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Leibniz-Institut
für Sozialwissenschaften

Roma in Central and Eastern Europe

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EDITORIAL

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2005 – 2015 – the Decade of Roma Inclusion in Europe

Dear readers,

We would like to take the 'Decade of Roma Inclusion' as a starting point for putting the situation of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe in the centre of attention of the current issue of the Thematic Series. The Decade is an initiative adopted by twelve European countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Spain[1]) with sizeable Roma minorities. The Decade was initiated at the high-level conference "Roma in an Expanding Europe: Challenges for the Future", hosted by the government of Hungary in June 2003. The conference was organized by the Open Society Institute, the World Bank, and the European Commission, with support from United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Council of Europe Development Bank, and the governments of Finland and Sweden. The Decade is the first joint effort aiming at changing the lives of Roma in Europe. Running from 2005-2015, the Decade serves as an action framework for governments and will monitor progress in accelerating social inclusion and improving the socio-economic status of Roma across Europe. Within the framework of the Decade four priority areas have been defined: education, employment, health and housing and the participating countries had to develop National Action Plans indicating goals to be achieved for the areas mentioned above.

The present issue includes twelve contributions focusing on Roma in Central and Eastern European countries. The issue commences with two articles looking into the situation of Roma in the whole CEE region in the context of the transformations following the collapse of communism (Sławomir Kapralski) and current characteristics of the Roma population in a comparative manner (Anikó Bernát). The following ten contributions provide insights into the problems faced by this most vulnerable minority in Europe, such as discrimination, poverty, unemployment, difficult access to education and other social services, etc. The case-perspective allows for drawing similarities between the countries not only in respect to the precarious living conditions of Roma, but also regarding difficulties in establishing successful policies targeted at combating Roma exclusion and improvement of their life standard. The issue also includes a contribution presenting a comprehensive overview of research into Roma and into Roma related issues undertaken in Serbia (Suzana Ignjatovic).

Editorial team

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[1] Slovenia has an observer status in the initiative.

CONTRIBUTION

Sławomir Kapralski[1]

Democratization in the Post-communist Europe: a Romani Perspective[2]

The Roma in the post-communist Eastern Europe

The developments which took place after 1989 in East Central Europe (ECE) have clearly illustrated the fact that the achievement of freedom and liberty by the states of the region does not necessarily correspond with an improvement of the situation of at least some of their citizens. The group which is frequently mentioned as marginalized, victimized and discriminated against in the new ECE, is the Roma population. According to the authors of the Project on Ethnic Relations (PER) Report, "since the beginning of 1990, Roma have suffered more than 45 attacks, resulting in the deaths of twenty Roma and the destruction of over four hundred Roma dwellings". The violence has been especially well documented in the… Czech and Slovak lands and in Romania and Hungary, but it has also taken place in Poland, Bulgaria, and former Yugoslavia" (PER Report, 1992: 7). Using different statistics (as well as a different definition of a violent attack), the authors of an editorial in Prague's English language weekly Prognosis estimated that between 1991 and 1993 in the Czech and Slovak lands Romanies were the target of 94 attacks and victims of all 16 of the racially motivated murders reported in that time (Prognosis, December 10, 1993: 9).

Of course, the victimization of the Roma is by no means an invention of post-communist Europe. In fact, from its very beginning the history of the Roma among the European people can be described as a continuous history of persecution and violent mistreatment which culminated in the period of the Holocaust and which has contained a very important communist episode: "The Roma have long been the outcasts of Europe and it is sometimes forgotten that they were among the victims of the Holocaust. They were the target of efforts at enforced assimilation by the communist authorities, whose programs all too often destroyed old patterns of culture and social structures without providing coherent alternatives, and left poorly educated, unemployed populations living in deep poverty, segregated, despised by the majority groups, victimized by the darkest prejudices and hatreds, and lacking the group cohesiveness or leadership required to defend themselves against violence, let alone to compete for a place in the sun" (PER Report, 1992: 3).

Violence against the Roma

Different acts of violence directed against the Roma can be divided into three main groups: acts of physical violence aimed at the destruction of the Roma population and individuals; acts and processes resulting in the destruction of the Romani culture; acts of "semantic violence," denying the Roma any distinct identity. In the first category one has to mention destructive mob violence against individual Romanies and their property (resembling very much traditional anti-Jewish pogroms) reported from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Hungary, Poland, Ukraine and Russia. In addition to these rather spontaneous outbursts of anti-Roma sentiments, there are organized, racially-motivated attacks on the Roma, carried out by right-wing extremists, neo-Nazi groups and/or "skinheads" (especially in the Czech Republic). The latter category is even more important for these racially-motivated attacks have often resulted in the Roma men and women being actually killed, while during "pogroms" it is mostly the property which is being destroyed. Of course, pogroms and lynching occur not only in ECE countries: they are reported from Spain, Germany and, quite recently from Austria. Sometimes they are even supported by irresponsible public statements by official political figures, statements that can hardly be distinguished from genocidal appeals. For instance, in 1990 the "British Conservative Councillor Tookey states in a public address that she wants to see 'the filthy, dirty Gypsies recycled and dumped in the sea', following a similar public statement by the Mayor of Dartford in Kent that Gypsies should be 'pushed over the White Cliffs of Dover' " (Hancock, 1991a: 24).

However, in the established democracies statements like those quoted above are easily to be criticized and counteracted not only by human rights activists but also by government's officials, whereas in ECE countries one can see, as Nicolae Gheorghe rightly observes, a widespread "governmental reluctance in condemning publicly, in a clear and unequivocal way, the overt violence and the expressed hostility

conducive to violence against Roma persons and against the Roma population as a whole" (Gheorghe, 1994a: 23) One has to add to this picture an anti-Roma prejudice and hostility expressed in the media throughout the countries of ECE which often denies the Roma the usual ally in the democratic countries: the independent voice of journalists.

Another outrageous example of the physical violence against the Roma population is the program of forcible sterilization of the Romani women in the former Czechoslovakia. "The communist authorities," Aviezer Tucker summarizes, "in a racist policy similar to the eugenics experiments in the American South, attempted to break what they considered a vicious circle of unemployment, welfare dependency, poverty, high demographic growth and crime through the sterilization of Romany women. Some were sterilized without their knowledge while being hospitalized. Others were pressured to agree, or offered considerable financial incentives by social and health workers, to undergo the operation. Post-communist government officials halted the practice of sterilization without explicit and informed consent. Still, there are reports of continued sterilization of Romany women in Slovakia" (Tucker, 1994: 210).

This practice has quite early been documented by human right activists and the International Romani Union has protested against it to the United Nations Organization (Puxon, 1986: 11), without, however, any significant result. Only in 1987, 1111 Czech and Slovak Romani women have been sterilized, with an open support of the medical authorities. For instance, Jiri Biocek, a senior paediatrician, was reported to say: "A gynaecologist has the right to do this [sterilization] without consent. On the one hand there are human rights, but on the other when you see how these Gypsies multiply you can see that it is a population of inferior quality" (Powell, 1994: 111). Opinions like this found backing on the highest governmental level when in 1993 Vladimir Meciar, then the Slovak Prime Minister called the Roma "socially unadaptable and mentally backward" (Powell, 1994: 111).

The culture of the Roma has been gradually destroyed in both spontaneous and planned way. The modernization of the ECE countries during last 50 years put an end to many activities of the Roma, related to the pre-modern type of social life, whereas:

"the Communist regime put an end to the capitalist enterprise of horse-trading, while orchestras and smithing were forbidden as private businesses. With their old trades gone, the Roma were relegated to the ranks of unskilled labour. In one sense, they retained their nomadic life-style, moving from place to place and town to town, but it was not out of choice. Instead, they moved under societal pressures and were kept at the lowest level of social stratification, gradually losing the defining characteristics of an ethnic group and coming to resemble an urban proletariat. In this sense, whole settlements of Roma became 'rootless' (PER Report, 1992: 14)."

Even this forced nomadic life-style ended up with the ban put on Roma travelling, issued in the communist countries at the end of the 1960s and at the beginning of 1970s which lead to the compulsory settlement of the Roma, mostly in the very poor housing conditions. The old culture was thus destroyed without offering conditions for developing a new one. The official program of assimilation failed therefore from the very beginning: without offering the proper conditions any attempts towards assimilating the Roma could result only in marginalizing them. On the other hand the very program of assimilation neither did take into account the existence of the genuine Romani culture, nor did it offer any alternative way of integration or co-habitation of the Roma within the society.

Inequality can be seen as the most important consequence of the marginalization of the Roma. Among its most gruesome aspects one can list the inequality in life expectation, in housing, in employment and in education (Powell, 1994: 106–108). Another result of marginalization is the process of criminalization of the Roma: being left on the margins of a society, without a sufficient maintenance, they become very much vulnerable to the activities considered as being against the existing law. On the other hand, the Roma have been stigmatized as criminals, prior to any evidence, and treated by the police as potential suspects even in cases in which they were in fact the victims. That explains why Romanies often do not report attacks against them: "The police take their testimony," says Bela Edginton, "and then charge the Romanies themselves with a crime" (Lyman, 1994: 5).

In this situation, counteracting the marginalization, inequality, and criminalization, together with the defensive measures against physical violence and destruction of the culture are the most important problems the Romani organizations have to cope with. The most important objectives of their struggle for improvement of the situation of the Roma are equal civil rights, minority rights, political representation, community development, and security. However, in the case of these latter issues, the question can be asked, for whom are these basic human rights to be granted? In other words, Romani elites seem to realize that the most important right for which they should strive is the right to have a commonly accepted and externally recognized self-definition as a group which should be granted consequent rights. Here we are touching upon the third group of the anti-Roma actions which I proposed to call "semantic violence."

I would like to define this term by referring to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "symbolic violence" which means "the imposition of systems of symbolism and meaning (i.e. culture) upon groups or classes in such a way that they are experienced as legitimate" (Jenkins, 1992: 104; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: xiii). By "semantic violence" I understand persisting attempts to define Romanies externally, in ways which would deny the Roma an ethnic or cultural identity. In other words, the labelling process becomes here an aspect of a discourse of power in which the authorities conceptualize the Roma people in a way which facilitates and "legitimizes" the acts of oppression and physical violation.

The evolution of external definitions of the Roma can be presented as a conceptual development from a "social caste," through an "inferior race," to a "social problem." As a caste, the Roma were defined in social terms and placed in the framework of relations with other groups as "a separate collectivity that inherited an imposed position of inferiority" (PER Report, 1992: 12). Later on, this caste-like status was redefined in terms of racist theories to justify the actual slavery to which Romanies were subjected in many countries because of their allegedly inferior racial characteristics. However, the racial definition was semantically compounded with the social one: first, because it "legitimized" the Romanies' social status; second, because the racial attributes merged with the social ones in a way which resulted in a social rather than a racist/ethnic external identification. Finally, in the post-war realities of communist Eastern/Central Europe, Romanies were officially defined as a social population, and not as an ethnic group, a definition which corresponded with the assimilationist policies of different governments in the region. In Czechoslovakia for instance, "the Roma were labelled a social group with a dying ethnic identity, [with] no culture of their own and…language bordering on slang; therefore, they had no right to a distinct ethnic existence" (PER Report, 1992: 12). In Poland, the situation differed only slightly: according to Andrzej Mirga, until 1989 "the Roma were recognized as people of Gypsy origin, but the Gypsies were considered an 'ethnographic category' rather than an ethnic group" (PER Report, 1992: 12).

One may list two main groups of forces promoting the "social" definition of Romanies. First, such a definition provided governments with a convenient excuse for not granting the Roma those rights that are usually attributed to ethnic groups and for refusing to assume the responsibilities of "host" societies (PER Report 1992: 13).[3] Second, the definition in social terms served as a legitimization of anti-Romani state policies. The Roma were defined as a social group not because governmental experts believed them to have any special kind of "social identity," but because they were targeted as a "social problem", a "pathology" with which state institutions had to deal. Such an approach implied that, in the best scenario, any existing ethnic and cultural differences of a targeted group were merely neglected, and in the worst case, transformed into social deviance which should be eliminated (PER Report, 1992: 13).

The breakdown of communism and its consequences for the Roma

The collapse of communism put an end to programmatic governmental efforts to destroy the traditional cultural patterns of Roma, their social structure, ways of life, and economic infrastructure. There is, however, little consolation in this fact for the assimilationist policy employed by communist governments turned out to be very efficient.

To some extent, the collapse of communism has had a positive outcome in allowing Romanies to organize themselves and to find ways of expressing their interests. It has also increased the possibilities for self-definition: in Poland for instance, according to Andrzej Mirga, the Roma have been recognized after 1989 as an ethnic group (although not as a nationality group), while before that date they were generally perceived as a merely "ethnographic category" (PER Report, 1992: 12).

In general, however, the transition towards democracy has influenced Romanies in a rather negative way. First, the transition period, with all the insecurities and difficulties connected with it, has resulted in a well-known scapegoat effect, with the Roma as an easy target to blame. Consequently, at the beginning of the transition process, Romanies were portrayed as black marketeers, becoming rich in an illegal way, and blamed for shortages of goods. Later on, in a "logic" typical of scapegoating, the Roma have become despised as an extremely poor group, spoiling the rosy picture of booming economies that East European governments have tried to present to the West (Gheorghe, 1991: 836–840).

Secondly, the manifestations, often violent, of popular anti-Roma sentiments can now be expressed freely without being counteracted by the state apparatus. One might call this mechanism a decentralization of violence: "Under the Communist regimes," according to the Project on Ethnic Relations Report, "violence against the Roma was fairly well restrained unless it occurred at state

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[3] This was, however, by no means an exclusively Communist policy: in 1992 the German government refused to recognize the Roma as an ethnic minority in Germany.

direction. Since the revolutions, however, both open discrimination and violent racism have been on the rise. Before, the state dictated social norms and behaviour, and norms were always defined to enhance the stability of the state. Now, the still weak state leaderships bend before popular opinion and, when popular opinion is racist, the state has done little to counter it" (PER Report, 1992: 14–15).2[4]

The racist character of the popular opinion has been proved by numerous surveys. One of them, conducted in 1994 in the Czech Republic by the Men, Education, and New Technologies Foundation together with Gabal Analysis and Consulting and sponsored by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, indicates for instance that for the Czechs, "when it comes to making a judgment on how a person is viewed, skin color remains the most decisive factor." According to the report, Romanies, the "people with dark skin," are perceived as "an irresponsible and dishonest population inclined to fraud… [who] don't like to work and abuse social benefits" and seventy-eight percent of the interviewed Czechs would favour "strict legislation…explicitly and ethnically directed at the repression of the Romanies" (Lesenarova and Baimbridge, 1995: 6).[5] In this situation the following opinion of Andrzej Mirga does not come by surprise: "In the view of ordinary Roma people," Mirga says, "the reality of new democracy gave them nothing but a growing sense of insecurity" (Mirga, 1994: 30).

Still another aspect of the situation of the Roma in the post-communist Europe is connected with the raising nationalism in the region. It is, moreover, a peculiar form of nationalism which draws upon the ancient conception of a nation as a community "of people of the same descent, who are integrated geographically, in the form of settlements or neighbourhoods, and culturally by their common language, customs and traditions" (Habermas, 1992: 3). In consequence, the Eastern/Central European version of nationalism has particularly emphasized the idea of an ethnically homogeneous state and the concept of nationality as based on "objective" criteria: commonly shared culture, language, ethnicity, religion (Mommsen, 1990: 213–214).

The Roma do not share most of these "objective" criteria. Thus, they are often perceived as "strangers" who endanger the ethnic homogeneity and "strength of the nation." Moreover, in the ECE countries a division between national identity and citizenship has never been successfully made and the eighteenth century concept of the nation of citizens, the nation which "does not derive its identity from some common ethnic and cultural properties, but rather from the praxis of citizens who actively exercise their civil rights" (Habermas, 1992: 3) has never been deeply rooted in the popular thought.

For the Roma it means that they might be excluded from the ranks of co-nationals, which in the case of post-communist countries often means a kind of second-class citizenship or even no citizenship at all, as in the case of many Roma citizens of the former Czechoslovakia who, after the split of they country into Czech Republic and Slovakia, and because of the new citizenship law ended up practically stateless (Leuprecht, 1994: 9).

Roma defensive strategies

As Peter Leuprecht, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, rightly observed, all the strategies which may be used by Romanies to improve their situation have to solve a problem of how successfully obtain two kinds of rights which apparently are contradicting each other: the right to be different (to preserve the separate cultural identity of the Roma) and the right to be the same (to obtain full and equal participation in society) (Leuprecht, 1994: 9).[6]

The first strategy we may list here does not meet the first criterion: it is simply the strategy of total assimilation that "would imply the abandonment of anything like a strong Roma identity for the sake of being incorporated into the dominant society" (PER Report 1992: 19). Even if possible at all, such an assimilation would perhaps secure "the right to be" but it would definitely not preserve any distinct Roma identity. The tendency not to strive for the right to be different is quite popular among some groups of Roma. The German Sinti, for instance, have been trying to obtain recognition as a German nationality group (deutsche Volksgruppe), which would provide them the status of an inherent part of German society, while in Slovakia, only six percent of Roma students would like to be seen as having a different ethnic background than the dominant population (Gheorghe, 1991: 840; PER Report, 1992: 19).

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[4] A notable exception is the Czech Republic, where the state took an actively anti-Roma policy in its new citizenship law (Zoon, 1994; Beck, 1994). However, contrary to the Communist regime of Czechoslovakia with its attempt at forcible assimilation, the post-Communists government of the Czech Republic aims rather at excluding the Roma population from the legal construction of the new Republic's citizenship.

[5] The results of a more recent survey, conducted by the IVVM Institute, are slightly more optimistic: according to them the negative opinion about Romanies has been expressed by sixty-nine percent of the Czechs ('Gazeta Wyborcza', December 16-17, 1995, p. 17).

[6] One also may add here the very basic right to be at all, directed against physical extermination, and the right to have an independent self-definition, directed against semantic violence.

The second strategy, contrary to the first one, denies any merits of the right to be the same. It advocates to its very limits the right to be different. It is the strategy of total separation which "implies complete withdrawal from the main community, including language, schools, even territory" (PER Report, 1992: 19). In its radical form, this strategy may consist of appeal for a territorial autonomy, which can often be found in the history of the Roma nationalism. Even the idea of an independent state has existed in Roma history and continues to be advocated by some radicals although it is not accepted by most of the Roma organizations. One of the first attempts towards obtaining a territorial homeland, "Romanestan," was made before World War II by Janusz Kwiek, the Romani leader in Poland, when he petitioned Mussolini to offer the Romanies a part of what was then Abyssynia. Recently, the most unobstructed exponent of the independent Roma state is Ronald Lee, his aspirations being influenced, among others, by the Quebec Liberation movement (Acton, 1974: 233–234). The official standpoint of the World Romani Congress, however, is that "we must create Romanestan–in our hearts," a notion which allows its leaders "to retain the emotional connotations of the idea of 'Romanestan'… without exposing themselves to the cogent arguments against any attempt to set up a second Israel" (Acton, 1974: 234).

The separation would also mean the total acceptance of the external definition of the Roma, the acceptance of the label given them by the authorities. In fact, there are many different groups of Roma and differences between them are sometimes of crucial importance. One has to agree with Leo Lucassen who in his study has contested "the view held by the most tsiganologists that people are termed 'gypsies' because they are gypsies, that is, define themselves as such" (Lucassen, 1991: 89). The strategy of separation would in fact mean the acceptance of the external label of "gypsiness" and building the group identity around its negative social perception: a phenomenon called by Lucassen "minoritization." "The labelling by authorities of certain categories as different, unwanted or even dangerous, not only influences their position in society in a negative way, the power of definition by authorities can even initiate group formation and minoritization. People who at the outset felt no, or only weak ties with one another can be driven towards each other and in the course of time become a minority or project themselves as one" (Lucassen, 1991: 91).

There is however the third possibility which could prove to be viable in avoiding the problems of the two just described and simultaneously able to combine the two types of rights as advocated by Leuprecht. It is a process of political ethnogenesis of the Roma. Following (and slightly changing) the concept of Nicolae Gheorghe, I could say that political ethnogenesis in case of the Roma means a conscious attempt toward achieving the accepted status of a politically organized, non-territorial (transnational), ethnic-national group (Gheorghe, 1991: 831).

Nicolae Gheorghe, advocating the political rather than cultural character of Roma ethnogenesis, stresses the fact that Roma ethnicity should not be perceived as an independent variable. It is, in his opinion, a consequence of political actions taken to secure the existence of the Roma and to provide them with recognition. Of course, this process does not mean an abandonment of ethnic identity. It is rather conceived as an adherence to a different type of nationalism than the ethnic type dominant in Eastern/Central Europe. This new political nationalism means first of all political organization and participation in political life; it strives to create a common arena in which people of different ethnicity could co-operate in solving their problems, without allowing the differences between them to become the predominant issue which would exclude communication. In such a project, "culture moves to politics" (Gheorghe, 1991: 842) the most secure place for cultural difference seems to be the sphere of interaction between equal political agents in which political homogenization protects ethnic heterogeneity.

In other words, the Roma could turn out to be more advanced in their understanding of identity than the societies in which they live. They could become "politically organized people," following of what Habermas has described as the modern conception of citizenship where a legal political concept, not ethnic cultural, defines identity in the first place. In this sense, to use Gheorghe's words, the task of the Romani organizations is to build the identity of the Roma people "as a political people in the Greek sense of this term" (Gheorghe, 1994a: 5). That means, once again referring to Habermas, people who are the members of a polity, who share political membership, and whose identity is defined in a legal, not ethnic, sense. In this sense the Roma self-definition as politically organized people resembles very much of what Habermas thinks to be the crucial element of a liberal definition of citizenship. And, since in the final instance citizenship is for Habermas defined in terms of civil rights, one may say that the same rights which define Roma identity define the notion of citizenship in a democratic society.

For Gheorghe, one of the most influential Romani leaders, this conclusion seems to be self-evident: to be "a political people in the Greek sense of the word" means for him "to contribute to the education of our people as responsible citizens of the country where they are living, and to look at how the

governments of these countries are respecting the rights of our people as citizens of these states" (Gheorghe, 1994a: 5).

However, in another statement, Gheorghe developed even broader understanding of the Roma identity as a legal-political construct, which expands beyond the borders of a nation state. "In the present time of an emerging pan-European Rule of Law," he said, "Roma, an European people without a kin-state of their own, are choosing the Rule of Law and Democracy as our main civic identifications and as our 'motherland' " (Gheorghe, 1994b: 14). This idea, which would definitely earn Habermas' admiration, brings us to the next defining element of the Roma strategy: to transnationality.

In the world in which the importance of the nation-state declines and the importance of transnational actors increases, in the world of the "evolving patterns of interdependence, dependency, and global dominance throughout the world system," ethnicity, too, "may be conceptualized as an evolving transnational force" (Stack, 1981: 28). The Roma ethnicity is somehow predestined to be transnational, taking into account the traditionally nomadic lifestyle of the Romanies. In this respect, the Roma tradition could turn out to be very modern, or even post-modern. As Aviezer Tucker observes, "The Romanies' traditional lifestyle combines the pre-modern with the post-modern. The nomadic, unsettled, uprooted, yet artistic and free way of life is at once pre-modern in its inability to adapt to modern industrial society, and postmodern in its disregard of national borders and modern ideologies and value systems" (Tucker, 1994: 209).[7]

The concept of the Roma as transnational people does not mean, however, only freedom of travelling, although this is a very important practical objective of the actions taken by the Roma organizations. It also means a refusal to accept the world of nation states with their ethnic definitions of identity and citizenship, and, instead adhering to the "motherland of European law." On the other hand, however, one of the basic aims of the Romani elites in the area of human rights is to be recognized precisely as a nation, a fact marked symbolically by the attention being paid to national emblems. The first World Romani Congress, held in 1971 near London, adopted the Romani anthem and the national flag, consisting of two horizontal bars, the lower green, the upper blue, with the red, sixteen-spoked chakra-wheel. The next Congress, held in Geneva, addressed a petition to all UNO member states to admit the Romanies "as a distinct nation and to treat them as a national minority possessing equal rights" (Bartosz, 1993: 15). The petition, presented to the NGO bureau of the United Nations in New York, has so far resulted in consultative status for the Romani Union with the United Nations, received in 1979 (Hancock, 1991b: 146; Puxon, 1987: 3).

Conclusions

The main aim of this essay was to show the democratic transformations in the formerly communist countries from the point of view of Roma: the minority which has permanently been discriminated against and marginalized in Central and Eastern Europe. Since communism added its own peculiar flavour to the persecutions of the Roma, one could expect that since its collapse the situation of the Roma has improved. It is, however, much more complicated. The Roma definitely have obtained the right of self-organization and articulation of their interest. "Market economy" has allowed them to legalize the businesses and trades which were to a large degree illegal under the communism as "private enterprises." On the other hand, the collapse of the "planned economy" made the economic situation of the large part of the Roma worse. This is the case of those who were absorbed by the process of "communist industrialization" and found their chance in moving into cities where they become workers in mines or steel factories, obtained an apartment in a block of flats and other social benefits. This is also the case of those who preserved more independent life style but lived in the symbiosis with the communist economy, providing goods and services which were not offered by the communist industry. The first group, consisting mostly of the low-skilled workers, was first to be fired when the big communist plants collapsed or started a difficult process of reforms. The second group lost its economic niche.

The second aspect of the situation of the Roma is connected with the process of constructing or regaining identities by the nations of Central and Eastern Europe. The collapse of communism was followed by the growing nationalist tendencies and development of the extreme nationalist groups which understand national identity rather in ethnic than in civic-political terms. The ideal picture envisioned by those groups is a homogeneous nation-state, a community united by the same ethnic origins. In such a vision there is no place for multiculturality, for people of clearly different descent who would accept the collective identity as fellow citizens but either would not like or would not be granted

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[7] Tucker's opinion, however, needs to be taken with some reservation, because the Roma tradition has been largely destroyed over the course of the past several decades. One may speak here rather of the 'invention of tradition' (Hobsbawm, 1983) in which the traditional elements are being re-created in an entirely new context of transnational, legal-political concept of identity.

the status of fellow nationals. In many countries the collapse of communism meant for the Roma the loss of state protection and the danger of being exposed to the attacks – sometimes having clearly racist motivation – of extreme nationalists. On the other hand, democratization in the post-communist countries means also the development of the human rights sector, establishing institutions supervising the situation of minorities and an international control of the standards regulating the majority-minority relations. The Roma do not have a single strategy either. Some of them tend to assimilate since they do not see a chance of "being Rom" in a society which does not accept difference, some tend to improve their situation using the concept of human rights, some attempt at achieving the status of national minority and fight for political representation.

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