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ROMA IMMIGRANTS IN WESTERN EUROPE – THE EXAMPLE OF FRANCE AND ITALY

ABSTRACT

The expansion of the European Union and the accession of ten new EU member states in 2004, as well as the accession of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, meant that the new borders of the EU came to encompass most of the Roma minorities living on the Old Continent. The Roma, as well as being the largest ethnic group in modern Europe, are also its most marginalised group. They have been and continue to be ostracised, excluded from society, and discriminated against on all possible social levels. I will focus on the mass exodus of the Roma to Western Europe, which was triggered by the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the European Union. Thousands of new Roma emigrants moved to the West in search of a better life, without possessing jobs, health care or social insurance, living en masse in camps on the edge of towns and cities. The beginning of the global economic crisis in 2008 and this massive influx of Roma immigrants living in extreme poverty was an explosive mix which led to a deepening and intensification of Anti-Roma feeling in Western Europe creating a radicalisation of policy concerning Roma.

Key words: Roma, Gypsies, minority, immigrants, European Union

[The] *Worrying situation of the Roma minority is a test for us which sets a challenge to build a Europe open, full of respect for the separate identity of individuals and constituent communities, rather than closed and excluding. We can not leave Roma on the side of the road. Our roads are common [...]*.¹ Is the above statement true? Unfortunately, it is difficult to confirm the words of researcher Frédéric Sarter, especially taking into account the reports which have been coming for a number of years from countries occupied by Roma immigrants. After the accession of Romania and Bulgaria EU borders contain the largest number of Roma people. It should be added that this community is the largest, but also the most marginalized ethnic minority in Europe. What to do with the Roma people in a Europe of open borders? After the inclusion of Romania and Bulgaria, the Roma issue has become urgent as they begin to leave their countries of origin on a mass scale. In search of a better life they move to the West. As a result, modern Europe is experiencing the shock of these socially and culturally maladjusted groups confronting Western reality.

These are the issues I would like to focus on in this article. However, special attention will be placed on the situation of Roma migrants in Italy and France. These countries, inter alia, have become a haven and thus give hope for a better life for Romanian and Bulgarian Roma. Before that, I would like to highlight the issue of the social situation of Roma in the countries which they are abandoning on such a large scale.

THE SITUATION OF ROMA IN BULGARIA AND ROMANIA

There is no clear answer to the question about the number of Roma in Romania. According to estimates, the country is home to more than two million Roma. It should be added that the official statistics note more than five thousand Roma people.² These differences can largely be explained by political motives. The authorities underestimate the number, because Roma are synonymous with their social problem. A number of Roma organizations provide a large amount because in this way they want to pressure the government. The situation is further complicated because of the variety of definitions applicable to the Romanian Roma community. Some of their representatives do not identify with the group from which they are derived, and declare themselves as Hungarians or Romanians. This community, as in other European countries, is not uniform as it is divided into several different groups depending on the way of living, the culture and the economic circumstances. These divisions are mainly a result of historical processes. From the sixteenth century to the second half of the nineteenth century, the Romas in Romania had the status of slaves and the situation in which they found

¹ An article in the author's possession.

² 'Opinia Komitetu Regionów "Unijne ramy dotyczące krajowych strategii integracji Romów do 2020 r.", *Dziennik Urzędowy UE*, C 54/13, 23 February 2012, at <<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PL/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52011IR0247>>, 12 June 2013.

themselves significantly affected their degree of internal diversity. Members of the community belonged to different owners, either the clergy or nobility, and performed various professions. Moreover, there was also a group of runaway slaves who hid in the forests and mountains, and one free group. The matter is further complicated by the differences between the Moldavian and Walachian Roma and those who occupied the Romanian region of Transylvania (pol. Siedmiogród). This last group had never been slaves which gives them a sense of superiority over other sub-groups of Roma.

In the mid-nineteenth century the abolition of Roma slavery began. Unfortunately, freedom was not associated with participation in public life as the Roma still remained on the margins of society. After the abolition their main professional engagement was limited to the blacksmith's craft. Some took care of the land. At the end of the First World War, the Romanian authorities had sought to assimilate the Roma people. One of the main objectives was to eradicate Romani culture, which is still often considered worthless and backward. Repression against Roma intensified after World War II. After the start of the war with the Soviet Union in 1941 the persecution of the Roma grew significantly, with the consequence of their deportation to the area known as Transnistria.³

For Romanian Roma the end of the war did not mean that everything would change for the better. The authorities returned to their nationalist rhetoric, combining it with Marxist theory. The process of assimilation was renewed and the administration helped, using a variety of repressive measures, to lead to the disappearance of the Roma culture. At that time, Roma were forcibly resettled and employed in state metallurgical communes as unskilled labor. Although they had not been granted any cultural autonomy (in contrast to Hungarian or German minorities) they were forced to stop even basic education, which resulted in, and continues to produce, a large percentage of illiteracy.

In the seventies, Romania began the liquidation of its villages. As a result the inhabitants were transferred to urban areas. The move was met with considerable opposition from society but it did not stop. Restrictive measures were applied in the form of police intimidation. For Roma, resettlement was a complete change to their existing ways of life. This also increased the impoverishment of the community, because their existing skills proved to be useless in their new conditions.

In the second half of the eighties Ceaușescu's government reduced social benefits depriving many families of their only means of support. Consequently, a large number of Roma were in a very difficult situation which resulted in their exclusion from society. The collapse of the communist regime in 1989 did not change their social position, and in some cases even made it worse. At that time, the liquidation of state-owned enterprises which employed Roma caused mass unemployment, and the complete lack of social support meant that they could not find a place in the new social order. The low level of education amongst Roma meant that they were not competitive on the labor market and therefore remained unemployed. The problem of unemployment also

³ Part of the coastal territory of Ukraine, which borders Bessarabia and which had been given to Romania for their support of the Third Reich.

caused other social problems. The vast majority of Roma in Romania were living in appalling conditions. Roma neighborhoods and settlements were within the cities, but often there were no basic amenities such as running water, electricity or gas. Living in such conditions made it difficult to provide the right environment for children to attend school, and, despite compulsory education, a large proportion of young Roma people remained outside of the education system. The lack of running water means that Roma often use contaminated water. This in turn is the cause of many diseases and the high mortality within the community.⁴

Bulgaria, according to official figures, is home to approximately 400,000 Roma. Unofficial statistics declare there are about 2 million. Additionally, the country's Roma do not form one entity. They are divided into sub-groups that speak different dialects and practice different religions. Some of them have a tradition of nomadic life, which has been banned since the eighteenth century. In addition, they are repressed by a reduction of their civil rights.

In the early twentieth century, travelling Roma and Muslims received the right to vote which led to the organization of the first Romani Congress in Sofia (1905) and the withdrawal of restrictions on the voting rights of Roma.

The World War II period, compared to the other countries of occupied Europe, was relatively quiet for Bulgarian Roma. The country had since joined the Berlin Pact. In 1942 all Roma were obliged to find employment. Those who were not able to do so were deported to work on the harvest, the construction of roads, railways or other public works. Marriages between Roma and non-Roma were prohibited. Also, members of the community were not allowed to stay in Sofia and use public transportation. After the war, the Communists took over and another difficult period for the Roma started, with repression and discrimination still on the agenda. As in other countries under communist rule Bulgaria sought to forcibly assimilate the Roma. The priority was to settle and employ the Roma and therefore wipe out the Roma culture. In the 1970s about 80% of Bulgarian Roma attended separate schools and more than half of the Roma children in Bulgaria lived in orphanages. After the government's policy towards the community had proven to be so effective, the authorities officially announced that the Bulgarian state had no persons of Roma origin.

After the change of government in 1989 the situation of the Roma has deteriorated. Liquidation of state-owned enterprises and the lack of education for Roma has increased the number of unemployed. Areas inhabited by the community have gradually turned into ghettos with no running water, electricity or transportation hubs nearby. Numerous social problems have worsened an already difficult relationship between the Roma and non-Roma.

In both Bulgaria and Romania, the Roma are poorly integrated. Their social situation has had a considerable impact on this state of affairs. According to UNICEF, a few years ago in these countries around 90% of the Roma population lived below the

⁴ L. Ostrowski, 'Romowie w Rumunii. Różnorodność i jedność' in E. Nowicka, *Romowie o sobie i dla siebie. Nowe problemy i nowe działania w pięciu krajach Europy Środkowo Wschodniej*, Warszawa 2003, p. 153.

poverty line. Additionally, the Roma settlements were without water, electricity and were located on the outskirts of towns and villages in areas unfavorable for living such as, for instance, near railway embankments or landfills. Poverty, unemployment and discrimination contribute to the fact that Romas are living at the expense of the state and this generates apathy and crime. A break to so-called normal society is harder for Romas than emigrating in search of a better life. What pushes them out of the country is also a fear of anti-Roma political parties. It was a Romanian politicians idea to send the Gypsies to penal camps. Romanian MPs want to be able to officially call the Roma Gypsies. The reason? They have had enough of the association of the Roma minority with their country. The perception of this group, shared by politicians and journalists, has a significant impact on shaping the image of the Roma minority in the country which affects their relationships with non-Roma.⁵

MIGRATION TO WESTERN EUROPE – ITALY AND FRANCE

The accession to the EU of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007 marked the beginning of a mass exodus of Roma to countries in Western Europe. Especially to Italy, France, Germany and the UK. Thousands of new Roma immigrants came to the West in search of a better life but without a job, healthcare and social support they dwelled in camps on the outskirts of cities. At the start of the economic crisis in 2008 the clash of Roma immigrants living on the edge of poverty became a flashpoint, which deepened and intensified anti-Roma sentiments among the peoples of those countries and contributed to the radicalization of policies towards the Roma.

In the wake of these sentiments the Italian Government introduced a drastic tightening of anti-immigrant policies, aimed primarily at Roma migrants. On 21st of May 2008 the government of then Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, using strong anti-Roma tendencies in Italian society, adopted a series of legislatives and policies called the “security package”. Under decree number 92, all citizens of EU and non-EU countries who have been sentenced for more than two years in prison are to be forcibly expelled from Italy. In addition, under the decree all immigrants residing in Italy for more than three months must hold “sufficient means” coming from a legitimate economic activity, and be able to provide for themselves and their families. The Italian Government has also introduced a mandatory procedure for taking and collecting fingerprints from Roma immigrants (including children) to form a census of the Roma population living in the territory of the Italian State. It should be added that the creation of a census based on ethnicity is against the EU law.⁶

⁵ E. Marushiakova V. Popov, *Gypsies (Roma) in Bulgaria*, Frankfurt am Main 1997 (*Studien zur Tsiganologie und Folkloristik*, 18); E. Marushiakova, ‘Gypsy/Roma Identities in New European Dimension: The Case of Eastern Europe’ in eadem (ed.), *Dynamics of National Identity and Transnational Identities in the Process of European Integration*, Newcastle 2008.

⁶ Parlament Europejski, ‘Projekt rezolucji w sprawie utworzenia bazy danych odcisków palców pobieranych od Romów we Włoszech’, B6-0345/2008; R. Skibińska, ‘Protesty przeciw pobieraniu odcisków

Since 2008 Italy has started the mass liquidation of Roma camps. Relocated to a new place the Roma now live without water or electricity. After protests the Roma residents were moved again. It should be added that the newly formed Roma camps are surrounded with fences and their inhabitants are strictly controlled. Since 2009 Italy implemented the so-called "Nomad Plan". This development was a response to an event that took place in Rome on Valentine's Day. There was an attack on a couple walking in a park, the girl was brutally raped. The media reported that the perpetrators of the attack were foreign, and the police pointed to the Roma. People went out into the streets with banners reading "no mercy for the monsters". After several months DNA tests excluded the accused Roma as perpetrators. According to the Nomad Plan, whose founder was the mayor of Rome, authorities planned the elimination of informal Roma camps and the relocation of their residents to those established by local officials. New camps are fenced and their inhabitants are strictly controlled. Implementation of the plan was challenged by human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International. However, when the case went to court the judges held the opinion that the plan was in compliance with the law. Local politicians have taken part in Anti-Roma campaigns. During an election rally Gian-Carlo Gentilini, Treviso's vice mayor, shouted from the platform that "Italy had awakened". He also called for a revolution against illegal immigrants, adding that he wanted to clear the streets and eliminate the gypsy children who rob the elderly. Italians protesting against the presence of the Roma, and using stereotypical phrases with the purpose of arousing hate against them, became unpunishable.⁷

Berlusconi's government's policy towards the Roma immigrants began the process of creating transparent, legal anti-Roma procedures that have since been created and implemented in other EU countries. A perfect example of this policy is advocated by the French Government. Using the incident in Saint-Aignan, which took place in July 2010 (when the Roma threw stones at the local police station after the local gendarmes shot and killed 22-year-old Roma Luigi Duqueneta),⁸ the French authorities decided to liquidate three camps and squats, inhabited by Roma immigrants, who were subsequently sent to the countries they came from. This mass deportation of Roma carried out by the French authorities constituted a violation of the provisions of the EU directive on freedom of movement and EU anti-discrimination law. In less than a year France expelled more than eight thousand Roma. During this time other countries im-

palców od romskich dzieci', *Rzeczpospolita*, 26 June 2008, at <<http://www.rp.pl/artukul/154522.html>>; T. Bielecki, 'Włosi spierają się o pobieranie odcisków palców od Romów', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 5 July 2008, at <http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114881,5426564,Wlosi_spieraja_sie_o_pobieranie_odciskow_palcow_od.html>, 7 June 2013.

⁷ *Dzień Walki z Ubóstwem – zatrzymaj przymusowe wysiedlenia Romów we Włoszech*, Amnesty International, 17 October 2012, at <http://amnesty.org.pl/no_cache/aktualnosci/strona/article/7722.html>; 'AI alarmuje: przymusowe wysiedlenia to codzienność', *Wprost*, 2 October 2012, at <<http://www.wprost.pl/ar/350512/AI-alarmuje-przymusowe-wysiedlenia-to-codziennosc/>>, 7 June 2013.

⁸ <https://stowarzyszenie.romowie.net/index.php/czytnik-aktualnosci/items/marek-isztok-niebezpieczny-anachronizm.68.html>– 15.04.2013.

plemented Roma removal policies. In July 2009 Denmark sent twenty-three, Sweden fifty and Germany over a hundred Roma to Romania.⁹

The French government was criticised by the EU decision-makers and representatives of many international organizations, such as The Council of Europe, the OSCE and the United Nations. But, most importantly, this case highlighted the magnitude of the problem relating to the integration of Roma into society in the majority of countries where they live, as well as the inefficiency of any actions¹⁰ taken so far. However, it should be noted that despite the wave of criticism in relation to the treatment of the Roma by European governments, in particular by EU politicians, the French government had not been previously involved in any anti-Roma policies – although such views prevailed, among others, in the media. Roma have been residing in France for a long time and there have never been any reports on the activities of the government, whose aim has been to get rid of them from the area of France. The primary factor was the collision occurring in the western countries when facing the communities that came from Central and Eastern Europe, and who lived there at a much lower level of welfare and have been, and still are, culturally unadjusted to the western realities in which they now find themselves. The behavior and lifestyle that they have led so far have become unacceptable to French society, hence the intervention of the government, whose task is to ensure order in the country, as well as the safety of its citizens. Unfortunately, the problem of Roma immigrants has hit, by ricochet, the Roma who have been living in Western countries for a long time and, as a result, they have been stigmatized and exoriated. In a recent study of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (Agency of Fundamental Rights of the European Union – FRA), Roma, in addition to the population of African countries are the most discriminated of all the European national and ethnic minorities. In studies sixteen percent of Roma confirmed that in recent months they experienced discrimination in many areas of social life. They are exposed to discrimination and risk of social exclusion in several spheres. As indicated, the Roma in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe live at a lower level than the Roma in the western part of Europe, the reasons for this are: communism, the minorities assimilation policies, and the difference in the standard of living of the population in both parts of Europe.¹¹ In connection with the accession of the former communist countries to the European Union, the need for measures to improve the socio-economic status of the Roma living in the country has become an important and challenging issue. At the same time we must remember that the issues related to regulations for minorities in the EU are left to the countries aspiring to membership in the European structure. Thus,

⁹ <<http://www.presseurop.eu/pl/content/article/339551-sarkozy-wypowiada-wojne-wlasnym-obywatelom>>; T. Bielecki, 'Francjo, zostaw Romów!', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 10 September 2010, at <http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,8356443,Francjo_zostaw_Romow_.html>, 12 May 2013.

¹⁰ 'Kłótnia o Romów na unijnym szczycie', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 16 September 2010, at <http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,8387689,Klotnia_o_Romow_na_unijnym_szczycie.html>, 12 May 2013

¹¹ Agencja Praw Podstawowych Unii Europejskiej, *Badanie UE na temat mniejszości i dyskryminacji. Sprawozdanie "Kluczowe dane"*, Part 1: *Romowie*, 2009, at <http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/413-EU-MIDIS_ROMA_PL.pdf>, 12 May 2013.

any actions taken by the states in this regard were voluntary and any EU documents, urging countries to settle the issue of minorities, did not have and do not have legal force. However, in the national framework, states began efforts to improve the living standards of the Roma on their territories.

In such circumstances pan-European debate on policies set by the French and Italian governments against the Roma, in addition to discussions on the unacceptable actions taken by governments of those countries, should be brought in as the social situation of Roma has not not changed, and neither has the low level of integration of the Roma in the majority of the communities in Romania and Bulgaria. Unresolved problems have moved with the Roma to Western Europe from the countries where they lived before. I would not expect any socially unacceptable behavior to be sanctioned in the Western countries. Therefore, taking appropriate action aimed at a qualitative evaluation of initiatives and their targets would be an improvement of the situation of Roma in Bulgaria and Romania and ought to be considered a priority. Until now, even given the huge financial resources spent on multiple programs, they have failed to be effective. Unfortunately, many politicians do not care about solving the real problems of the Roma. They do not refer to the effects of their actions, only cite the number of actions taken and the amount of money given. In this sense it is all about the quantity of the actions taken, rather than the quality, and we can observe the lack of discussion on the results.

WHAT TO DO IN THE FUTURE? AID PROGRAMS AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR CHANGE

Each country that becomes part of the EU has the right to the use of funds under various aid programs. Regarding the difficult situation of the Roma in the new EU countries, large sums of money have been spent on activities aimed at the equalisation of Roma in the labor market and in education. But before Member States accede to the Community, they can benefit from various forms of pre-accession assistance. One of the major funds set aside for these activities was the PHARE. Much of the funding coming from this fund, especially in Romania, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, has been used to support the Roma living in these countries. Projects related to equal opportunities for the minorities in the labor market, in education, and access to health services and improving housing conditions. Significant support for the Roma came from the budget of the other pre-accession programs. The LIEN program supported the development of non-governmental organizations, civil society development and the promotion of high-risk groups (including Roma). In turn, the funds from the ACCESS programs supported projects that contributed to the building of civil society organizations in Central and Eastern Europe. It was also possible to support non-governmental organizations working with Roma.

As far as support for non-EU countries it should be emphasized that the activity in the context of EU financial support for the Roma community began to be particularly intense when the organization was joined by the countries of Central and Eastern Eu-

rope. Despite this, it seems EU decision makers are aware of the scale of the problems of the Roma and thus the countries inhabited by them. All of this has not lead to the creation of any kind of program focused on the Roma community at the EU level. Appointing a program common to all EU countries is not possible due to the variety of problems, as well as the diversity within the Roma community. However, it is possible to isolate funding for the support of the minority and adjust the type of assistance to the national context. So far such measures have not been applied, and the Roma may be the beneficiaries of a number of EU programs financed by the various financial mechanisms of the European Union.

The most important source of support policies for Member States in activities aimed at the Roma is the European Social Fund (ESF). It is one of the oldest of the Structural Funds whose task is to support activities aimed at eradicating social differences in Member States, in the areas of education and the labour market. The ESF also attaches considerable importance to social inclusion. Support provided on these grounds targets disadvantaged groups, or those at risk of social exclusion, as well as ethnic minorities, the disabled or immigrants. The second EU fund which should be mentioned in the context of assistance available for the Roma is the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), which is the most important instrument of support in member countries. The ERDF helps to compensate the dissimilarities in the level of development of various regions of the Community. After the successive enlargement of the EU community in 2004 and 2007 the differences widened quite significantly, so the ERDF is a key financial tool through which it is possible to strive to achieve a balance. The ERDF supports regional development, economic change, increased competitiveness and territorial cooperation throughout the EU.

Significant support for the Roma in the EU comes from the European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity PROGRESS 2007-2013. As already mentioned the program focuses on activities in employment and social affairs with particular emphasis on equal opportunities for all citizens. The program consists of five thematic areas in which countries can apply for financial support. For projects targeting particular Roma minorities there are three areas: employment, social inclusion and the fight against discrimination.

The Member States also implemented other programs financed from the budget of the European Commission, which benefit Roma particularly in areas related to education and promotion of their culture. These include: Lifelong Learning (the Lifelong Learning Programme), Youth in Action (the Youth in Action Programme), Culture 2007-13 (the Culture Programme 2007-2013).

In some countries, governments have adopted programs for Roma, others have joined the Decade of Roma Inclusion.

It is obvious that the mere adoption of these measures does not guarantee their effectiveness, and in practice countries that initiated these activities became members of the EU. This was the case for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which, along with several million Roma, became members of the EU in 2004 and 2007. As it turned out the implemented programs have not yielded satisfactory results. Problems for the

Roma are becoming more pressing in Europe, because under EU law, EU citizens have the right to move and reside in any EU country.

Thus, the consequence of the accession to the EU for countries with a large Roma population are the Roma who are migrating to Western Europe. The clash between the West and people discriminated against in their own country, living on the poverty line has been the beginning of many issues that Western European countries are unable to cope with.¹²

CONCLUSION

Facing growing problems, EU policy makers seem to be more aware that although the Roma, like other minorities, are subject to legal protection and the EU community has spent huge sums on improving their social position, there is still a need for better support from Member States in the implementation of these actions. The European Commission, from 14th of October 2010, states that in recent years (until 2009) in addition to transferring funds to the member states under such programs as Structural Funds, its focus has been primarily on the diagnosis and analysis of the situation of Roma in different countries. Currently (as of 2010) practical work is expected to begin, because the EU institutions have the expertise and the many legal and financial tools which are designed to promote the integration of Roma in the countries in which they reside. At the same time, as rightly stated, it is impossible to create a strategy and conduct a one-way policy because of the intrinsic differences of the Roma. In this situation it is necessary to establish different approaches taking into account the socio-cultural contexts, as well as the economic, geographic and legal realities. Despite this it is indispensable for all EU countries to support the integration of the Roma in the EU. So far the result of the joint actions is a number of documents and initiatives relating directly to the Roma and the vast majority are non-legally binding – reports, discussion platforms for the exchange of experiences, opinions and ideas and debate and discussion on Roma issues and their solutions. Thus, at this stage, it is hoped that the initiatives are a prelude to complementary measures that will have a real impact on improving the situation of Roma within the EU.

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¹² J. Talewicz-Kwiatkowska, *Wpływ aktywności finansowej Unii Europejskiej na położenie społeczne Romów w Polsce*, Kraków 2013, pp. 119-121 (*Varia Culturalia*). 9

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