

## The Czech lands and Slovakia: Another false dawn?

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### ROMANI BROTHERS AND SISTERS!

*Wake up! Let's wake up one another! The day our ancestors have awaited for many years has arrived. For the first time Roma who live in this land can take their fate into their own hands. Now it is up to us to decide how we are going to support each other and what we are going to do for our children.*

(quoted Davidová 1995: 220)

The ringing words of this early 1990 pamphlet, printed in Romani, Czech and Slovak, rallied Roma throughout Czechoslovakia to support their own all-Roma political party, Romani Civic Initiative (ROI), in the first free elections after the 'Velvet Revolution' had overthrown Communist power. The leadership of this fledgling party, drawn from the small but significant Romani intelligentsia, felt they had good reason for their optimism as, compared with their fellows elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe, Roma in Czechoslovakia were perhaps the most integrated into wider society.

Ever since the ending of the Second World War the Czechoslovak industrial economy, more developed than its agricultural neighbours, had swiftly drawn Roma into mainstream employment and, although utilising them almost entirely as unskilled labourers, had provided many with reasonable wages and the chance to improve their living conditions. Also, a brief window of opportunity from 1969-73 had permitted Roma to form their own cultural and economic associations, in some ways the precursors of the Romani organisations of the 1990s.

But, at the same time, widespread repression had accompanied these undeniable benefits. State policy had breached the constitution and led to frequent denials of Romani human rights as freedom of movement was curtailed, women were coerced into sterilisation and children were increasingly consigned to special schools for the intellectually impaired. In spite of progress in their material circumstances many Roma were still condemned to ill-health and an early death. In 1989, shortly before the collapse of Commu-

nism, the journal *Demografie* noted that, during the decade 1970–80, Romani life expectancy at birth was 55.3 years for men and 59.5 years for women. These low levels were described as similar to those of 'developing countries' and equivalent to Czechoslovak life expectancies 'in the thirties' (Kalibová 1989: 250). It was little wonder, then, that the new Romani politicians were bitterly critical of previous policy towards Roma.

A decade later, the initial eager anticipation of the post-Communist world had been bitterly disappointed as the successor governments in both parts of the now divided state proved unable to protect their Romani citizens from savage, racist attacks or provide them with employment. Staring into a future without hope, large numbers of despairing Roma had turned their backs on their homelands and taken the extreme path of seeking asylum elsewhere in Europe and beyond. It could be argued that only the threat this flight posed to early entry into the European Union (EU) prompted Czech and Slovak political leaders to begin to take seriously, at long last, the desperate situation of their Roma fellow citizens.

This extended chapter covers what are now two separate countries. The justification is that not only were these combined in a unitary state for most of the twentieth century until 1993 but also that almost all the present-day Roma of the Czech Republic have their origins in Slovakia and often maintain extended family connections. This chapter explores parallels and differences between Communist and post-Communist experience and suggests that the inability, or reluctance, of central governments to impose their political will on local authorities might continue to frustrate attempts to improve the situation of Roma, just as it had in Communist times. While such an outcome would probably not prevent the entry of the Czech Republic and Slovakia to the EU, it would undoubtedly lead to further intensification of inter-ethnic pressures.

### Roma in Slovakia and the Czech lands before Communism

Shortly after the first recorded appearance in 1399 of Roma in the Czech lands a large band managed to obtain letters of safe conduct in 1423 from the Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund at Spiš castle in eastern Slovakia (Horváthová 1964: 37, Fraser 1992: 76). They did not remain long in Slovakia but travelled on. Around this time similar groups arriving from the east aroused great interest throughout Western Europe, and can perhaps be regarded as the precursors of the 'western pattern' of Roma development. There, Roma have made a living by skilfully utilising niches that generally required nomadism within developed capitalist economies. To the east, in less advanced economic conditions, Roma were needed for their labour power and were often encouraged or forced to settle from an early date (Guy 1975a: 204

and 2001, Mirga and Gheorghie 1997: 5). The territory of the former Czechoslovakia straddles this developmental divide.

As early as the fifteenth century many Roma apparently settled soon after arrival in Slovakia, frequently in the vicinity of feudal castles such as Spiš, where the men found employment as grooms, smiths, musicians – and frequently as soldiers – while the women worked mainly as domestic servants and washerwomen. However, they remained distinct from the local peasantry, differentiated by their dark skin, language and customs. This separation was heightened by the fact that their arrival coincided with incursions by the Turks. Roma, in both the Czech lands and Slovakia, were frequently accused of acting as spies and incendiaries for these feared invaders. For long periods, as in the troubled aftermath of the Thirty Years' War (1618–48), they received savage treatment including execution and mutilation to deter further incursions but in Slovakia they were generally dealt with more leniently (Horváthová 1964: 97, Guy 1975a: 208–9, Jamnická-Šmerglová: 44–51).

In the Czech lands Roma remained nomadic, pursuing 'traditional' occupations such as horse-dealing, fortune-telling, dispensing folk medicine, begging and petty thieving, but in Slovakia nomads had dwindled to a small minority by the end of the nineteenth century. A census in 1893 recorded around 36,000 Roma in Slovakia of whom 2,000 were categorised as 'semi-nomadic' – with a winter base of a hut or tent – and only 600 (less than 2 per cent) as 'nomadic' (Horváthová 1964: 138).

The pace of sedentarisation had probably been accelerated by a sustained thirty-year assimilation campaign during the eighteenth century. The Habsburg monarchs, Maria Theresa and her successor Joseph II, attempted to turn all Roma on their lands into productive workers and raise taxes from them as part of an overall plan to transform their realm into a rational, centralised state (Willems 1997: 31–4). Their measures went far beyond settling those who were still nomadic and banning occupations such as horse-dealing. The aim was to integrate all Roma by housing them in serfs' villages and setting them to work as labourers on projects such as road-building or ditching, if they were not already engaged in craft work. In order to hasten their assimilation into the peasantry, Roma were forbidden to use their own Romani language, wear 'outlandish' clothes or 'waste time on music'. Most draconian of all, their children were to be forcibly removed and brought up by non-Roma. To signal the disappearance of this group as a distinct minority and the effective abolition of their identity the Roma were renamed *Neuhauern* (new farmers) or *Ujmagyar* (new Hungarians) (Horváthová 1964: 113–36, Guy 1975b, Fraser 1992: 157–61).

How Roma were viewed in the first Czechoslovak Republic (1918–38), which united the Czech lands with Slovakia, is evident less from their formal status than from their treatment. Although they were recognised as a separate nationality in the 1921 constitution, in the same year the government

circulated copies of the 1888 Austrian regulations on registering nomads. These repressive rules were to form the basis of Law 117 directed against 'nomadic gypsies' in 1927 (Horváthová 1964: 155, 161–2, Nečas 1995: 31–3, Guy 1975a: 211).

Such legislative changes were of less relevance to the settled Roma of Slovakia than their widespread destitution in the depressed economic conditions after the First World War and in the 1930s, which proved fertile ground for the rise of political extremism. The Slovak Peasants' Union complained bitterly that 'since they have nothing, the gypsies either beg or steal and as poverty cases are a burden on the peasantry' (quoted Horváthová 1964: 154). Others took more direct action, launching pogroms in reprisal for crop pilfering in which Roma were murdered and their huts razed to the ground. Even though young children were among the fatalities, the national daily *Slovák* condoned one attack as 'a [democratic] citizens' revolt against gypsy life', adding '[t]he gypsy element, such as it is today, is really an ulcer on the body of our social life which must be cured in a radical way' (Nováček 1968: 25–6). Meanwhile, mounting feeling against the Roma led to their exclusion from larger towns, particularly those with spas and a tourist trade (Horváthová 1964: 167). Yet not all Czechs and Slovaks shared this hostility for some remarkable, if isolated, attempts were made to improve the situation of Roma, particularly in the field of education.<sup>1</sup>

During the rise of fascism, pogroms against Roma also occurred in neighbouring Austria and Germany (Nováček 1968: 87) – precursors of the Holocaust to come during the Second World War when up to half a million of the region's Roma perished alongside the Jews.<sup>2</sup> At this time the two parts of the dismembered Republic came to exemplify the most extreme versions of the western and eastern 'solutions' to the 'gypsy problem'. In what had become the Czech Protectorate, all but a few hundred out of 6,500 Roma<sup>3</sup> were annihilated in the concentration camps, while in Slovakia, although many men served in forced labour camps, most of the estimated 100,000 Roma survived the war (Jámnická-Šmergllová 1955: 80–6, Horváthová 1964: 173, Daniel 1994: 125–35). Those in Slovakia owed their survival to the Nazi 'divide and rule' policy, for the eventual planned extermination of all Roma was delayed in the puppet state of the fascist Slovak Hlinka Party.

The extent of Czech and Slovak complicity in the 'final solution' of the 'gypsy problem' is unclear. It is undisputed that Slovak Hlinka guards carried out a series of bloody pogroms, burning Roma alive in their huts and machine-gunning those who tried to escape but only recently have investigations been published on Czech involvement in operating concentration camps for Roma in Lety and Hodonin (Nečas 1994, Pape 1997). However, there is evidence that some Slovaks and Czechs tried to protect their local Roma. Likewise, Roma sheltered and fought alongside Slovak partisans and were decorated for their heroism (Kenrick and Puxon 1972: 135–9).

### The Communist period – material progress and assimilation

The creation of the first Czechoslovak Republic in 1918 had juxtaposed, for the first time within a modern state, 'eastern' Roma in Slovakia with 'western' industrialisation in the Czech lands, but it was only after 1945 that an expanding peacetime economy needed to draw on this potential workforce. Post-war Czechoslovakia, the most industrialised state in the region and where wartime damage had been minimal, experienced a labour shortage that was particularly acute in areas of heavy industry. This was largely the consequence of the violent expulsion, in 1945, of the three million-strong German minority in retribution for its part in dismantling the inter-war republic (Plichtová 1993: 14). The immediate solution lay to hand in the Roma of Slovakia.

Gypsies were moved from Slovakia to Czech industrial centres ... [near] the Czech-German border where they were employed, housed primarily in camps, and paid meagre wages. Their labour served, in part, to put the Czechoslovak economy back on its feet.

(Kostelancik 1989: 309)

Far from all the new Roma workers were supplied by these enforced relocations, eventually discontinued in 1947, for thousands more followed them voluntarily (Grulich and Haisman 1986, Hübschmannová 1999: 126–7).<sup>4</sup> Whole families abandoned their huts in the segregated, shanty-town settlements of rural Slovakia, which had been the characteristic abode of most Roma for centuries, and flooded westwards in search of work. Soon these new arrivals had more than replaced the former Romani inhabitants of the Czech lands – but with the crucial difference that they were not nomads but rural-to-urban migrant workers.<sup>5</sup> As with migrant labour in Western economies, these newcomers were assigned the least desirable and most arduous work – men generally as heavy labourers in road-building and the construction industry but also as miners and factory workers; women mainly as cleaners, street-sweepers and dish-washers but sometimes as factory workers too (Lacková 2000: 172–9). For the first time in history Roma were entering the general labour market on a large scale and these migrants became the most proletarianised and urbanised of all European Roma.

On arrival from Slovakia, Roma were generally assigned to dilapidated inner-city housing as more suitable for them.<sup>6</sup> Romani families soon became concentrated in the decayed urban cores of Czech industrial areas during the 1950s, prompting the authorities to note with alarm that these migrants were not vanishing amongst other town-dwellers. With their distinctively dark skin and expressive behaviour they remained highly visible and separate communities in what had become virtually minor ghettos. Meanwhile, in Slovakia, the

isolated Romani settlements continued to be overcrowded and dangerously insanitary in spite of heavy out-migration. After years of concern the government eventually took action and in 1958 launched an ambitious campaign to turn the Roma into model socialist citizens by integrating them fully into the workforce and the community (Háišman 1999, Jurová 1993, Guy 1977). The timing was partly, although not entirely, a response to the lead given in 1956 by the USSR in banning nomadism, also followed in Hungary, Poland and Bulgaria (Lemon 2001, Kovats 2001, Mróz 2001, Marushiakova and Popov 2001).<sup>7</sup>

As with the Habsburgs,<sup>8</sup> wasted productive potential was a fundamental issue for the Communist state and consequently its first priority was to ensure that every adult Rom was drawn into permanent employment. The handbook to guide the practice of local authorities explained that:

Heavy losses to the national economy ... are caused by this labour reserve of tens of thousands of predominantly young gypsies who either do not work at all or else whose work output is very low.

(Czechoslovak Socialist Government 1959: 7-8)

Apart from its economic motivation the Communist assimilation campaign most closely resembled its Habsburg predecessor in the all-embracing scope of its attack on Romani identity for the Communists believed that integration could be successfully achieved only by the complete assimilation of all Roma. Accordingly, they denied any validity for Romani identity on the grounds that oppression under previous social orders had irreparably damaged Romani culture. Although Roma were not renamed 'new Czechs' or 'new Slovaks', as formerly, the formulation 'citizen of gypsy origin' was introduced to indicate that distinct Romani identity was a relic of the past.

Experience shows that all measures which revive gypsy national [sic] consciousness, and their own special organisation and autonomy, preserve the present isolation and separation of gypsies from the remainder of the population, prevent the penetration of everything progressive from our environment ... and help conserve the old, primitive gypsy way of life with all its bad habits.

(Czechoslovak Socialist Government 1959: 28)

The ideological rationale was the questionable claim that Roma failed to meet Marxist-Leninist criteria for national minority status (Sus 1961), but such an intransigent stance was characteristic of a period when the Party was consolidating its position by centralising power and curtailing any minority aspirations. At this time even Slovak Communists, seeking greater autonomy within the republic, were imprisoned on charges of bourgeois nationalism, while a leading Romani activist who sought permission to establish a cultural organisation for Roma was threatened with the same fate (Hübschmannová 1968: 37).<sup>9</sup>

A strategy of population dispersal was adopted at the outset but for it to be effective there had to be some means of administratively controlling the location of Roma. Law 74/1958 'on the permanent settlement of nomads', with sanctions of up to three years imprisonment, formally deprived an estimated 20,000-27,000 Roma of their right to freedom of movement and was potentially applicable to the remainder. But while the travels of the estimated 6,000 nomadic Vlach Roma were brought to a sudden end, the main apparent target - the 150,000 or more sedentary Slovak Roma - were left for the most part unscathed (Guy 1975a: 214-5). Seven years later, in an attempt to accelerate assimilation, Government Decree 502/1965 introduced a planned programme for transferring Roma from overcrowded settlements in Slovakia and dispersing them to suitable locations in the Czech lands. A maximum permissible proportion of Roma per community was set at 5 per cent (Guy 1975a: 219-20, Hübschmannová 1968: 39). As a Romani spokesman sardonically commented: 'They planned the numbers for each village - horses, cows and Gypsies' (Hübschmannová 1968: 37).

Within three years these unrealistic plans were frustrated, mainly by the refusal of Czech local authorities to accept shipments of Roma from Slovakia, and the co-ordinating government committee was dissolved in acknowledgement of its failure (Guy 1977: 249-342). Soon after, in 1968, federalisation of the republic allowed the Czechs to distance themselves still further from what the Slovaks vehemently insisted was a problem of whole-state dimensions. Apprehensively, they interpreted this move as an ominous statement of intent by the Czechs to refuse equal responsibility in any future solution (Guy 1998: 50-1).

[These changes] ... perhaps suit the Czech regions where there are about 40,000 gypsies. In Slovakia, where today we have 170,000 (of which perhaps 100,000 live in quite inhuman conditions), the latest administrative structure for solving the gypsy question is utterly unsuitable.

(Slovak Socialist Government 1968)

While federalisation had negative consequences for Roma - and undoubtedly prepared the ground for their problems following the 1993 break-up of the republic - it stemmed from a more tolerant approach to minorities during the brief period of political liberalisation known as the 'Prague Spring' of 1968. The collapse of the 'transfer and dispersal' programme coincided with this breathing-space, allowing Roma activists to gain permission, in both the Czech lands and Slovakia, to establish their own cultural and economic organisations, the Association of Gypsies-Roma (*Svaz Cikánů-Romů* in Czech). Lack of a credible alternative official policy allowed this experiment to continue for a few short years during the repressive period of 'normalisation' when the other reforms of the Dubček regime were reversed. A delegation<sup>10</sup> from the Czech branch took part in the historic, first World Romani

Congress in London in 1971 and later, Czechoslovak Roma in exile continued to play an important part in the development of the International Romani Union (Acton and Klimová 2001).<sup>11</sup>

Eventually, these associations were unceremoniously swept aside in 1973, partly on the grounds that they had failed in the tasks in which the Party had made it impossible for them to succeed but also because of fears of renewed demands for national minority status (Davidová 1995: 208–9). However, the Slovak Government had not even waited for the abolition of its Romani association before adopting a declared approach of ‘acculturation’ in 1972 (Jurová 1993: 93). Essentially a reversion to the earlier one-sided view that problems stemmed entirely from the ‘cultural backwardness of Gypsies’, this implied stripping Roma of their culture and re-educating them (Davidová 1995: 208–9). The language of policy-makers in the Czech lands was more temperate but, there too, Romani initiatives were ruled out in spite of frequent repetition of the mantra ‘social integration’.

Six years after the suppression of the short-lived Romani associations, a dissident group, Charter 77<sup>12</sup>, published a caustic report on Communist policy towards Roma listing specific human rights abuses (Charter 77 1979). This maintained that the denial of national minority status to Roma, which underpinned the rationale of the policy, ‘was dictated by the desire of the ruling powers to reduce the size of the minority problem’ (Charter 77 1979). Population control took a specific form in the case of Roma. Some of the fiercest condemnation in the report was of the practice of sterilising Romani women, either under duress and bribed by financial inducements, or without their knowledge at childbirth or during other operations (Charter 77 1979b: 22, Tritt 1992: 19–35, Pellar and Andrs 1990).<sup>13</sup>

Another main target of criticism was the planned segregation of Roma, which occurred in both halves of the Republic, in dedicated blocks of flats in towns where they were most numerous, a reversal of the earlier policy of dispersal and amounting to municipally-sponsored ghettos (Tritt: 56–8).<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, in rural Slovakia, settlement sizes were growing as Roma were often blocked from buying or building houses in ‘white’ villages, perpetuating apartheid-style segregation (Guy 1975b, Lacková 2000: 183–4).

At the same time, the physical segregation of Romani dwellings was complemented by a matching educational ghetto as growing numbers of Romani children were unjustifiably consigned to special schools for those with learning disabilities (Tritt 1992: 37–9). The Charter 77 report denounced this practice, as did a much later ERRC investigation which reported that ‘[c]omprehensive statistical evidence [reveals that] ... from the early 1970s until 1990 ... there was a dramatic increase of Roma in special schools. By the mid-1980s almost every second Romani child attended a special school’ (ERRC 1999a: 16).

Most of the measures condemned by the report were not new but rather a

continuation of long-established practices. The use of the 1958 law on nomadism to control the movement of Roma, ‘who, while not nomads, are forced to migrate on account of living conditions not of their own making’, was branded as ‘racist repression’ (Charter 77 1979a: 7). In practice, this law had failed to stem the continuing migratory tide<sup>15</sup> and of more concern to Roma was the frequent and illegal refusal by local authorities, mainly Czech, to register them as residents – even if they already had found jobs (Charter 77 1979a: 7–8, Guy 1975b).<sup>16</sup> As a result, newcomers were excluded from the housing list and forced either to crowd in with relatives or squat in near-derelict buildings. A bleak alternative was to live in basic barracks near their workplace, commuting home to their families only at weekends. In many ways their situation was akin to that of migrant workers in the West, needed for their labour power but undesired as citizens – with the major difference that this was their own country (Guy 1975b).

The employment level for male Roma of productive age had reached the national average by 1970 in the Czech lands and was not far behind in Slovakia. Employment rates for Romani women were lower, particularly in Slovakia, but these showed a steady increase (MPSV 1971: Table III). Nevertheless, the claim to have integrated Roma into the labour force was sharply challenged in the Charter 77 report by the accusation that the Communist administration was deliberately perpetuating the disadvantaged situation of Roma in order to keep them as a flexible and compliant reserve pool of unskilled labour. A perceptive warning emphasised the acute vulnerability of Roma workers should the economy modernise in the future.

The demand for unskilled labour will then fall, threatening the Roma with massive unemployment which will expose this ruthlessly urbanised minority to extreme pressures, and fuse their social ostracism and material oppression with a new ethnic consciousness, all the stronger the more cruelly it is today suppressed.

(Charter 77 1979b: 7)

Exactly a decade later this chilling prophecy was to be fulfilled.

### Another false dawn? The first decade of post-Communism

The 1989 Velvet Revolution brought liberation from Communist rule to the Czech and Slovak peoples – including the half million or more Roma.<sup>17</sup> The dramatic change offered hope of greater Romani integration into public life and first omens seemed promising as formal political gains were accompanied by a flowering of Romani culture.<sup>18</sup>

The charismatic new president, Václav Havel, had been the leading figure in the Charter 77 dissident movement, championing the Romani cause.

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Consequently, the newly-formed Romani Civic Initiative (ROI) was included as a partner in the coalition parties which swept to victory in the first post-Communist elections – Civic Forum (OF) in the Czech lands and Public against Violence (VPN) in Slovakia.<sup>19</sup> Matching their new political representation the formal status of Roma was reconsidered and in April 1991 the Slovak Government resolved 'to acknowledge the Roma to be a nationality in the contemporary terminology and to guarantee their political and legal equality of rights' (Tritt 1992: 14–16). The Federal and Czech governments soon followed suit. At the same time Roma of Czechoslovakia sought to re-establish links with broader Romani political movements and at the fourth World Romani Congress, held in Warsaw in 1990, the leader of ROI, Dr Emil Šuka, was elected secretary general to the International Romani Union (Davidová 1995: 222, Acton and Klimová 2001).

During the last decade of Communism Havel had been regarded as the conscience of the Czechoslovak peoples but now his compassion for Roma was deeply unpopular. Opinion polls soon confirmed extremely high levels of hostility towards Roma (e.g. Times Mirror 1991), which found public expression in many ways as Roma were increasingly excluded from public space (Tritt 1992: 111–6). A report on the Czech lands noted that 'Roma are often denied access to pubs, discos, restaurants, swimming pools and other public establishments run by private individuals or the state' (Human Rights Watch 1996: 14), while the Slovak town of Spišské Podhradie imposed a night-time curfew on local Roma (ERRC 1997a: 47–8).<sup>20</sup>

An uncertain legal interregnum encouraged the emergence of neo-fascist groups that had more direct ways of expressing their feelings. These ranged from skinhead gangs to a Ku Klux Klan and a 'White League' (*Bílá liga*) (Tritt 1992: 2–3).<sup>21</sup> In the period between the fall of Communism in 1989 and May 1995 an estimated twenty-seven Roma died as a result of racial violence in the Czech lands alone (Human Rights Watch 1996: 6, 2). Similar attacks, sometimes leading to fatalities, also occurred in Slovakia (ERRC 1997a). The victims were killed in various ways – by beating, drowning, shooting, burning, bombing and by garrotting in the case of 'a six year-old Romany boy ... strangled in a playground by a skinhead using a cable' (ČTK 1995).<sup>22</sup>

Similar attacks were reported from neighbouring countries, yet governments did little to protect their Romani citizens other than occasionally tinker with the laws (Barany 1998: 319–23). In 1995, a brutal and highly publicised murder did prompt the Czech government to introduce longer sentences for 'racially-motivated attacks' (*Lidové noviny* 1995b, Guy 1998: 63–4) but such measures were largely ineffectual. Not only were those found guilty generally given suspended sentences or imprisonment shorter than one year (Czech Government 1999a: 8), often on the grounds of youth, but the failure of the law to define racist crime encouraged authorities not to identify assaults as such.<sup>23</sup>

Figures for racist crimes underestimated the extent of the problem since Roma were usually afraid to report incidents to the police (Czech Government 1999a: 8).<sup>24</sup> Many Roma reported that officers often looked on as disinterested bystanders when demonstrations or attacks took place (Tritt 1992: 93–109), while some had experienced 'witnessing or being a victim of police violence' (Human Rights Watch 1996: 6). This testimony was endorsed by official reports that law enforcement agencies often shared the views of those perpetrating such attacks. In the Czech lands 'an internal study by the Interior Ministry conducted in 1995 determined that racism was a serious problem within the police force' (Human Rights Watch 1996: 7–8),<sup>25</sup> while two years later it was conceded that 'there are ... sympathisers, even members, of the skinhead movement among the police' (Czech Government 1997b: 1, 23, Jakl 1998). In Slovakia, however, there were reports of a more systematised violence (ERRC 1998), as in 1995 when over a hundred armed and masked police, allegedly in search of stolen property, made a planned raid on the largest Romani settlement in the country (Jarovnice), attacking the inhabitants with batons, knives, chemical sprays and electric cattle prods (ERRC 1997a: 36–44).<sup>26</sup>

Apart from racist attacks the most direct and widespread result of post-Communism for Roma was unemployment. Of all ethnic groups, Romani workers were undoubtedly the worst affected by economic restructuring (Human Rights Watch 1996: 4). Both unskilled and skilled workers in the inefficient, labour-hungry, smokstack industries of the command economy were the first to be shed (Premusová and Sirovátka 1996). However, other sectors previously employing large numbers of Roma actually expanded, like construction. However, such Roma workers often suffered a similar fate, being replaced by imported Ukrainian labouring gangs paid at much lower rates. The Ukrainians were often mafia-organised, operating outside of Czechoslovak labour law (Siderenko 1995, Wallace *et al.* 1996: 272–7). Meanwhile, Romani agricultural labourers, particularly in Slovakia, were thrown out of work as the fields of former collective and co-operative farms were either returned to their previous owners or privatised. Consequently, the little work that remained was usually casual and seasonal rather than permanent.

As well as suffering as the first to be dismissed and from privatisation, Roma were also victims of a relaxation of legal restrictions on employers (Lemon 1996: 28–30, Weinerová 1994). This discrimination was routinely institutionalised in both the Czech lands and Slovakia, where 'official lists of available jobs [in municipal labour exchanges] often ... note that the particular employer does not accept Roma' (Czech Government 1997b: 1, 18, Tritt 1992: 76–90, Vašečka 1999: 2, Guy 1998: 58).

Reliable figures for Roma unemployment rates are unobtainable but a 1997 Czech Government report estimated these at around 70 per cent, rising

to 90 per cent in some places, at a time when the national average was 5 per cent (Czech Government 1997b: I, 17). The situation was even starker in Slovakia with a national unemployment rate of around 15 per cent (Tritt 1992: 77–85, Plichtová 1993: 18). In contrast, a few Roma managed to benefit from the new opportunities. During the Communist era there had been a small number of Roma operating as illegal traders in Western consumer goods and as currency changers and, just as for their more numerous non-Romani counterparts, these activities 'translat[ed] into entrepreneurship' in the 1990s (Lemon 1996: 29). They were joined by others and, by 1997, there were an estimated 9,000 Roma officially licensed as traders in the Czech Republic (Czech Government 1997b: I, 17).

The limited research undertaken suggests that the very high levels of Romani unemployment were largely due to restructuring and deregulation of the labour market, and compounded by discriminatory practice (Premusová and Sirovátka 1996, Weinerová 1994). Nevertheless, the popular belief was widespread that unemployment among Roma is self chosen and 'that once [C]ommunism stopped forcing Roma to work they quit their jobs – that they refuse to work or live "honestly"' (Lemon 1996: 28).<sup>27</sup> A main reason why Roma were thought to be unwilling to work was that the low pay on offer for unskilled labour could not match the alternative income available from social support for those with children.<sup>28</sup> This belief was reminiscent of the Communist accusation that generous child benefits, designed to boost Czechoslovakia's dwindling population, were supposedly encouraging Roma to abandon wage labour for childbearing as a profession (Tritt 1992: 20).

An immediate consequence of pandemic unemployment among Roma was that growing numbers were driven into semi-legal or illegal activities. For children, mostly without qualifications, prospects were even bleaker. On the basis of highly contentious police statistics of dubious legality, it was claimed that Roma accounted for 20 per cent of all crime in the Czech Republic, although they formed less than 3 per cent of the population. Allegedly, their share of robbery and theft amounted to half or more of reported cases (Powell 1994).<sup>29</sup> Types of criminal activity most commonly mentioned by police and media were 'property crimes, receiving stolen goods and prostitution' (Czech Government 1997b: I, 22).<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, in rural Slovakia, Roma were reduced to scavenging crops from the fields (Scheffel 1999: 45). These depredations infuriated the newly privatised farmers and in a nightmarish echo of the pre-war pogroms, these incidents sometimes triggered violent fights between Roma and Slovak villagers (*Lidové noviny* 1996).

NGOs, as well as Romani spokespersons, linked the apparent increase in criminality among Roma to their recent unemployment and hopeless prospects (*Romano kurko* 2000:7). Others offered different explanations in terms of 'innate tendencies and ... sometimes even genetic predisposition' (Czech Government 1997b: I, 22). While the 1997 Czech report rejected these

widely-held views as 'openly racist', the inherent nature of such criminality was a central plank in the vehemently anti-Roma electoral platform of the far-right Republican Party, which won an increased share of the vote in the 1996 Czech elections.<sup>31</sup> And, in spite of official condemnations of extremism, doubts were raised about the administration's conception of Romani criminality by the controversial Czech citizenship law.

Romani experience throughout the 1990s was uniformly bleak as their always low social status went into free fall.<sup>32</sup> Racist attacks and vilification, unemployment and impoverishment, increasing residential, social and educational segregation were met with official inaction<sup>33</sup> in both the Czech lands and Slovakia, at least until the mid-1998 change of government in both countries seemed to offer some hope of change. But in this depressing decade two landmarks stand out for their powerful symbolic significance: the 1993 Czech citizenship law and the waves of emigrants seeking asylum, starting in the summer of 1997.

Three short years after the fall of Communism, the federal republic was divided in what was dubbed the 'Velvet Divorce' after the governing Czech party had seen a threat to its radical economic reforms in populist Slovak nationalism (Kavan 1996: 38). On 1 January 1993 Slovakia became an independent, sovereign state for the first time in its history, leaving Roma in the Czech lands as possibly the largest, though evidently unwelcome, minority. In fact, up to 80 per cent of Roma did not appear as such in the 1991 Census but camouflaging themselves on the census form as ethnic Czechs, Slovaks and Magyars was to prove of little help to Roma in the Czech lands.<sup>34</sup>

While Slovakia offered citizenship to any citizen of the former Czechoslovakia who wanted it, the new Czech Republic required anyone other than a previous Czech citizen to make a special application and meet stringent conditions in order to gain citizenship. These included proof of permanent residence in the Czech lands for at least two years and no criminal record for the previous five years. Most Roma living in the Czech lands were deemed to be Slovak citizens, because of their origins in Slovakia and the circumstances of federalisation in 1968, even though by the early 1990s Roma had been established in the Czech lands for over forty years and perhaps as many as two-thirds had been born there (Gross 1994: vi).

Many adult Roma, estimated as up to 50 per cent, were ineligible for Czech citizenship on the grounds they had convictions – though mostly for minor offences such as pilfering state property (Gross 1993).<sup>35</sup> Likewise, often because of bureaucratic resistance to registering them, many failed to meet the residence criterion, even though they had lived in the Czech lands for longer than the required period (Tolerance Foundation 1994: 17). Wildly conflicting claims were made by NGOs and the Czech government about numbers affected,<sup>36</sup> including deportees to Slovakia.<sup>37</sup> Undoubtedly some Roma were made stateless and there is ample evidence that some Slovak local



authorities refused to register those either expelled from the Czech lands or driven by desperation to return to their former settlements.<sup>38</sup> But the vast majority of Roma in the Czech Republic simply remained there, irrespective of legal status, though some suffered the loss of their rights as 'foreigners in their own land'.<sup>39</sup>

International criticism, drawing on Romani and other NGO reports, was scornfully dismissed by Premier Klaus as 'insignificant' and even Havel, now re-elected as Czech President, publicly defended the new law (Gross 1994).<sup>40</sup> Continuing condemnation from the UNHCR and the Council of Europe, among others,<sup>41</sup> eventually led the Czech government to modify this law in April 1996, although the amendments were dismissed as little more than cosmetic changes to placate international opinion (O'Nions 1996: 8–10, Schlager 1998b: 32). Only after large numbers of Roma began to flee the republic as refugees, attracting embarrassing media attention, did the Czech government finally bow to the inevitable and on 9 July 1999 parliamentary deputies voted to make a significant amendment to this peculiarly pointless and vindictive law (*Lidové noviny* 10 July 1999, RFE/RL 1999).<sup>42</sup>

So much has already been written about the disputed citizenship law that, at this stage, it would be more helpful to reflect on its purpose and consequences. Of these, the outcomes are more evident.

One of the two main effects of the law was to bring misery to many Roma, who were given the stark news that they were now unwelcome in the country they regarded as home.<sup>34</sup> Even worse, Roma were threatened with the sudden removal of many of their basic rights. Shortly after the new law was enacted, the same blunt message – that Roma were a target of ethnic cleansing – was proclaimed on national TV to public applause. A Czech beauty queen from North Bohemia declared: 'I want to become a public prosecutor ... so I can clean our town of its dark-skinned inhabitants' (Stewart 1997: 2).

The other effect was to bring unprecedented, international opprobrium on the new state for violating international law and breaching human rights. For the Czech Republic the citizenship law was an unprecedented public relations disaster which achieved nothing except to convince Roma they no longer had a future in their homeland. Such exclusion, even if formally successful, was never likely to result in a mass exodus of Roma to Slovakia. Instead, it drove many into exile in the West, precipitating an even worse international crisis for the state.

As regards the purpose of the legislation, Czech officials were unwilling to adopt the same open approach as the Slovaks because they hoped the impending split of the Czechoslovak Republic might give them a unique opportunity of ridding themselves of their now redundant Romani and foreign workers.<sup>44</sup> An internal government document, leaked to the press, spelt out Czech intentions all too clearly:

We should use the process [of the division of the republic] for the purpose of departure of not-needed persons from factories, especially for the reasons of structural changes, and for the departure of people of Roma nationality to the Slovak Republic.

(Prostor 21 July 1992 quoted Human Rights Watch 1996: 19)

Viewed in this light the citizenship law was a direct continuation of the much earlier attempt by the Czech Republic to minimise its responsibility for Roma citizens. Federalisation in 1968, therefore, was a precursor not just of the break-up of Czechoslovakia but of the abandonment of a joint approach to Roma. The fundamental difference was that previously Romani workers were still needed in Czech industries; after 1989 they had become superfluous, thus fulfilling the first part of the Charter 77 prophecy. Even if documentary evidence is doubted, there is no other plausible explanation for the introduction of this tortuous law.<sup>45</sup>

For Roma in Slovakia, too, the break-up of the federal Republic led to an immediate deterioration of their position. Although not threatened with a loss of citizenship, Roma now found themselves the target of more explicitly racist abuse from politicians.<sup>46</sup> Ján Slota's policy recommendation for their treatment was 'a small yard and a long whip'. While similar views expressed by the Czech Republican Party might be dismissed as extremist rantings, Slota was leader of a party in the governing coalition. In particular, independence focused attention on the new state's fastest growing minority and fear of being dispossessed became a recurrent theme. As recently as 1999 a leading Slovak daily reported with alarm that 'if present demographic trends continue, one million ... Roma will live in Slovakia in ten years time and will make up the majority of the population by 2060' (*Pravda* 1 August 1999).<sup>47</sup>

In September 1993, the Slovak premier, Vladimír Mečiar, suggested that family allowances of Roma should be reduced to help cut 'extended reproduction of the socially unadaptable and mentally backward population'.<sup>48</sup> Official policy statements were hardly more reassuring. In spite of early formal recognition of Roma as a national minority in Slovakia, a 1996 blueprint for policy until the year 2002 revealed a familiar, denigratory view of these people as backward and primitive, needing social re-education to fit them for the modern world (Slovak Government 1996, ERRC 1997a: 69–71). The post of Government Commissioner for Citizens in Need of Special Care was created but no mention was made of action to combat ethnic discrimination (Vermeersch 2000: 6–7). The overriding emphasis on the need for 'acculturation' in the policy outline on 'activities and measures in order to solve the problems of citizens in need of special care' was very reminiscent of the earlier Communist approach.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, insistence that the situation of Roma should be treated as a complex of social problems of 'citizens with special

needs' could be seen as extending the conceptual model used in education for segregating Romani children to almost the entire minority (PER 1992: 7-8).

As well as confining increasing numbers of children to special schools, another disturbing echo of Communist practice, in both Slovakia and the Czech Republic, was the intensification of the post-1960s policy of residential segregation. A council plan in Košice, the capital of East Slovakia, to move the city's entire Romani population to the Lunik IX district, was condemned as 'creating a 25,000-30,000 person ghetto' akin to a reservation (ERRC 1997a: 57). In the Czech lands it was eventually conceded that the growing practice of forcibly evicting Romani rent defaulters and relocating them to purpose-built, 'so-called "bare flats" [with only basic facilities], concentrated on the outskirts of towns, ... evoke[d] fears in the entire Romani community that this [w]as a certain kind of "ethnic cleansing"' (Czech Government 1997b: I, 20). Similar fears were provoked by the later attempt of a local council in the North Bohemian town of Ústí nad Labem to wall off a block of flats, inhabited mostly by Romani families, providing a powerful symbol of the segregated ghetto.<sup>50</sup> Further wartime memories were evoked by controversy over the site of the former concentration camp at Lety, where Czechs had stood guard over Roma.<sup>51</sup>

Romani experience of post-Communist life, both before and after the division of the federal republic, left them in despair and with no tangible hope of improvement. Consequently, it was hardly surprising that a short series of TV documentaries, offering the mirage of life abroad without discrimination, should have sparked off a dramatic reaction which shocked the complacency of the Czech and Slovak Governments.<sup>52</sup>

The exodus started in August 1997 when around 1,500 Roma boarded flights to Canada, where they immediately requested asylum (Lee 2000: 54-5).<sup>53</sup> This soon led to the imposition of visa restrictions for all Czech citizens in October (Legge 1998a). Although most journeys were self-financed,<sup>54</sup> a mayor in the industrial city of Ostrava used municipal funds to subsidise some tickets on condition that the recipients gave up their state flats and right to return to them, even though there was no guarantee that they would be granted asylum.<sup>55</sup> She described this action as 'friendly gesture' (ERRC 1997b).<sup>56</sup>

Later waves of Roma migrants to Britain in mid-1997 and 1998<sup>57</sup> were stemmed in October 1998 when the British government imposed visa restrictions on Slovak citizens.<sup>58</sup> In Canada, asylum was eventually granted to over three-quarters of petitioners, on the grounds that their own state offered them no protection against racist attacks, but the British government took a quite different approach, treating the 'invaders' as economic migrants and granting asylum in only a few token cases (Lee 2000: 61, Legge 1998b, Travis 1998).<sup>59</sup>

What was to become the standard European response to subsequent attempts by Czech and Slovak Roma to flee their homelands revealed no

small measure of hypocrisy. On the one hand, the Czech and Slovak Governments were condemned for violating their citizens' human rights but as soon as the victims arrived in EU countries, claiming human rights abuses, these same people - now refugees - were unequivocally branded as economic migrants and expelled as soon as possible (Cahn and Vermeersch 2000: 78-9).<sup>60</sup>

### The beginnings of a new approach?

Almost five years after the controversial citizenship law had been introduced the Czech government at last began to admit that international and NGO condemnation of this particular law and of general government inaction in alleviating the plight of Roma might be well founded. At the end of October 1997, it eventually accepted the *Report on the Situation of the Romani Community in the Czech Republic* by Pavel Bratinka, Minister without Portfolio and Chairman of the Government Council on Nationalities (Czech Government 1997b).<sup>61</sup>

This was a landmark in official Czech assessment of the situation of its Roma minority, drawing on a wide range of evidence including a sociological survey among local authority officials and Romani representatives as well as a study of media treatment of Romani issues.<sup>62</sup> Commissioned in January 1997, the report frankly admitted the continuing high levels of hostility towards Roma and that it was 'the fact that society is not willing to accept them, despite their efforts to integrate', that had driven many Roma to emigrate (Czech Government 1997b: I, 2-3).<sup>63</sup>

More importantly, for the first time, an official report conceded that in major respects the government had simply failed the Roma and that, in the light of 'practical experience and the actual situation, ... it must be conceded that overall the criticisms are substantiated' (Czech Government 1997b: I, 2). A month earlier, the government had taken another important step in establishing an Interdepartmental (aka Interministerial) Commission for Romani Community Affairs as an 'advisory, initiating and co-ordinating body' (Czech Government 1997a), as the report had recommended.

A few days after the Czech government had eventually accepted the report, the centre-right ODS party of Václav Klaus, in control since the early 1990s, fell from power to be replaced for the first time by a new Social Democrat-led coalition, following the elections of June 1998. Meanwhile, in Slovakia the long domination of Mečiar's HDZS party was overturned in the September 1998 elections, bringing hopes of a more democratic approach to the plight of the Roma population in both countries.

At this time both the Czech and Slovak Republics, under their new governments, were eager to become members of the European Union. One of the criteria for entry was that candidate countries should have established

institutions 'guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of democracy' (European Commission 1999: 4). Concern had already been expressed by the European Commission about the situation of Roma in July 1997 and the annual Regular Reports on progress of individual countries of November 1998 and October 1999 were even more critical. These reports included both the Czech and Slovak Republics among those applicants where 'Roma still suffer discrimination and social exclusion' (European Commission 1999: 4).

Continuing anxiety about EU entry stimulated renewed efforts in both countries to devise new policy initiatives. In the month following the elections, the ill-fated attempt to exclude Roma from the Czech state was finally abandoned when deputies drastically amended the citizenship law (RFE/RL 1999). Meanwhile the keystone of the Communist attempt to control Roma migration, the 1958 Law 74 on 'nomadism', had been quietly rescinded in March 1998 after forty years on the statute books and almost a decade after the ending of Communism (ČTK 1998).

Eighteen months after the reluctant acceptance of the Bratinka report and a few days after the Framework Convention (setting fuller criteria for EU entry)<sup>64</sup> had come into force on 1 April 1999, the new Czech Government approved a radical document outlining a draft conception of long-term policy toward Roma (Czech Government 1999b). In the same month, another report (Czech Government 1999a) on compliance with the Framework Convention (Council of Europe 1994) acknowledged the numbers involved by accepting that Roma had not declared themselves as such at the 1991 census out of fear.<sup>65</sup> At the same time, the draft conception flatly stated that the overall situation was no better than formerly, for '[d]iscrimination against Roma on the labour market [and elsewhere] ... has not abated' and 'there has been no marked improvement in the protection of Roma against racist acts of criminal violence' (Czech Government 1999b: 11).<sup>66</sup> In the same spirit, the Czech Minister of the Interior agreed that Roma refugees 'were right when justifying applications for asylum abroad by saying they are persecuted by skinheads' (Grohová 1999). The draft conception concluded with a specially commissioned study, which offered a blunt warning 'of the likely development of the Romani community if the government adopts a wait-and-see policy', as it had hitherto. For the very first time the government was confronted with a cold, hard look into the future, which offered an apocalyptic vision (Socioklub 1999).<sup>67</sup>

It took another fifteen months until the final draft was approved in June 2000, putting forward a long-term plan from 2001 until 2020. The concept of assimilation was explicitly and unequivocally rejected in this conception for '[m]inority integration worthy of the name cannot amount to assimilation'.<sup>68</sup> Instead, Romani identity was to be reinforced and celebrated as the key to their integration as equals in what was now embraced as a 'multicultural soci-

ety', for 'the more Roma will feel like being Roma, the more emancipated and responsible citizens they will be' (Czech Government 2000a: 1).

The main aim of the conception was stated to be 'the achievement of conflict-free co-existence of the Roma community with the remainder of society', which would depend on attaining a number of goals over the coming two decades. First among these was 'ensuring the safety of Roma' and others included 'the removal of all forms of discrimination', as well as 'improving the social situation of the Roma community, above all by lowering unemployment and raising their housing standards and associated levels of health' (Czech Government 2000a: 1).

However, as well as altruism, the motivation was also openly political, as the final paragraph of the conclusion made crystal clear:

The way in which this conception is accepted ... and its goals realised ... will have a significant influence on the assessment of the EU Committee for the Czech Republic. In its last appraisal report this Committee was critical about the current manner of co-existence between the majority and Roma. The report to be made in autumn 2000 will be crucial for the entry of the Czech Republic to the EU. In this sense the government solution of the integration of Roma into society will influence the integration of the Czech Republic into Europe. (Czech Government 2000a: 24)

The policy implications of the conception were wide-ranging. Some appeared simply to extend and strengthen previous provisions, although on closer examination, these were more innovative than they seemed.<sup>69</sup> Others, however, were radical new departures from previous practice. Measures to promote what amounted to affirmative action (literally 'equalising measures') were to be introduced in the areas of employment, improving qualifications and housing, although quotas were explicitly ruled out.<sup>70</sup> In an unusually frank admission the earlier draft of the conception had justified such a course of action as essential for 'without active government intervention the actual condition and present-day situation of the Romani community are hopeless' (Czech Government 1999b: 5).

Apart from extensive discussion of measures to raise employment levels, for example by tax incentives to employers, the most dramatic initiative was a commitment to abolish the consignment of normal Romani children to special schools for those with learning difficulties.<sup>71</sup> By 1999, the proportion of all Romani children in such 'ESN' [sic] (educationally sub-normal) schools had increased to 'roughly three-quarters' and this was 'subject to growing criticism from abroad where such schools are seen as tools of enforced segregation and ominous signs of a slide to apartheid' (Czech Government 1999b: 7.8).<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, this declaration in the draft conception had not deflected a group of Romani parents from Ostrava, with the support of the European Roma Rights Center (ERRC), from challenging this practice in

court in June 1999 (ERRC 1999b) nor the ERRC from releasing a critical report on special schools on the same day (ERRC 1999a).<sup>73</sup> In general, the conception envisaged that the same buildings were to be used but former special schools were to be converted to a mainstream curriculum (Czech Government 2000a: 12–16), which might be regarded either as a pragmatic use of existing resources or, alternatively, as cosmetic re-labelling.

Reading through the impressive range of structures to be established in order to supervise and carry out the numerous tasks described in the conception, the nagging doubt remains that the Habsburg and Communist schemes, too, had been planned in exhaustive detail but ultimately had foundered in their implementation at local level.<sup>74</sup> This was also a concern of the November 2000 Regular Report for the Czech Republic and particularly that for Slovakia (European Commission 2000a, 2000b).<sup>75</sup> At this point it is worth reflecting that a fifth of Czech officials in the 1997 survey ruled out any hope of successful integration. They believed that 'any attempts to solve the problem are useless, because their source and substance – the completely different Romani mentality – cannot be changed'. Most of these officials thought that 'Roma should live, as much as possible, in selected parts of towns (municipalities) where they could receive greater attention' (Czech Government 1997b: II, 3–4).

However, following acceptance of the conception in mid-2000, a lengthy report was produced listing progress made by the end of the year on 121 tasks undertaken (Czech Government 2000b). Therefore, in this light, perhaps hopes should be pinned, in contrast, on officials like the narrow majority of respondents in the 1997 survey who thought that 'Roma should live in ways which suit them, like any other citizens' (Czech Government 1997b: II, 4).

Meanwhile, following the 1998 elections in Slovakia, the previous Government Commissioner for Citizens in Need of Special Care had been replaced by one for the Solution of the Problems of the Roma Minority. The new commissioner was himself a Rom and in June 1999 his office produced a new policy paper, which was 'concerned with including the minority voice in the design and implementation of Roma-related policies' (Vermeersch 2000: 8).<sup>76</sup> This was adopted by government in September of that year (Slovak Government 1999c).<sup>77</sup>

Hopes were raised still further by the first foreign visit of the newly confirmed Slovak president, Rudolf Schuster, to Prague. Heading his agenda in the meeting with his Czech counterpart, Václav Havel, was a proposal to develop a joint programme for 'solving the Roma question', an offer which was readily accepted (Carolina 1999, Naegele 1999). It was no surprise that this problem was viewed as urgent, since only the day before the visit Finland had suspended visa-free entry for Slovak citizens in response to the latest wave of Roma asylum seekers.<sup>78</sup> Only a week earlier, on the assumption of the rotating EU presidency, the Finnish prime minister had bluntly warned

Slovakia that 'it is out of the question that countries where conditions are not in order should join the European Union'.<sup>79</sup>

Grounds for optimism were undermined later that same year when a derogatory document, distributed by the Slovak Presidential Office to the 'Meeting of Presidents of the Visegrad Four Countries',<sup>80</sup> suggested that prejudice was still firmly entrenched and that old attitudes had not really changed.<sup>81</sup> The following year Róbert Fico, charismatic leader of the newly-formed *Smer* (Direction) political party, heightened tension by claiming gynaeological evidence indicated that by 2010 there would be 1,200,000 Roma in Slovakia and that in East Slovakia their numbers would equal those of Slovaks in the region. For good measure, he predicted that up to 800,000 Roma would be dependent on benefits and this would overwhelm Slovakia's system of social support (SITA 9 June, quoted *Romano novo lit'* 2000: 2).<sup>82</sup>

The more favourable political climate of the late 1990s presented sharp, new dilemmas for Roma political organisations. The initial optimism of the early 1990s had quickly subsided, accompanying the fall in levels of Romani political representation,<sup>83</sup> a phenomenon repeated elsewhere in the region.<sup>84</sup> But from the mid-1990s new groupings emerged, spurred into action by racist attacks and the emigration waves. Also, population growth began to translate into voting power, at least at local level in parts of Slovakia, where in the '1998 local council elections six mayors and eighty-six council members were elected from Roma political parties' (Vermeersch 2000: 10). However, the emotive issue of emigration proved divisive for Romani organisations.

Some, such as the Roma Intelligentsia for Co-existence (RIS) in Slovakia and Fund for Understanding and Hope in the Czech lands, were inclined to blame the emigration on the discrimination suffered by Roma (Vermeersch 2000: 10). Others, like the long-established ROI, feared that highlighting the issue would provoke even more resentment and further attacks against Roma. The emigrants were blamed by the public, politicians and media in Slovakia for the imposition of visas by Western states and in both Republics for endangering their countries' chances of admission to the EU.<sup>85</sup> In the view of ROI, a more prudent strategy was to seek accommodation with the state and negotiate favourable concessions in the manner of Romani Rose, leader of the long-established Sinti association in Germany, rather than challenge it. This stance helps explain why ROI tended to be critical rather than supportive of Roma emigrants.

This dispute was elevated to an even higher level with the prominence of the ROI leader, Emil Ščuka, as secretary general of the International Romani Union (since 1990) and his subsequent election in July 2000 as president at the Fifth World Romani Congress in Prague. In response to the passionate defence of asylum seekers by Western Roma representatives, the ROI strategy of accommodation was generalised as IRU support for a regional policy of 'stabilisation' for Roma, by which was meant their improved social integra-

tion, material conditions and legal safeguards in their homelands (Acton and Klímová 2001, Guy 2001).

This standpoint neatly fitted the requirement of the Czech government, in particular, for an amenable negotiating partner and supporter in its EU entry procedures. Also, far from posing a threat to the authority and cohesion of the centralised state as the Communists had feared, the current form of Roma nationalism – the call for Roma to be recognised as ‘a nation without territory’ – corresponded to the government’s desire to ‘internationalise’ the whole question and in the process share the burden of its responsibilities.<sup>86</sup>

### Visions of the future

There is no doubt that considerable efforts have been made in recent years by both Czech and Slovak Governments to carry out a range of Roma-related activities, and to demonstrate this to the European Union (e.g. Czech Government 2000b, Slovak Government 2000). Such activities include what are generally small-scale projects, undertaken by Roma and pro-Roma NGOs and often funded through the EU’s PHARE programme. In spite of such endeavours, most ordinary Roma have yet to see any significant change in their circumstances (Holomek 2000: 3). Given the late start and apparent slow rate of progress it seems unlikely that significant equalisation of Roma with other citizens will have occurred by the anticipated EU entry date of around 2005. In the event of failure to produce considerable improvements, those Roma organisations which have staked their future on the success of integration or ‘stabilisation’ policies may be in danger of forfeiting their support and of being replaced by more radical and militant leaders.

It remains to be seen, therefore, whether time will run out for the Czech and Slovak Republics and, by the same token, for their Roma citizens. In many ways the governments of both states wasted the 1990s for, in spite of certain positive measures, they were completely unable to prevent mass unemployment of Roma and their subsequent dependency on social support. Inevitably, this led to the catastrophic collapse of their never-high social status. Meanwhile, tacit public support grew for widespread attacks on Roma, who were left unprotected by the state. Roma with most to lose – by a tragic irony the most integrated – seized the remote hope of asylum abroad. Those unable, or unwilling, to take the option of flight increasingly began to stand their ground and fight, thus fulfilling the second part of the grim Charter 77 prophecy.<sup>87</sup> A Czech Rom stated the dilemma facing his people in stark terms: ‘The question before us is this: Do we follow the path of Martin Luther King – or Malcolm X?’ (Schlager 1998a: 28).

The choice will depend largely on whether the Czech and Slovak Governments, with the help of Roma and pro-Roma organisations and NGOs,<sup>88</sup> can successfully implement their policies at local level and

ultimately on the response of the Czech and Slovak peoples to new government initiatives. One of the most depressing findings of the sociological survey, carried out in the spring of 1997 before the migratory waves, was that ‘[a]lmost two-thirds of all respondents ... think that ... problems with co-existence will continue to increase, regardless of the efforts devoted to preventing and solving them ... [since] the Roma population is growing faster than its ability to integrate’. It is to be hoped that the optimism expressed by more than four-fifths of representatives of Roma and pro-Roma initiatives, who disagreed with this view, is well founded (Czech Government 1997b: II, 4).

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Notes

- 1 After 1925 several schools for Roma were established in Ruthenia (now Trans-Carpathian Ukraine) and East Slovakia and in 1929 a group of East Slovak doctors founded the Society for the Study and Solution of the Gypsy Problem (Horváthová 1964: 168). The society published books and articles but also organised theatrical and musical performances in principal regional theatres and established a flourishing football team, named Roma, which even toured abroad (Davidová 1965: 26).
- 2 Kenrick and Puxon originally gave what they regarded as a conservative estimate of a quarter of a million deaths (Kenrick and Puxon 1972: 183–4). The IRU now claims that 'over half a million persons were exterminated' (Acton and Klimová 2001: Appendix 3).
- 3 Jamnická-Šmerglová quotes 1948 police records for a 1940 census of Roma showing 6,500 in the Czech lands and 60,000 in Slovakia. Kenrick and Puxon, also referring to police archives, cite a 1939 estimate of 13,000 in the Czech lands and explain the discrepancy by stating that 'several thousand managed to escape to Slovakia before deportations began' (Kenrick and Puxon 1972: 135). Horváthová's estimate of 100,000 Roma in Slovakia during the wartime period is an extrapolation from the census figures of 1927 and 1952.
- 4 At this time 40,000 ethnic Hungarians were forcibly relocated to the Czech lands while, like the Roma, many impoverished Slovaks also migrated westwards voluntarily in search of work (Plichtová 1993: 15).
- 5 This went unacknowledged in the description of a 1947 police census of 'wandering Gypsies and other work-shy vagabonds' which revealed that only two years after the end of the war there were 16,752 Roma in the Czech lands, over 16 per cent of a total 101,200 in the whole republic (Kostelancik 1989: 310, Jamnická-Šmerglová 1955: 86, Hrašňan 1999: 145). A decade later, in 1958, although no precise figures are available, the Romani population was estimated at between 120,000 and 150,000 of which perhaps a quarter were in the Czech lands.
- 6 '[The urban local authorities] practically ceased to house gypsies in decent flats in accept-

- 7 able residential districts. Instead, as a matter of standard practice, all new arrivals were allocated flats that were either cramped, dirty and mouldering or else cold and cavernous, located in houses long-destined for demolition and which stood in shattered, depopulated back-streets' (Jamnická-Šmerglová 1955: 89).
- 8 It was also in preparation for the transition from a People's Republic to the more elevated status of Socialist Republic, declared in 1960 (Guy 1975a: 214).
- 9 Economic considerations had been a major factor in the earlier assimilation attempt. Eighteenth century Hungary, of which Slovakia was then a part, had been severely depopulated in the wake of the conflict between Habsburgs and Turks and consequently labour power was at a premium (Fraser 1992: 157).
- 10 This followed earlier attempts in 1948 by Roma in Slovakia to set up a socio-cultural organisation, which was not allowed for similar reasons (Jurová 1992: 92).
- 11 This delegation was accompanied by the author and his ethnologist colleague and friend, Dr Eva Davidová.
- 12 The first president of the International Romani Union was Dr Jan Cibula, a Romani doctor from Slovakia.
- 13 Charter 77 (*Charta 77*) was established in 1977 to bear witness to violations of human rights safeguarded by the 1975 Helsinki Accords to which Czechoslovakia was a signatory. Václav Havel, now president of the Czech Republic, was a founder member and spokesperson.
- 14 A 1972 Decree on Sterilisation, issued by the Ministries of Health of the Czech and Slovak Socialist Republics, was careful not to mention Roma by name but other evidence makes it clear that this ethnic group was a prime target. A 1977 briefing paper for a Slovak Government commission referred to what it called the 'high unhealthy' level of the Roma population and urged increased grants for sterilisation to counterbalance the income from child benefits, since 'even a backward Gypsy woman is able to calculate that, from an economic point of view, it is more advantageous for her to give birth every year' (quoted Tritt 1992: 20).
- 15 The most notorious of such housing projects were Chanov in Most (Northern Bohemia), Lunik IX in Košice (Eastern Slovakia), and Důžavská Cesta (also called 'Black City') in Rimavská Sobota (Central Slovakia) (Tritt 1992: 56–8, Hübschmannová 1994).
- 16 An internal government report revealed that a subsequent attempt to strengthen the law had been abandoned because 'the proposed solution of restricting the movement of the gypsy population in fact limits their freedom of residence and therefore is not in harmony with Article 31 of the constitution' (quoted Davidová and Guy 1972: 84).
- 17 The government committee, as the co-ordinating body charged with overseeing policy implementation, was quite clear about the illegality of local authority practice but appeared powerless to do anything other than complain – in strictly internal reports: '[L]ocal authorities protect themselves ... by refusing to register these citizens [i.e. Roma migrants] as permanent residents. However the Ministry of the Interior directive on Law 54/1949 Sb. about population registration specifically states that registration as a permanent resident may not be dependent on any other conditions, especially accommodation, economic, financial, etc.' (quoted Guy 1975a: 220).
- 18 According to administrative records, based on decisions by local authority social work departments about non-assimilated Roma, 'in 1989 there were approximately 400,000–500,000 Roma in Czechoslovakia' (Plichtová 1993: 42), of which 145,738 were in the Czech lands forming 1.41 per cent of the total population there (Kalibová 1999: 99). Two years later the 1991 census, when Roma had the right to declare themselves as such for the first time in sixty years, showed there were 32,903 Roma in the Czech Republic and 75,802 in Slovakia, forming 0.32 per cent and 1.4 per cent respectively of the total population

(Kalibová 1999: 96–7). Plichtová tried to explain the huge discrepancy in the numbers as partly due to 'a low level of ethnic awareness' among Roma but also suggested 'fear of possible discrimination' might have been a factor (Plichtová 1993: 17, 42). This far more plausible explanation was eventually accepted by the Czech government in 1999 (Czech Government 1999a: 33). The estimated numbers accepted by European institutions are based on the opinion of researchers and, with allowance for demographic growth, correspond more closely to earlier administrative figures compiled by Communist officials, which are generally regarded as the most reliable source. These indicate that there are between 250,000 and 300,000 Roma in the Czech Republic and between 480,000 and 520,000 in Slovakia (Liégeois and Gheorghe 1995: 7). In 1999 the Czech Government accepted lower 'qualified estimates' of 200,000 for the Czech lands, 'divided into several ethnic groups' [sic] – 170,000 Slovak Roma (85 per cent), 18,000 Olah or Vlachiko Roma (9 per cent), 15,000 Hungarians of the Czech lands (7.7 per cent) and 'only about 100' Sinti, the original Roma inhabitants of the Czech lands (Czech Government 1999b: 6–7). Slovakia contains the same groups although numbers are larger but here, too, it is recognised that declared ethnicity greatly underestimates those who would normally acknowledge Romani identity and is no help at all in differentiating between sub-groups (Slovak Government 1999a). In 2000, the leader of a Vlachiko organisation made the unsubstantiated claim that there were 100,000 Vlachiko Roma in Slovakia, amounting to a third of all Roma living there (Schön 2000: 8). According to a leading Czech demographer, projections made on the basis of 1980s data would indicate a total population of 'almost half a million' on the territory of the former Czechoslovakia by the year 2005, 'with rather more than a third (200,000) living in the Czech Republic (Kalibová 1999: 107).

18 Meanwhile, newspapers and magazines in the Romani language sprang up and over thirty cultural organisations applied for official registration throughout the republic. A museum of Romani culture was founded in Brno, while in East Slovakia a Romani theatre opened its doors in Prešov and an innovative department of Romani music was established as part of the existing conservatory in Košice. Many of these cultural and political activities were launched and sustained with financial support from the state. Likewise educational experiments using teaching materials in the Romani language were introduced. In July 1990, this new beginning was celebrated in Brno by the first World Romani Festival, with President Havel as guest of honour (Davidová 1995: 222–7).

19 In June 1990, six Romani deputies gained seats in the Czech parliament, of which five were OF candidates and one seat was gained (VNP) in Slovakia (Vermeersch 2001: 3).  
20 Around ten other villages and towns in the Spiš region adopted similar measures which, after protests from Roma and NGOs, were dropped a month later 'when the Slovak Parliament declared them unconstitutional on July 15, 1993' (ERRC 1997a: 48).

21 The vast majority of the attacks were carried out by groups of skinheads, revealed by research to be mainly immature, aggressive juveniles aged under twenty, though some were under fifteen, the age of criminal responsibility. They were predominantly from blue-collar backgrounds with only elementary school education or apprenticeships (Czech Government 1997b: 1, 22). While the 1997 research reported they came from 'non-problematic families', a later view talked of 'social difficulties faced by these young people who are easily manipulated' (Czech Government 1999a: 9).

22 The victims were not exclusively Roma, for Vietnamese migrant workers and African and Arab students also suffered (Tritt 1992: 2, footnote 2), but 'the overwhelming majority of ... [attacks] were directed against Romanies (Gypsies) or people mistaken for Romanies' (ČTK 1995). The first recorded death in 1990 may have been such a case, where a Turkish national was knifed by a skinhead gang in Plzeň.

23 In one bizarre ruling a district court decided an attack could not be racist since 'the injured Roma are of the same Indo-European race as the perpetrators' (Czech Government 1999b: 4). A Slovak court in Banská Bystrica made a similar ruling in May 1999 (Fenyvesi 1999).

24 Since the fall of Communism in 1989 and May 1995 an estimated twenty-seven Roma died as a result of racial violence in the Czech lands while 181 racist attacks were reported for 1995 alone (Human Rights Watch 1996: 2). Not much had changed by late 1997 with 'over 150 such cases' that year, although in 1998 the number decreased to 138, including two deaths. However, a spokesperson for HOSST stated that the number of racist crimes registered by this NGO was 40 per cent higher (*Lidové noviny* 1999a, *Mladá fronta dnes* 1999).

25 This charge was met with a flat denial by a police spokesperson who did not even feel the need to resort to the familiar 'just a few rotten apples' defence: 'There is no racism in the police. It's just a matter of their [police officers'] personal experiences. And a lot of them have had bad experiences with Roma. And someone dealing with them on a day by day basis could even say that every Roma is a thief. It's an individual matter' (Human Rights Watch 1996: 7–8).

26 The 1993 Minority Rights Group report, *Minorities in Central and Eastern Europe*, seemed unaware of any irony in its cover picture, captioned: 'Local police protect Roma community in Slovakia'. In spite of providing the main image, the Roma are dealt with in a single paragraph in the chapter on 'Czechoslovakia as a multi-cultural state ...' (Plichtová 1993). The author was Slovak.

27 In 1997, sociological research in the Czech Republic revealed that 89 per cent of labour office representatives from all localities with a substantial Romani community thought that a significant cause of their unemployment was 'the Roma's unwillingness to work regularly, long term, systematically', whereas '68 per cent of Romajni representatives from the same localities disagreed that they [i.e. Roma] do not work because they are unwilling to' (Czech Government 1997b: II, 17).

28 A mid-1997 comparison showed that a family with three children was entitled to monthly support of approximately 11,600 Czech crowns (ČZK), compared to an average wage of around 10,000 ČZK, 'which is not achievable in the job market for Roma – usually unskilled labour – [so] they often prefer to receive welfare benefits' (Czech Government 1997b: I, 17). In 1995–6, of those Roma still with jobs in the Czech lands, 90 per cent of men worked as manual labourers, mainly in construction, while women most commonly had jobs as cleaners. Their average wages were 6,000 ČZK for men and 2,500 ČZK for women (Dženo Foundation cited Czech Government 1997b: I, 17).

29 In similar vein, police in the Czech town of Teplice estimated that although Roma were only 7 per cent of the population, they accounted for 60 per cent of all crime and up to 80 per cent of assaults (Czech Government 1997b: I, 22). However, other evidence challenged the reliability of such typical estimates. A 1995 survey-based study, using international comparisons, claimed that when socio-economic conditions were taken into account, 'rates of crime in poor Romani neighbourhoods [in Eastern Europe] ... [were] no higher than in poor non-Romani neighbourhoods'. Also, contrary to popular stereotypes, 'rates for violent crime such as murder and rape ... [were] far lower among Roma than the national averages' (Silverman quoted Lemon 1996: 29).

30 Romani women joined the mushrooming growth in prostitution as previous legal restraints were removed and the economic situation deteriorated. In this they were by no means alone for a police spokesman from Plzeň reported that, while a fifth of prostitutes on the city streets were Romani, the great majority (70 per cent) were Czech. The remainder were from Slovakia, Ukraine or Belarus (*Lidové noviny* 1995a).

31 In his inaugural speech to the Czech parliament, Republican leader Miroslav Sládek

proposed that 'for Gypsies the age of criminal responsibility should be from the moment of birth because being born is, in fact, their biggest crime' (Carolina 1996). The Republicans support unexpectedly halved in the following elections, in 1998, when they failed to reach the 5 per cent threshold and so lost their representation in parliament. Once more, the Republican campaign was anti-Roma with billboard posters attacking their dependence on social support.

32 90 per cent of Romani representatives in the 1997 survey saw their 'minority's social and educational decline' as a 'very important' factor in their 'different [lowered] status in society' (Czech Government 1997b: II, 2-3).

33 The exception was governmental willingness to support Romani culture in the form of publications in Romani, language courses for teachers, music and dance and the Museum of Romani Culture. Also, both Czech and Slovak Governments sponsored conferences on the situation of Roma. For example, in 1992 the Federal, Czech and Slovak Governments sought the help of a US-based conflict resolution agency, Project on Ethnic Relations (PER), to organise a roundtable meeting of 125 participants from all over Central and Eastern Europe, which brought together leaders of Romani communities, government officials and academic experts (PER 1992: 1).

34 On occasions, the 'official' census figures for Roma have been presented by the Czech Government in negotiations to minimise the size of the problem arising from the 1993 citizenship law. This subterfuge was sharply rejected by the Council of Europe as 'unsatisfactory ... when at the same time the authorities of Ostrava admit that in that [city] ... alone the Roma population amounts to at least the same figure' [as that suggested for the whole of the country] (Council of Europe 1996: 18).

35 By refusing citizenship on these grounds the Czech authorities were adding an extra penalty, *ex post facto*, to those who had already been punished for their crimes and in many cases this was a far severer sentence than was possible for the offence in question. This amounted to a violation of Article 15 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which the Czech government had adopted (Council of Europe 1996: 25, Human Rights Watch 1996: 21-2, O'Nions 1996).

36 Romani activists and NGOs estimated, on the basis of survey research, that between 10,000 and 25,000 long-term or life-long residents of the Czech Republic remained without Czech citizenship, while in response the Czech Ministry of the Interior claimed that by the end of 1995 only 200 former Czechoslovak citizens had been actually denied Czech citizenship.

37 In 1994, 154 Slovak citizens were expelled from the Czech Republic (Council of Europe 1996: 31) and 244 the following year and 'there is reason to believe that many of those deported to Slovakia were Roma who, for one reason or another, were denied Czech citizenship despite having genuine links to the Czech Republic' (Human Rights Watch 1996: 28). A mayor from East Slovakia reported that of about one hundred Roma who had come to

38 his town from the Czech lands in the two years since the division of Czechoslovakia only two had been granted residency permits (Human Rights Watch 1996: 29). A major national daily reported a similar situation elsewhere in the same region, where those refused residency had remained as 'illegal' immigrants (*Lidové noviny* 1996). Yet Slovak local authorities were well aware that it was *they* who were acting illegally (Vašečka 1999: 2). Vašečka gives a stark account of the deteriorating conditions in such settlements during the 1990s (Vašečka 2001: 192-3).

39 In spite of governmental assurances to the contrary (Council of Europe 1996: 28, 31), various local authorities throughout the Czech Republic told human rights lawyers that Roma without Czech citizenship 'would be treated like foreigners in future and would lose their benefits under the law' (Gross 1993). This could mean loss of unemployment, health, wel-

fare and insurance benefits as well as of the right to free education, to vote and to pass ports. A later report showed such instances had occurred (Gross 1994: vi).

40 Although the Council of Europe set no conditions on minority rights for admitting the Czech Republic as a member in June 1993, this lenient stance changed as criticism of the citizenship law steadily grew. The CSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities 'strongly urged that such legislation be changed' and US Congress members asked Premier Klaus to alter what they described as 'the most extensive revocation of citizenship since the end of the Second World War' (Gross 1994).

41 An international NGO condemned official evasiveness: 'Czech officials have refused to provide credible and consistent documentation on the question of numbers' (Human Rights Watch 1996: 18, 26), while a Council of Europe report drew attention to poor official record keeping and confusion, commenting tartly that 'the Czech authorities are *today faced with the uncertainties of their own administrative expediency*' (Council of Europe 1996: 18, emphasis in original).

42 Although only those with permanent residency were eligible and formal application was still necessary, this step still represented a policy reversal of major symbolic importance.

43 '[T]he Czech law was designed to make it uncomfortable for Roma to remain in the Czech Republic' (Schlager 1998b: 32).

44 Šiklová and Miklušáková suggest that 'an exodus of Roma from Slovakia was anticipated' but note that '[t]hrough officials now deny it, the Czech government must have been aware of the exclusionary potential of the new law', citing an April 1993 report which states: 'It can be expected that ... at the beginning of 1994, a number of Roma will find themselves in the position of foreigners living in the Czech Republic, without any legal basis' (Šiklová and Miklušáková 1998: 4).

45 Suspicions that the implicit desire was to confirm the new Czech Republic as a homogenous 'ethnic' state, after a lengthy process since 1945 of progressively shedding non-Czech peoples, are strengthened by the special treatment of the Volhyn Czechs. Legal obstacles barring citizenship to this returning émigré group of ethnic Czechs from the former USSR were promptly amended in 1994, suggesting a merging of the concepts of ethnicity and citizenship in a manner characteristic of German practice (Schlager 1998b: 32).

46 In general, Slovak politicians and media were far less inhibited than their more wary Czech counterparts. Stefan Pauliny, Slovak ambassador to the Netherlands, described Roma in 1994 as persons who 'prefer to avoid working, are engaged in criminality rather than seeking jobs, are molesting their surroundings and disregarding the rule of law' (*Romneys* 13 December 1994).

47 A Czech daily headed a special report on an area of East Slovakia with large numbers of Romani inhabitants: 'Will the multi-ethnic Spiš [region] come to belong to the Roma?' (*Lidové noviny* 1996).

48 In response to international condemnation, Mečiar threatened the Czech journalist reporting him with prosecution for defamation of the state, punishable by up to two years imprisonment, and accused him of complicity in an international plot to bring about the 'disintegration' of Slovakia (Greenberg 1993). He also claimed he had been misquoted, but a verbatim transcript of his speech revealed his remark was really an expression of fear about the consequences to the ethnic balance in Slovakia of the high birthrate of Roma in comparison with that of 'whites'. 'So the prospect is that this [population] ratio will be changing to the benefit of Romanies' he observed. 'That is why if we did not deal with them now, then they would deal with us in time ...' A matter of us or them. What 'deal' might mean in this context was left to hang in the air, loose talk often being the safest for the speaker and the most threatening for its target' (Kohn 1995: 179).

- 49 Both the tone ('socially unadaptable', 'negative social behaviour', 'bad way of life', etc.) and the tortuous circumlocutions – in the title and paragraph headings – to avoid naming Roma as the real subject of the report are characteristic of the 1959 government documents, advising local authorities how to implement the assimilation campaign, as well as the 1972 Slovak Government policy of 'acculturation'.
- 50 Although this wall was eventually demolished following government intervention, the Czech central authorities declared their impotence over the actions of the town council, pleading that 'Article 8 of the Constitution [guaranteed] the principle of self-government of territorial administrative units' (Czech Government 1999c: 1, Guy 2001).
- 51 The camp at Lety became the subject of heated disputes due to the apparent reluctance of the Czech authorities to relocate the pig farm, which currently occupies the site, and construct an appropriate memorial. This was interpreted as epitomising official indifference to Czech crimes against Roma and to the suffering inflicted at the camp.
- 52 The series, called *Na vlastní oči* (In your own eyes), was shown by the popular independent TV station Nova.
- 53 By June the following year, 600 of the original 1,500 had returned to the Czech Republic (Radio Prague 1998). Smaller numbers of Roma refugees also arrived in Canada from Slovakia (Braham and Braham 2000: 98) and later from Hungary (Lee 2000: 61–4).
- 54 Romani spokespersons characterised many emigrants as not the poor but 'upper-class' or 'young [and better] educated ... [who] don't see any ... future ... for their children' (Legge 1998a).
- 55 In the meantime, the president of the Ostrava branch of ROI unsuccessfully requested collective asylum from the US embassy for all Czech Roma (Naegele 1999).
- 56 Her reported justification for paying two-thirds of the ticket costs was astonishingly blunt – that 'in Ostrava there are two groups – "Roma" and "whites" – who cannot live together and ... the local administration should not refrain from helping one group – Roma – find a solution' (ERRC 1997b).
- 57 Around 1,500 arrived in 1997, mainly from the Czech Republic, while the following year Roma came predominantly from Slovakia – 1,256 in the first half of 1998 (*The Guardian* 8 October 1998, Legge 1998a, Vaščka 1999: 3). However, the flow from the Czech Republic resumed in the summer of 1999, peaking in June when 143 families sought asylum (ČTK 29 July 1999).
- 58 EU members imposing visa restrictions on Slovakia at various times included the UK, Ireland, Belgium, Denmark, Norway and Finland (Cahn and Vermeersch 2000: 78). Only Canada has treated the Czech Republic in the same way.
- 59 Of over 3,000 Roma refugees to the UK in 1997 and 1998, only five from Slovakia and one family of three from the Czech Republic were successful in gaining asylum (*Lidové noviny* 1999b).
- 60 Some Slovak Roma initially denied asylum in the UK had actually appealed successfully but the Home Office had immediately lodged counter-appeals ('Gypsy rulings put pressure on ministers', *The Guardian*, 1 December 1998). Eventually, the test case of Milan Horváth, from a village near Michalovce in East Slovakia, was dismissed in an appeal to the House of Lords on the grounds that, even though he might well have a well-founded fear of persecution, 'the authorities in Slovakia are willing and able to provide protection to the required standard, and Gypsies [sic] as a class are not exempt from that protection' (Lords dismiss Roma asylum test case', *The Guardian*, 7 July 2000).
- 61 The report's outspoken criticism of previous Czech policy had led to its earlier rejection by the cabinet, which required a redraft to include 'concrete examples and concrete solutions'. Braitmka himself revealed that, '[a]ccording to the cabinet, the report was written from the

- other side of the river. ... [It] was not pleased by the negative tone and non-standard style of the report, which drew information from non-governmental sources'. His deputy, the author of the report, was far more outspoken, even threatening resignation: 'Screw the government ... I tried very hard to point out what positive steps the government had taken. But I found out that previous obligations [aimed at improving Romani conditions] were not fulfilled. I am afraid the government doesn't really want to solve this issue' (Legge 1997).
- 62 Material from this report has been drawn on extensively in this chapter.
- 63 Mass asylum seeking by Roma is linked to three factors, which explains why the largest waves came from the Czech Republic, Slovakia and, to a lesser extent, Hungary. These are: no visa restrictions on travel, the financial means to buy tickets, and, most importantly as with much migration, the level of consciousness and expectation among would-be emigrants. 'The critical measure is not so much how badly off the Roma are in a country ... but what the gap is between ever-increasing Roma expectations and government measures to address their concerns. In Romania the Roma have been conditioned to suffer and accept mistreatment that Roma in [the Czech Republic, Slovakia,] Hungary and Poland would not tolerate' (Schlager quoted Fenyvesi 1999).
- 64 The Framework Convention required EU candidates 'to promote, in all areas of economic, social, political and cultural life, full and effective equality between persons belonging to a national minority and those belonging to the majority' (Council of Europe 1995: Article 4, Paragraph 2). See Braham and Braham (2000) and Guy (2001) for fuller discussion.
- 65 The report openly stated: 'The reason for the low number of persons who declared "romipen" (Romani national identity) is fear of possible consequences. Information collected in a 1930 public census, when all citizens were required to state national identity in a non-anonymous manner, was used in 1939 and thereafter to send Romanies into concentration camps and later to death transports. Due to the aversion of the majority towards Romanies, declaration of ... Romani national identity, albeit anonymous, demands a certain amount of bravery' (Czech Government 1999a: 33). In fact, a similar undercount occurred in the 1930 census (Davidová 1970: 94).
- 66 A slightly later Czech government report of July 14 1999 actually recorded an annual decrease of over 10 per cent in racially motivated crimes from the previous year but at the same time the estimated number of 'extremists' almost doubled (*Lidové noviny* 1999a).
- 67 The bleak and menacing conclusions of this independent study read like no other government report: 'Beside bringing international dishonour upon the country for failure to uphold human rights, and consequently non-admission to the European Union, ... [a wait-and-see] approach and/or inadequate solution would lead – as it is already leading now – to a growing lack of understanding, tension and emigration of the most integrated Roma. ... It would gradually preclude co-existence and lead up to physical separation (walls, objectively arisen ghettos for non-payers of rents, and ultimately to intentional evacuation). ... This kind of approach would lead to hostile self-defence, radicalisation, Black Panthers, Palestinianisation, potential political misuse, destabilisation of regions and the state, an untenable process of lapsing into conflicts with ultimate segregation or bilaterally welcomed exodus' (Czech Government 1999b: 12).
- 68 Although assimilation was still accepted as a solution for individuals, if freely chosen, any future assimilation of all Roma was now seen as 'very regrettable', and not only just for themselves. 'The denationalising of Roma, their cultural and linguistic Czechification, would be a cultural loss for the whole of Czech society' (Czech Government 2000a: 1).
- 69 These included the safeguarding of Roma minority rights, improving their democratic representation, strengthening anti-discrimination laws, retraining of those involved in criminal proceedings, appointing Romani counsellors to act as mediators, recruiting more Romani

assistants in schools, protecting Romani culture including language, supporting civic associations promoting co-existence, establishing citizens' advice bureaux and commissioning of further research.

- 70 In fact, those eligible for 'equalising measures' (*vyrovňovací akce*) were 'persons in a disadvantaged situation as a result of social – and even ethnic – reasons, and by this definition are not limited only to members of the Romani community'. This rather tortuous formulation might seem reminiscent of the patronising Slovak circumlocution 'citizens in need of special care' but the purpose was different. The 1996 policy in Slovakia was in direct descent from the earlier 1972 'acculturation' approach but the aim of the Czech conception was to provide direct and additional help to Roma, as Roma, but without it appearing as such. The 1997 Bratinka Report had been very critical of 'affirmative action', not least because of the dangers of backlash from excluded members of the majority, who would resent Roma once more appearing to benefit undeservedly from state handouts (Czech Government 1997b: I, 30–31). Here it is worth pointing out that Kymlicka is sceptical about affirmative action for Roma: 'Given that these policies have not been very successful so far in improving the situation of blacks, it is not clear how much we should expect from them in the case of the Roma' (Kymlicka 2000: 204).
- 71 Many NGOs, e.g. *Nová škola* (New School), had long opposed such segregation and had been active in developing alternative educational strategies, such as the recruitment of Roma teaching assistants, which 'was initiated and conceptualised wholly by non-governmental organisations' (Laubeová 1999). This initiative was eventually adopted by the Czech Ministry of Education and is proving one of the most promising innovations.
- 72 The idea of teaching Roma in smaller classes had already been floated the previous year in *Učitelské noviny*, the main Czech journal on educational issues, and in early 1999 was being piloted in ten schools (Czech Government 1999a: 25). Likewise, there were 23 Roma teaching assistants in action by June 1998. Nevertheless, the ERRC accused the new strategy of failing to 'address ... the issue of discrimination in the school system' (Cahn 1999).
- 73 Ultimately this case was taken to the European Court of Human Rights.
- 74 For a comprehensive denunciation of the Communist regime's failure to implement its programmes effectively beyond the sphere of central government planning, see Višek (1999: 184–218).
- 75 For the Czech Republic it noted that '[t]he inter-Ministerial Roma Commission still has no budget to implement policies, no executive power and few permanent staff' (European Commission 2000a: 26). This was precisely the predicament of the co-ordinating government committee in the mid-1960s, which failed to implement the programme of transferring and dispersing Roma throughout the federal republic!
- 76 However, Vermeersch noted that there was no clear structure allowing Romani organisations to participate and that the Commissioner, an appointee rather than elected officer, had lost credibility among many Roma because of his support for the government view that refugees from Slovakia were simply economic migrants (Vermeersch 2000: 8).
- 77 In the meantime, the 1996 policy document had been updated slightly in November 1997 by Resolution 796/97 of the Slovak Government.
- 78 By mid-July 1999 over 1,000 Roma were reported to have requested asylum in Finland in that year 'with the bulk of them arriving in the [last few weeks]' (*Sine* 1999, Fenyvesi 1999).
- 79 The Finnish prime minister reiterated and broadened this message shortly afterwards declaring: 'It is up to the governments [of Central and East European countries] to take the issue seriously and stop the discrimination of Roma' [sic].
- 80 The 'Visegrad Four' countries, regarded as among the front-runners for EU entry, are the Central European states of the Czech and Slovak Republics, Hungary and Poland.

- 81 The following passage does not quite reach the depths of a Jan Slota utterance: 'The lifestyle of many of them is oriented towards consumption and they live from hand to mouth. Because of their lower educational standard, the philosophy of some of them is simply to survive from one day to the next. If we add their increased propensity to alcohol abuse, absence of an at least minimum degree of planning, and low concern for developing normal habits including the feeling of responsibility, hygienic habits and ethics, this philosophy is changing today to that of living "from one benefit to the next"' (Office of the President of Slovakia 1999: 7, quoted Cahn and Vermeersch 2000: 76–7).
- 82 These claims were ridiculed as wild, unsubstantiated exaggerations in the Romani press, which cited demographic and ethnographic experts in their rebuttal (*Romano novo list* 2000: 3).
- 83 In the 1998 elections there was only one Romani deputy, Monika Horáková, elected to the Czech Parliament – and not for a Romani party.
- 84 Even where not weakened by factionalism, Roma organisations had little power to achieve much. For example, '[r]elative cohesiveness among the Slovak Roma ha[d] not yielded benefits for the collective, mainly because a number of successive Slovak governments ha[d] neglected the Roma and their problems' (Barany 1998: 320).
- 85 The daily *Pravda* headlined its front page story 'Organised Exodus' (*Pravda* 6 July 1999), while President Schuster believed the migration was a plot, insisting that 'time will confirm how these Roma were organised, in what manner, and why they were chosen' (Naegele 1999). The 2000 Regular Report on Slovakia noted that '[s]ome political representatives have blamed the situation on the Roma themselves or attributed it to organised gangs' but added: 'The underlying social and economic roots can nevertheless not be ignored' (European Commission 2000b).
- 86 This strategy was taken a step further in April 2001 by an agreement between the Czech Foreign Ministry and the IRU (see Acton and Klimová 2001). Likewise, on 27 July 1999 the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs insisted, in response to the refugee crisis, that 'the problem of Roma is not only a specifically Slovak problem ... but has Europe-wide dimensions and for this reason, too, it will need to be solved on a Europe-wide basis' (Slovak Government 1999b: 4).
- 87 '[W]here Roma face severe violence and discrimination ... young, disaffected Roma are increasingly reacting to their abuse with aggression – potentially setting the stage for violent inter-ethnic conflict. Young Roma in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria, and Macedonia are among the most radicalised' (Kawczynski 1998: 98).
- 88 Such as *Yzjenné snužiti* (Mutual co-existence) in Ostrava, headed by a charismatic development worker from India, Kumar Vishwanathan, which brought Romani and Czech communities together in the wake of the devastating floods of 1997. However NGOs can have their own problems of impermanence, limited resources and disorganisation (see Trehan 2001, Šiklová 1999).

**Chapter 6** Razor blades amidst the velvet?  
Changes and continuities in the Gypsy experience  
of the Czech and Slovak lands  
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Razor blades amidst the velvet?

1982) proclaimed "Gypsies are the least protected citizens – a third world culture in the midst of a European Culture" and went on to assert: "Rights and freedoms should benefit all people regardless of their nationality or ethnic origins. Belonging to a certain nationality or race cannot be a reason for limiting a persons rights or depriving him of his rights". The implication was that Gypsies merited ethnic status, something the communist regimes of Poland and Hungary had acknowledged but Czechoslovakia had not. In the course of the Velvet Revolution Roma had close ties to the Civic Forum (an outgrowth of Charter '77) and both Czech and Slovak states have enshrined the above principles in their respective new constitutions.

One might have hoped, then, that such political liberation would lead to steady improvements in the broader social circumstances of Roma. However, if we consider some basic social stratificatory variables we find that such is by no means the case. In 1989 Kostelancik observed that 36 per cent of all Romani households lived in one room buildings. Such is still the case. The Romani population is overwhelmingly concentrated in what are officially recognised to be the worst housing conditions.

Roma have been and are heavily employed in seasonal occupations, by definition somewhat tenuous and insecure, and in reality poorly paid. Kalibova (1992) has demonstrated that Romani people born in 1980 can expect to live approximately thirteen years less than can non-Gypsies. In terms of education it is still the case that only 29 per cent of them advance to vocational schools (Kostelancik 1989). The number of Roma entering higher education establishments is minimal and those teaching in such places virtually non-existent. Truancy rates are over eight times higher than those for non-Gypsies. Over a quarter of all Romani children are officially in special schools. As 20 per cent of all Romani children are officially designated as mentally retarded, this is perhaps predictable. Officially the Romani proportion of the overall population (4 per cent) is responsible for half the robberies, 60 per cent of the thefts and 20 per cent of overall crimes (Ulch 91). Such data parallel the Communist period during which Gypsies accounted for three quarters of all charges laid for endangering the morals of youth and a quarter of those for parasitism. Arguably then 'over-criminalised' by regimes old and new, Roma have remained massively over-represented amongst the imprisoned population for whom conditions have remained quite appalling.

Perhaps it is unrealistic to expect that in a period of rapid change such inequalities could be reduced in a short space of time. The status of Roma as an 'underclass' was by no means the product of the Communist Regime and hence should not be expected to alter as an automatic spin-off from its demise. Rather, the history of the Roma in the Czech and Slovak lands is one of continuous oppression since the mid sixteenth century when legislation was passed to expel them on the alleged grounds that they were spying on behalf of the Turks. The later part of the following century found the regime ravaged by the aftermath of the Thirty Years War. Guy (1975) refers to the country as "depopulated, plague-ridden, starving and continually troubled by serf uprisings and robber bands recruited from discharged soldiers. Meanwhile the Turks (and French) mounted new and more menacing attacks. It was a terrible time for Roma." Many Gypsies were expelled but many others, less 'fortunate' were slaughtered and their corpses left hanging from trees on the borders to deter future immigration.

'Velvet' is the word widely used in order to describe the manifestly dramatic events which have taken place in the Czechoslovak lands since 1989. The argument is that given the collapse of a political and economic system which had been in place for forty years, followed four years later by the Czech/Slovak schism, potential catastrophes have been kept at arm's length by a combination of good will and calm heads. Clearly there is some truth in this version of events. This region has avoided the kind of militarised conflict which has plagued the old Yugoslavia, Chechnia and Azerbaijan, while the divide provided the opportunity for the newly formed states to respond to changed circumstances at the pace each preferred. Hence the Czech Republic could follow Prime Minister Klaus down the free market route just as fast as the West would permit, whilst Slovakia under Prime Minister Meciar was more reluctant to cast aside what many there regarded as benefits deriving from the old 'socialised' means of production. Velvet Revolution has, it appears, been followed by Velvet Divorce. It is clear, however, that such a cosy view ignores substantial numbers of people who have been adversely effected by the changes in economic terms. It is even more clear that it ignores the plight of the Gypsies, or *Roma*, whose situation has deteriorated in almost every way since 1989.

This was not, of course, the way it was meant to be. The activists in the struggle against the Communists were well aware of the adverse circumstances which most Roma endured under that regime. For example, Vaclav Havel (1982), prior to the Velvet Revolution had described the public attitude towards Gypsies in Czechoslovakia as somewhere between indifference and racism. The communist state in his view had done little or nothing to counter this attitude. "Czechoslovakia", Havel asserted, "demands a more enlightened and more tolerant policy". Charter '77 (Havel

Guy tells that this kind of persecution collapsed throughout the Hapsburg Empire in the eighteenth Century. The Age of Enlightenment was defined by attempts being made to transform lands into national and 'rational' cent'ralised states. The intention as far as Roma were concerned was to transform them into productive peasants ultimately controlled by the state. Such attempts at assimilation were proceeded by the provision of new houses and compulsory employment. To 'rational' ends then, Roma were to be prohibited from travelling and from owning wagons and horses. Furthermore they were forbidden to wear 'outlandish' clothes.

People were officially forbidden to speak the Romani language and Gypsies became abolished linguistically, to be reconstituted as 'New Farmers'. Happily all these assimilatory measures collapsed only (less happily) to be superseded by routine harassment of Roma throughout the nineteenth century. For example, they were required to register with the local police who very often tried to 'escort' them off their patch. In the 1920s Roma shared with convicted thieves the doubtful distinction of being required to carry identity cards. This was part of an attempt to restrict nomadism – a practice which became illegal unless formally sanctioned by the local police and local authority. The Nazi period brought about another, albeit a more 'successful' attempt at exterminating the Roma. Whilst those in the Slovak lands avoided this fate, the Czech-based Roma were virtually eradicated.

The post-war Communist government promised that anti-Gypsy discrimination would not be tolerated. The preferred form of social control became assimilation again. With this objective in mind, in the 1950s laws were passed aimed at the remaining minority of nomads, denying them the right to travel. Wheels were forcibly removed from carts and wagons and horses were shot. Even the Czech Circus was affected. This law on restricting movement could be applied to Roma who just happened to be travelling somewhere or visiting friends or relatives. Those officially categorised as nomads could be imprisoned for terms ranging from six months to three years. Essentially whilst such measures succeeded to some extent in limiting Romani patterns of movement, they failed to achieve assimilation. Indeed, rendering the population static resulted in the institutionalisation of the special segregation of Roma in terms of amenities and low quality settlements or ghettos.

The negatively differentiated treatment of the Romani populations of the Czech and Slovak lands thus needs to be understood in terms of important continuities. Whether by elimination or assimilation the intent has been to inhibit Romani autonomy and the outcome to consign Roma to the bottom of the social stratificatory heap. The aftermath of the Velvet Revolution and Divorce has further worsened the situation of the Roma.

It is abundantly clear that both the Czech Republic and Slovakia are currently rife with expressions of anti-Gypsy racism. This racism manifests itself in a wide variety of areas. For example, on the streets, people point to Roma, pull faces at them and obviously avoid them. One woman I was with visibly shuddered when she saw them. Everyone had a ready off-the-peg anecdote to tell about Gypsy criminality. Gypsy visibility on street corners, in city centres and on public transport (perhaps especially public transport) is a matter for public concern. Graffiti proclaiming 'Gypsy free area' are common. In public places such as pubs, clubs, discos and restaurants Roma

have been effectively blacklisted by many businesses. Signs contrary to the constitution declaring "Gypsies not welcome" have been ignored by local authorities. More blatantly Roma have had dogs set on them when they have attempted to go into bars. Owners typically deny their own prejudices. One restaurateur, for instance, was reported in the *Prague Post* in 1992 as excusing himself by saying: "Germans come to the restaurant, see them [the Gypsies] and leave".

Racism also occurs at sporting events. For example, soccer clubs from places like Trnava and Kosice (where there are relatively high proportions of Roma) are subjected to the kinds of racist chants most British soccer fans are used to hearing directed at black players.

There has also been a dramatic intensification in anti-Gypsy feelings amongst young people. Most obviously and violently skinheads have taken and continue to take their anti-Gypsy sentiments onto especially (but by no means exclusively) the Prague streets, calling for gas chambers to be introduced for the 'impure' race. A Ku Klux Klan group has been established. Possibly more worryingly, Nougayrede (1992) reported an upwardly mobile, rather 'Americanised' group of sixteen and seventeen year olds in Prague. They consider the slogan 'Foreigners out!' to be intolerable. "Tolerance and friendship between people ... especially the Europeans" they chant in unison but they make major exceptions to the rule, especially in the case of Gypsies, although not liking "Gypsies doesn't make you a racist, they assert serenely!" This kind of casual racism is allowed to seem normal. In the course of a televised beauty contest, one young woman quite matter of factly observed that her ambition was to become a lawyer so that she could help her community get rid of all the 'dirty' Gypsies. Her interviewer gave no indication that this was in any way controversial. The media indeed plays its part in expressing and reproducing anti-Gypsy prejudices. It has, for instance, run campaigns linking Roma with diseases such as typhoid. Furthermore, the crime-reporting policy has been to identify the ethnic origins of people involved only on the occasions when Roma have been the offenders, ignoring such an ethnic dimension when the victims have been Roma.

The police have proved to be reluctant to act where violence has been targeted against Roma. Indeed, such is their anti-Gypsy reputation that Romani victims often decline to report incidents for fear of becoming doubly victimised. Those events which are reported are by no means automatically recorded and those which are recorded are left bereft of their ethnic dimension. Helsinki Watch (1992) has provided evidence to the effect that the police routinely interact aggressively with Roma and regularly conduct unauthorised searches of their houses. Express efforts have been made to 'cleanse' the streets of Roma, especially in tourist areas and in those areas where businesses wish to locate themselves. The police might also use the low credibility of Roma as a good opportunity to steal from them. It seems that many police officers use coercive measures against Roma as a means of re-establishing their credibility amongst the population at large. In recent years a number of businesses have been established offering private 'security services'. The so-called 'black' sheriffs are developing a real reputation for their vigorous anti-Gypsy actions. Public opinion polls indicate that 85 per cent of Czechoslovaks wanted Roma to be excluded from their neighborhoods and 92 per cent believe that all Gypsies are

criminals. Hardly anyone could countenance having a Gypsy as a friend and 83 per cent believed that Gypsies should be denied all welfare benefits.

Such rampant racism is both rooted in and reproduces the social stratificatory characteristics identified above. Since the two 'velvets', for example, Romani housing conditions have actually declined. Helsinki Watch (1992) found that throughout the region landlords had felt at liberty to remove windows and turn off electricity and water supplies so that Roma would be forced out of their apartments. In terms of the labour market those state employment agencies, whose responsibility it is to enforce equal rights legislation, largely fail to do so. They 'justify' advertising jobs with private companies which expressly exclude Gypsies in terms of avoiding mutually embarrassing encounters. However, positions in the public sector are also openly declared as not for Gypsies. Whilst legislation prohibits firms from requiring job applicants to identify their ethnic origins, in practice Roma are required to declare themselves as Gypsies. Finally, Roma are experiencing new forms of discrimination in formal educational terms. In 'mixed' schools their children are often segregated 'for hygiene reasons'. Increasingly 'dirty' children are sent home. This results in the state withdrawing welfare payments from their parents for refusing to send their children to school! One has to draw the conclusion that since the Velvet Revolution and Divorce, the structural position of the Roma has deteriorated. There is a tendency, perhaps understandably, for concern over the treatment of the Czech and Slovak Gypsies to be focused on manifest expressions of violence and symbols of such violence. It is relatively easy for liberals in the West to be horrified by the racist graffiti which is now commonplace and by the knowledge that skinhead razor gangs frequently rampage through towns and cities looking for Gypsies. Consciences are almost as easily pricked by an awareness of the discriminatory practices identified earlier. The reality is, however, that the latter are potentially dialectically linked with the structural location of the Gypsies.

'Potentially' is the key word here. Throughout the Communist period the Gypsies in structural terms constituted an 'underclass'. The Romani activist Scuchka (1993) refers to a situation of "State Racism". During that time, the official policy of assimilation required, however, that discrimination against Roma should remain relatively invisible. Whilst anti-Gypsy prejudices were held and expressed by a large proportion of the public, discriminatory powers were substantially within the control of the state. The state-controlled media restricted overt anti-Gypsy output and the authorities stamped down hard on public acts of violence against Roma. In an important sense the collapse of the communist state has 'liberated' people; they are now free (and are more likely to have the power) to discriminate and indeed to engage in physical violence. Scuchka observes that state racism has been replaced by citizen racism. It is now in the open.

However understandable, Scuchka's conclusion is, it is somewhat limited. 'Citizen racism' is not a product of 'natural' impulses which any given state can inhibit as it chooses. Citizen racism cannot be analysed in isolation. It has to be understood in terms of a complex interplay between state, economy and global politics. A given state may attempt to inhibit, release or wash its hands of citizen racism but it makes its attempt within a far broader context which determines the parameters seeming to limit the 'choice' of the Czech and Slovak states appear to an alternation between

'handwashing' and 'releasing'. Many changes which have adversely effected Roma have been (on the surface at least) brought about by the state. Although skinhead razor violence has been publicly denounced, no measures have been forthcoming to deal with it. Indeed Leicht (1992) alleges that in at least one Bohemian town officials have gone so far as to engage skinheads to help in guaranteeing security and order. Police have been all too willing to victimise Roma in promoting the interests of more powerful social groups. Both the Czech and Slovak states have been quite prepared to break and bend their own rules when the issue concerns Gypsies. The case of employment rights has already been commented on. It is also the case that contrary to law 'Gypsy registers' have been compiled in some areas. Peoples' houses have been illegally entered and some Roma have been forcibly removed from the Czech Republic. In Slovakia a local authority imposed a curfew on Roma who were not allowed on the streets between the hours of 11pm and 4.30 am. The local police chief observed that this was illegal but effective. Apologists for the regimes argue that they are trying to contain 'citizen racism' by being seen to be actively engaged in controlling what they describe as anti-social behaviour perpetrated by Gypsies. The reality is, of course, that such state action actually legitimates rather than inhibits citizen racism. A 'kind' reading is that a strong state has been superseded by a relatively weak one, not adequately equipped and indeed somewhat reluctant to oppose public expression of opinion, even when racist. A harsher reading would be that the lack of response to citizen racism and the enacting of state-implemented racist measures is less an outcome of loss of power and more a policy designed to enhance state power. Such an account is supported by the increasing tendency for officials and researchers to make public pronouncements which are liable to promote anti-Gypsy feelings and actions. Academics, for instance, now feel free (or are tacitly encouraged?) to refer to Gypsies as 'alien' and to repeat a catalogue of very familiar sounding anecdotes and prejudices.

For example Gypsies are alleged to:

- commit crimes to get a bed on a cold night
- coerce doctors into giving them false medical certificates saying they are unable to work
- breed more prodigiously than 'normal' people and thereby threaten to swamp the country
- have a large number of extended kin in limited accommodation
- not know how to live in a normal house and use the floorboards for firewood
- work with mechanical things, spoiling the neighbourhoods both visibly and audibly
- make and sell illicit alcohol
- urinate in bushes!
- dispatch the women to the tourist areas for the express purpose of prostitution.

During the communist period Charter 77 termed as 'genocide' state attempts to pressurise women into having abortions and sterilisations. There is no evidence of recent changes. Officials are still rewarded for meeting assigned sterilisation quotas and Gypsy women are given bonuses five to ten times those given to other women (Ulch 91).