This Committee meets twice a year.

In 2001 the idea of a European Roma Forum<sup>35</sup> was launched by the Finnish president, Tarja Halonen. The point of this forum is to allow various associations and NGOs to make their voices heard at an international level, and most specifically within the Council of Europe. The first forum was held in 2005 in Strasbourg.

The first EU Roma summit was held in 2008 in Brussels and the second one was held very recently this year under the Spanish presidency of the EU, in Cordoba on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of April<sup>36</sup>, the 8<sup>th</sup> of April being the International Roma Day.

Another very concrete action been put up by the EU is the possibility for young Roma graduates to have an internship in their services. This enables them to discover the way the EU works and to have a practical understanding of the idea of European integration.

All in all, there are two major levels of support in Europe for the Roma. Firstly the EU, and secondly the Council of Europe. In some cases joint actions are put into place such as awareness campaigns like *Dosta!* (Enough! in Romani language).

### **The Dosta! campaign for Roma Awareness**

The political campaign *Dosta!* it is an awareness raising campaign which aims at bringing non-Roma closer to Roma citizens. The main objective is it break prejudices and stereotypes. In a 19 page leaflet<sup>37</sup>, they have developed a tool for fighting stereotypes towards Roma. There are 16 stereotypes developed, such as the financial situation, education, Roma society, customs, nomadism, and music.

Television spots for all 46 Council of Europe States have been made, as well as radio campaigns. Different events are to be held all over Europe all through 2010.

### **Non-Governmental Organizations working for the protection of Roma**

The main Non-Governmental Organization in the protection of Roma rights is the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC)<sup>38</sup> was created in 1997 and is based in Hungary. It is an international public interest law organization that works to combat anti-Romani racism and human rights abuse of Roma. The approach of the ERRC involves, in particular, strategic litigation, international advocacy, research and policy development, and training of Romani activists. The ERRC published the report *Roma in an Enlarged European Union* under the Directorate General of Employment and Social Affairs of the EU. It is one of the most influential policy documents on Roma to date. The ERRC has influenced the European Union enlargement by pressuring candidate countries to comply with the Copenhagen criteria<sup>39</sup> and ensuring that the Roma situation is a priority issue. The political obligations for accession to the EU State that “human rights and respect for and protection of minorities” must be met.

<sup>35</sup> [http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/romatravellers/ertf\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/romatravellers/ertf_en.asp)

<sup>36</sup> [http://www.coe.int/T/DG3/RomaTravellers/source/documents/Cordoba\\_Decl.pdf](http://www.coe.int/T/DG3/RomaTravellers/source/documents/Cordoba_Decl.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/romatravellers/JP3/arc/toolstereotypesEN.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.errc.org>

<sup>39</sup> [http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/accession\\_criteria\\_copenhagen\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/accession_criteria_copenhagen_en.htm)

## CONCLUSIONS

Since the fall of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe, and the end of the conflicts in ex-Yugoslavia, there have been more and more Roma arriving in the Western part of the continent. As we have seen through this study, the Roma population in Western Europe is still very vulnerable. The living conditions are poor, their education level is one of the lowest of all Europeans, and the access to employment is very difficult.

These three main points are intimately linked to the history of oppression and exclusion towards the Roma. Indeed, across time the minority has been dominated by the main populations that they have been in contact with. The role of the governments as well as the media in the propagation of stereotypes and hatred towards the Roma, has been highly important in the mainstream view of gypsies today.

In the last 27 years the European Union and the Council of Europe have made many efforts towards the respect of minorities across Europe. The Roma being the largest, and maybe the most visible one, they have been on the forefront of many discussions. NGOs as well as local associations have been very active as well. Nevertheless, a lot of work remains to be done. Action at a European level is important, but so long as local governments do not make inclusion and acceptance of this population a high priority on their agenda things can only get so much better. Senior officials should declare racism unacceptable and promote equality for all populations in regard of housing, education, and employment. Only when the general population gets rid of the old embedded stereotypes and moves towards more inclusion and antidiscrimination will the future of the Roma look brighter.

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