Stefano Montesi

Hairie, married with one child, lives in a refugee camp near Sarajevo but came to Konik refugee camp in Podgorica in search of her mother. Podgorica, Montenegro, November 2000 (Stefan Montesi).

Irka Cederberg

Many Roma from Albania and Kosovo have attempted the perilous crossing to Italy, often dying in the attempt. Bina Ajeti, a refugee from Priština, Kosovo, lost thirteen of her loved ones on an ill-fated voyage in 1999 on which 103 Roma drowned. She now lives in an Italian refugee camp outside Florence. (Irka Cederberg)

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Hungary: politics, difference and equality

Martin Kovats

The study of Roma politics is still in its infancy, not least because of the relatively recent emergence of such activity.[1] This chapter focuses on Hungary, the country which has done most to encourage an explicit political dimension to Roma identity through state support for self-organised groups, the inclusion of Roma in Europe's most comprehensive minority rights legislation (Law on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities (1993), hereafter Minorities Law) and the creation of a nationwide network of representative Roma institutions (the minority self-government system).

Politics is fundamentally about relationships of power, ranging from the local to the global level, and, as such, is a strange (and distorting) medium full of ambiguities and contradictions. Though the further evolution of Roma politics is inevitable, it cannot be assumed that the process will necessarily bring benefits to Roma individuals and populations as a whole. Each Roma population politicises in its own time and in its own way in accordance with local conditions. Nevertheless, by analysing the Roma political experience in Hungary, it is possible not only to identify the factors determining behaviour and outcomes within that country, but also to establish parameters for the ongoing debate about the role of Roma politics, as well as identify points of reference with which to evaluate the political activity of Roma populations in other states.

The incorporation of the Roma into the Hungarian state and society

Feudal flexibility

A date for the arrival of a significant number of Roma into Hungary is still unresolved.[2] It has been argued that the existence of a number of settlements from the early fourteenth century with versions of *cigány* (the Hungarian for Gypsy) in their name (Cigánd, Cigányegyhaza) indicates a relatively early

presence. However, this view is dismissed by the historian, Pál Nagy, whose most recent contribution to the debate identifies the first record of Roma settlement from the 1450s (Nagy 1998: 31–3, 66–7).

More research is needed to identify precisely the political/legal status of Roma during this early period and we must be conscious of the fact that contemporary notions of citizenship did not apply in the feudal world where status and rights were often related to ethnicity (and position within the division of labour). From (and even prior to) the foundation of the Hungarian state in 1000, the ruling élite sought to attract foreigners (non-Magyars) in order to bring skills and labour power into the country.[3] The newcomers 'obtained the privileges of choosing their own justices, living according to their own customs, and paying taxes in money based on holdings of land instead of a poll-tax' (Pamlényi 1975: 63). The situation of the Roma is more complicated because they did not arrive by invitation. Based on detailed archival research, Nagy argues that there is no evidence of Roma, as a population, being provided with any collective privilege (Nagy 1998: 125), though certain itinerant groups received a kind of privilege in the form of letters of safe conduct (Fraser 1992: 76). It appears that local Roma groups were attached to town or castle authorities who determined their place of settlement, employment and wages. These arrangements were often subsequently confirmed by royal decree. What proportion of the Roma population was covered by such arrangements is hard to quantify because there is inevitably less documentary evidence regarding those who lived a less regulated existence.

In addition to such ethnic diversity, the early Roma settlers benefited from the tripartite division of the country for most of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries which precluded the establishment of centralised government.[4] Roma could provide support for the various armies on the ever-shifting frontline between Muslim and Christian empires (skilled and unskilled labour, information). Roma also filled a variety of occupations including public executioner, market inspector, doctor, international wine merchant. The absence of persecution is also demonstrated by the establishment of a Gypsy Quarter (*cigányváros*) in the capital, Buda, during the sixteenth century (Mészáros: 1976: 483).

Habsburg rule and the emergence of Gypsy policy

Towards the end of the seventeenth century, the victory of the Habsburgs, and their absolutist pretensions, led to a decline in local autonomy and in the application of feudal privileges. It also affected the ethnic mix and demographic structure of the country with the arrival of many new landlords and the importation of immigrant labour to fill depopulated areas. The first half of the eighteenth century was also a time of economic stagnation and the

rapid growth in the numbers of landless and dispossessed people. Against this background Roma policy first emerged in the sense of regulations explicitly targeting the Roma population as a whole. Roma were required to settle under the authority of landlords, whom a decree of 1725 also obliged to pursue and expel itinerants from their areas. By the 1760s resistance to serfdom led to a deepening of state involvement and produced the now well-known regulations and policy of assimilation of Empress Maria Theresa. In 1767 all Roma were made subject to the jurisdiction of the local courts, in effect completing the legal integration of the Roma into the state and society.[5]

The consequences of eighteenth century policies of persecution and violent assimilation were profound, most notably in producing the economic and social marginalisation of Roma individuals, communities and identity. The consistent failure of policies to achieve their stated aim (the peaceful absorption of Roma into the ranks of the serfs) also created a culture of antipathy between the authorities and Roma, with the former identifying the cause of this failure with the lack of 'civilisation' of the Roma themselves. However, in order to identify the factors determining the contemporary circumstances of the Hungarian Roma and of state-Roma relations, we need to move forward to the next critical period. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the emergence of new factors, most notably the social, economic and political effects of agricultural recession and early industrialisation, as well as the evolution of Magyar national identity.

Roma and the emerging nation-state

With the decline of serfdom from the mid-nineteenth century Roma had to shift for themselves within the new economic environment. Inevitably, without land (only 3.4 per cent of the Roma population was identified as working their own land at the end of the century), capital or developed economic and social relations, most were confined to occupations offering little security or possibility of development. An extensive register in 1893 found that 40 per cent of Roma worked as agricultural day labourers, one quarter were involved in metal work, carpentry or construction while a further 10 per cent lived through providing entertainment (Pomogyi 1995: 17). Agricultural depression from the end of the nineteenth century led to a fall in wages and in demand for casual farm labour. Roma artisans were also hit hard by the development of manufacturing industries which priced them out of the markets for metal and wooden utensils. The majority of the Roma in Hungary entered the twentieth century facing declining economic opportunity and rising poverty which persisted until the 1960s (Csalog 1993: 29–33).

Roma were not the only people to suffer economic distress during this period which saw mass emigration, numerous outbreaks of rural militancy, the formation of trade unions and revolution. However, the fate of Roma was

also marked by the deepening perception, particularly on the part of state authorities, of their being 'alien' to the Hungarian nation, despite the fact that Roma fought alongside Magyars in 1848–9 (during the failed liberation struggle against the Habsburgs) and increasingly adopted the Hungarian language.[6] This perception was created in part by the arrival, in increasing numbers from the 1860s, of Roma liberated from slavery in neighbouring Romania. The poverty and cultural isolation of the newcomers presented a challenge to the authorities with which they singularly failed to cope. The lessons of previous centuries had not been learned, and expelling itinerants from one locality to another simply served to breed fear and resentment while failing to solve the 'problem'.

However, the fundamental cause of tension lay in the increasing exclusivity of Magyar national identity. To secure popular support for the anti-Habsburg struggle, the leaders of the 1848–9 Revolution mobilised the Magyar population with passionate nationalist rhetoric. Initially, this process did not adversely affect the Roma but was targeted against rival 'nationalities', primarily northern (Slovak) and southern (Croat) Slavs. Following the *Ausgleich,* the new ruling élite introduced the policy of magyarisation to secure their status and powers within the Empire.[7] The arrival and persistence of Romanian Roma, who did not assimilate either socially or economically, led to Roma identity becoming part of defining what was not Magyar (in both ethnographic and moral terms) which also adversely affected the long-established Hungarian Roma population. In 1920 Hungary regained independent statehood, though, as a war loser, at the price of losing two-thirds of its territory and millions of Magyars who became subjects of 'alien' nations (Slovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia). The politics of the inter-war Horthy regime was based on revising the country's borders and Magyar chauvinism.[8] Whereas Maria-Theresa had offered Roma the economic security of serfdom in exchange for cultural assimilation, during the first decades of the twentieth century the Hungarian state gave only unemployment and an ideology of cultural exclusion, a combination which led inexorably, through increasing pogroms, towards the mass murder of the Holocaust during World War Two.[9]

The first Cultural Alliance

The post-war Hungarian state[10] paid practically no attention to the Roma who were defined (in the census) as those whose mother-tongue was Romani. This census produced conveniently low figures of 21,387 (1949) and 25,633 (1960), i.e. less than 0.3 per cent of the total population (Crowe 1991: 119–20). The 'uprising' of 1956 profoundly affected the Hungarian state and society and contributed to a revision of official attitudes towards the Roma. In part, this was due to the dedication and hard work of a Romani journalist, Mária László, who in 1957 persuaded the authorities to allow the establishment of the Cultural Alliance of Hungarian Gypsies (*Magyarországi Cigányok Kulturális Szövetsége*). The constitution of the Alliance emphasised the need for the state and Roma (representatives) to develop policies to improve opportunities for and the living conditions of Roma people. Nevertheless, initial plans emphasised the promotion of Roma languages and culture, leading Sághy to conclude that the aim was 'unambiguously to create the basis for achieving nationality status' (Sághy 1999: 24).

The Alliance coincided with (and possibly even initiated) a revival of state interest in the Roma. To understand the context to this development it should be recognised that state socialism explicitly sought the transformation and modernisation of the economy and society (as distinct from social and economic evolution based upon competition between interests within civil society). Furthermore, the Roma population was in a profoundly disadvantaged condition having suffered decades of poverty and discrimination and having received practically no support to recover from the trauma of the war. In 1957 the Ministry of Labour commissioned a survey of the employment, housing, health and cultural[11] circumstances of the Roma population, the findings of which provided the basis for the watershed politburo decree of 1961 on Tasks in Relation to Improving the Circumstances of the Gypsy Population.

Ideology of assimilation

Before looking at the effect of Communist policy on the living conditions of Roma people, it is necessary to examine the position adopted by the state towards Roma identity. Despite praise for its work, the 1961 decree abolished the Alliance declaring it 'unsuitable' for the tasks ahead. The Alliance's demise reflected the conscious decision on the part of the state authorities to strive for the full assimilation (cultural, as well as social and economic) of the Roma. To what extent this approach represented a racist contempt for all things Roma is hard to gauge, though contemporary documents indicate that this was a minor factor, particularly at the higher levels of the policy making process. Instead, Communist ideologues saw Roma culture as 'introspective', 'conservative' and 'backward', defined by centuries of persecution and discrimination and perpetuated by racism, unemployment, unhygienic ghettos and illiteracy. Its abolition would liberate Roma people, allowing them to take their place alongside all other citizens and to enjoy the benefits of modernisation (Turóczi 1962: 74–5).

In fact, Roma culture was attributed far less influence in the perpetuation of Roma disadvantage than that of prejudice on the part of society as a whole. The chauvinism of previous regimes was responsible for widespread prejudice and discrimination against the Roma, even on the part of state and Party organs. Supporting Roma identity would simply retard progress

because it was irredeemably linked to negative attitudes. In effect, the Kádár government sought to cure racism by abolishing that which 'provoked' it. Assimilation was also justified by an interpretation of Roma history which emphasised the steady disintegration of the Roma 'nation' from a supposed unified origin into the spatial, linguistic, cultural and occupational diversity evident both within Hungary and abroad (Turóczi 1962: 79).

Integration policies

The Communists' unambiguous emphasis on (material) equality over (cultural) difference defined policy for the next twenty years. Probably the single most important factor in this approach was the desire to incorporate into the socialist system of extensive economic development the Roma who represented one of the few remaining untapped pools of labour in the country. The 1957 survey had found that only around 30 per cent of Roma were in regular employment, another 30 per cent worked occasionally while 40 per cent were effectively unemployed (Faludi 1963: 8–11). By the mid-1980s Roma employment levels (85 per cent men, 53 per cent women), closely conformed to the national average. However, Roma were not evenly distributed throughout the economy and their late arrival into the industrial labour force, the persistence of prejudice and the retarding effects of other aspects of disadvantage (relatively lower levels of educational attainment, the quality and location of housing, poorer health, etc.) meant that they were heavily over-represented amongst unskilled workers (Mezey 1986: 275–87).

In addition to employment, which was encouraged through the growth in the number of jobs, wage subsidies to encourage enterprises to take on and keep staff, as well as campaigning against discriminatory practices, policy also focused on housing and education. This effectively complemented the employment strategy by improving access to Roma labour and its quality. In the early 1960s most Roma lived in over 2,000 'Gypsy settlements' (*cigánytelep*), isolated communities with little to no infrastructure and in accommodation often deemed unfit for human habitation. A slum clearance programme, combined with regular wages, access to public housing and to low-cost building loans, enabled Roma to enjoy more comfortable and healthy housing, though even by the mid-1980s Roma tended to occupy smaller and poorer quality accommodation than the national average (Havas *et al.* 1995: 77). Rehousing also led to significant change in the geographic distribution of the Roma population. Tens of thousands of Roma moved into urban areas and, in the countryside (where most Roma still lived), there was a general movement closer to the centre of villages (Kocsis and Kovács 1999: 13–20).

Important, if slow, progress was made in education. In 1961 only 2–3 per cent of Roma children completed eighth grade (usually completed at age

fourteen and representing the most basic educational qualification required for employment). Twenty-five years later this figure was approaching 40 per cent with over 4,000 Roma participating in secondary education. Improvements were largely due to greater accessibility of schooling and better living conditions combined with campaigning amongst Roma (and non-Roma parents) and the educational authorities. The effectiveness of the policy was limited by the low base of the starting point (one-third of Roma adults were illiterate in 1960) (Faludi 1963: 11), and prejudice remained a significant obstacle to the progress of many children. Antipathy towards Roma school attendance on the part of schools was identified early on but, despite formal calls to end segregation within classes and the creation of 'Gypsy' schools, these were not eradicated and the appearance of increasing numbers of Roma within the educational system led to growth in the number of segregated classes (Kemény 1999b: 245). Though many Roma were able to enjoy vocational secondary education, the numbers in grammar schools and of those going on to tertiary education remained very low.

If Communist integration policies failed to achieve equality for Roma people, they at least allowed the Roma, both individually and collectively, to participate in and benefit from the increase in wealth and improvement in public services during the 'golden age' of state socialism. Failure was due, in part, to the extent of the disadvantages of the Roma population and an insufficiency of time (only twenty-five years) in which they could catch-up. The gains of the Roma in absolute terms, while important, were also offset by improvements throughout society. Disadvantage was not so much abolished as reconstructed.

The failure of assimilation

Integration policies were also undermined by the regime's inevitable failure to eliminate public perception of Roma identity. As noted, anti-Roma prejudice was perceived by policy makers as being a major factor in creating and perpetuating Roma disadvantage. However, as Michael Stewart observed, the state was not able to compel local authorities in particular, and the wider public in general, to end discriminatory behaviour. Whereas Habsburg assimilation policies foundered on poor communications, Communist policy failed primarily because of a lack of political will to take the necessary steps to eliminate prejudice which would have proved highly unpopular in many quarters. In addition, 'assimilation' (in the sense of the total loss of identity) prevented the development of a formal Roma 'voice' that could provide alternative explanations for the tensions inherent in the integration process. Consequently, a tendency developed, throughout society, to blame the Roma themselves for these, leading to a revitalisation of prejudice rather than its reduction.[12]

Other factors also contributed to the growing realisation that Roma identity was not likely to disappear. A consequence of developing programmes for and monitoring their effects upon Roma, was to stimulate research into the nature and scope of Roma 'difference'. In 1971 a national Roma survey was commissioned which found that non-native speakers of Hungarian (Romani and Beash speakers) suffered particular disadvantage in school because of their limited knowledge of Hungarian and the failure of the school system to compensate for this (Kemény 1974: 63–72). Improving Roma access to education also enabled some Roma to articulate their feelings about their culture and identity in a manner more accessible to mainstream society.[13]

By the end of the 1970s, despite the significant social and economic advances made by the Roma population as whole, it was becoming increasingly obvious that Roma identity had not been eliminated. Indeed, Kemény's research had proved that, far from disappearing through assimilation, the number of officially identified Roma had actually increased by over 150 per cent in a decade and was continuing to grow rapidly (Kemény 1974: 64). In addition, the establishment of the first World Romany Congress (1971), Hungary's formal acceptance of the minority rights provisions of the Helsinki Accords (1975) and the work of a small, but growing, number of Roma intellectuals, such as Ágnes Daróczi, committed to developing Romani culture and achieving nationality status, meant that the official position of refusing to acknowledge Roma identity became increasingly untenable. In 1979 the Roma were recognised as an ethnic group, a novel status falling short of 'nationality' with its associated right to self-organisation. However, this was only a partial retreat as ethnic status was conceived as a temporary measure necessary to facilitate full 'assimilation'.[14]

The 'new consensus'

Real change in Roma policy occurred in the early 1980s following a severe currency crisis which also heralded the start of the country's long transition to a market economy and a pluralist political system. In 1984 the Patriotic People's Front, (*Hazafias Népfront*), the umbrella organisation for state socialist civil society, published a report which concluded that 'integration [of the Gypsies] is restricted by our difficult economic situation ... a consequence of which is that we must now consider the Gypsy population as playing an important role in the construction of a new consensus' (Blaha *et al.* 1995: 27). The basis of this 'new consensus' was that the costs of achieving equality for Roma citizens, in respect of living conditions and opportunities, were now considered prohibitive. Consequently, 'integration' was to be replaced by negotiating a cheaper relationship between the state and society with representatives of the Roma as a distinct, culturally based population, i.e. the struggle for equality was to be subordinated to the promotion of 'difference'.

The institutional arrangements of the new policy were soon put in place. In 1985 national and county-level Gypsy Councils were set up and, in the following year, the Cultural Alliance of Hungarian Gypsies (*Magyarországi Cigányok Kulturális Szövetsége*) was established (not to be confused with the organisation bearing the same name formed on the initiative of Mária László in 1957). The Gypsy Councils were political bodies but they had no budget and their members were selected by national or local officials and did not enjoy any popular mandate. The imminent dissolution of the one-party system prevented the Gypsy Councils from developing a significant role or identity. The Cultural Alliance, on the other hand, enjoyed considerable public funding which it used to promote Roma cultural organisations and events. This discrepancy in state support between 'political' and 'cultural' activities characterises the emphasis the new policy approach placed on culture. This is not surprising as, coincidental with these developments, the mid-1980s saw the re-emergence of Roma unemployment and, by 1990, around 40 per cent of Roma workers had lost their jobs (Havas *et al.* 1995: 75).

The promotion of identity and declining living standards

In Hungary the transition to a multi-party system and the end of Communist rule was more gradual than in any other state of the Soviet bloc. Consequently, the continuation of this shift in policy is less strange than might first appear. Indeed, the fundamental change of direction was developed further and accelerated by a new Minorities Law in 1993. This aimed at reviving national identities (alongside the development of civic identities) to fill the ideological vacuum left by the abandonment of state socialism. For the minorities, the state pledged to 'to halt the process of assimilation' (Tabajdi 1997: 10) and to facilitate their cultural and educational autonomy.

Inclusion in the Minorities Law (as an 'ethnic' minority enjoying the same rights as other, 'national', minorities) symbolised the incorporation of Roma policy into this wider political process of reviving national identities. In addition to setting up almost 300 self-organised groups, Roma embraced the minority self-government system, established by the Minorities Law as the institutional means for exercising collective minority rights, and formed almost 500 groups in 1994–5 and over 700 in 1998. Hundreds of Romani cultural events were organised during the 1990s, often with state or NGO support. Also numerous Roma journals were established and Roma programmes were broadcast on television and radio. A number of schools and other educational initiatives targeting Roma were created and Roma studies were included in the curricula of many teacher training institutions. 'Positive discrimination' became an integral part of policy towards the Roma.[15]

Such initiatives appear a step forward from the Kádárist definition of the Roma as a 'disadvantaged social layer'. However, they need to be examined within the context of another characteristic feature of the Roma during the 1990s, the mass impoverishment of the population, growing inequality and an increase in prejudice and discrimination. Unemployment continued to rise and by 1994 only one quarter of healthy Roma of working age had regular work (MTA Szociológiai Intézete 1994: 25). While prejudice may have played a part, the main reason for such high Roma unemployment was that the economy no longer had need of their labour. Structural unemployment was exacerbated by the demographic spread of the population, concentrated in the countryside and in the least developed counties of northern and eastern Hungary, leading the Ministry of Labour to conclude that 'in these surroundings they are no longer semi-skilled or unskilled workers any more, but are Gypsies plain and simple' (Ágoston 1994: 2). By the mid-1990s 'official' Roma unemployment was five times the national average and over 70 per cent of Roma lived below the poverty line compared with only 15 per cent of the total Hungarian population (*Népszabadság*, 13 May 1995).

Some Roma survived 'transition' relatively unscathed and a number flourished by exploiting new economic opportunities, primarily in the service sector. The majority of Roma, made dependent on an undeveloped welfare system and facing rising prices and declining public services, were exposed to the multiple disadvantages associated with impoverishment. Difficulties in covering loan repayments, rent or utility bills led many to be threatened with eviction or to seek cheaper, less desirable accommodation. Freeing up the property market increased inequalities and resulted in the (re)formation of ghettos, as well as a number of high profile attempts by local authorities to rid their areas of some Roma residents.[16] Roma suffered higher rates of child mortality and chronic illness and had a life expectancy on average ten years lower than the already low national average (Puporka and Zádori 1999: 11–20). Disadvantage within the educational system was exacerbated by declining access to nursery education and an increasing tendency to place Roma in so-called 'remedial' classes or special schools (Szilágyi and Heizer 1996: 22, A Kisebbségi Ombudsman 1998: 17). Educational attainment was also undermined by the probable over-representation of Roma amongst the 150,000 children officially recognised as suffering from malnourishment (*Népszabadság*, 28 October 1998). In the 1990s the chances of Roma going on to higher education were fifty times lower than for non-Roma pupils (*Népszabadság*, 5 February 1998). Despite Roma being the main victims of racially motivated crime, Roma were highly over-represented amongst the prison population (*Népszabadság*, 21 November 1998).

The rise of Roma politics

The greater availability of public funds to promote Roma civil society from 1991 meant that the third characteristic feature of the Roma's experience of post-Communism has been the unprecedented expansion of Roma political activity. By 1998 there were over 1,000 registered Roma organisations (self-governments and self-organised groups) most of which undertook some form of interest representation, as well as enabling several thousand Roma individuals to enjoy an income from public activities. Theoretically, such a growth in lobbying capacity should have increased concessions from government to the Roma population. However, the decline in the economic and social circumstances of most Roma indicates that Roma politics was ineffective in representing the interests of its constituency. We should not be surprised at the limitations of Roma political activity. In addition to the numerous structural factors undermining the creation of an effective political movement (poverty, geographic dispersion, cultural and linguistic diversity, lack of experience and a long-standing tradition of avoiding conflict), it must be remembered that the formal expression of Roma interest representation was created in 1985 precisely to *reduce* the obligations owed by the state towards its Roma citizens. This role for Roma politics was merely extended in the 1990s as the inherent weakness of the Roma as a political community meant that it was relatively easy for the state to manage its development (Kovats 1997: 70–1).

Political realignment and the desire for change at the fall of Communism enabled liberal Roma activists, many of whom had been excluded from the 'official' Communist Roma bodies, to take the initiative in Roma politics. This took the form of preventing the creation of a new monopoly body for national Roma representation in the form of the Democratic Alliance of Hungarian Gypsies (*Magyarországi Cigányok Demokratikus Szövetsége*). This group had coalesced during the struggles against the ailing Communist regime and produced the organisation *Phralipe*, founded in early 1989. Out of this *Phralipe* movement, in 1991, emerged the Roma Parliament which sought to act as a collective forum, independent from the state, to which the rapidly growing number of self-organised Roma groups could attach themselves. The Minorities Law (1993) effectively squashed this development by imposing a legislatively defined mechanism for Roma interest representation (the minority self-government system) and restricting the Roma political agenda to one based on minority rights rather than demands for material and social equality (Kovats 1998). Power within Roma politics was returned to the hands of activists willing to accommodate to the state's conception of appropriate Roma political activity. These took control of the National Gypsy Minority Self-government in 1995 and secured re-election in 1999 under the leadership of Flórián Farkas.

The contradiction of Roma policy

The predominant emphasis on Roma identity in post-Communist policy was also reflected by the limited ambition of programmes to support Roma participation in the mainstream economy and society. The dramatic rise in Roma unemployment produced no coherent response in policy which, in the early 1990s, evolved no further than by crisis management. The coming to power in 1994 of the socialist-liberal coalition, which lasted until 1998, led to a degree of stabilisation and the construction of a Medium Term Action Plan. This was reissued in a similar, if vaguer form by the Young Democrat-Smallholders coalition government in 1999. Though containing a variety of initiatives, the main employment strategies in these plans focused on including Roma in public work schemes and in encouraging subsistence farming. While each of these undoubtedly assists the individuals and families involved, neither provide any long-term solution as public work schemes are designed less to get the unemployed back to work but to enable them to re-qualify for unemployment benefit. Turning Roma into smallholders or peasants does not enable them to acquire the skills or income necessary to compete with other sections of society in an increasingly technology-based economy. A review of the subsistence programs supported by the Public Foundation for Gypsies (*Cigányokért Közalapítvány*) showed an average investment of 1 million forints (£3,000) for twenty-four families producing a monthly return (in either cash or kind) of 2,000–10,000 forints (£5–30), i.e. still substantially below the poverty line. This indicates that policy was still based on limiting costs to the state.[17]

Education is almost universally seen as the long-term solution to Roma disadvantage and significant progress was made in supporting educational initiatives such as the Gandhi Grammar School, Roma '*Esély*' Vocational School, a nationwide network of hostels to support Roma in secondary education and in making available a variety of grants and scholarships. Such initiatives aim to create an educated Roma middle class but this raises the question of the fate of the mass of Roma, who are not included in this social experiment. During the 1990s, the issue of the over-representation of Roma classed as 'backward' has not been addressed and a tendency was identified towards 'spontaneous' segregation (Vég 1995: 9). Rather than facilitating equal opportunities, guidelines for promoting minority education focused, for the Roma and only the Roma, on overcoming their educational 'difficulties'. In 1998 the Parliamentary Commissioner for Minority Rights, Jenő Kaltenberg, expressed concern that this policy implies that the Roma collectively experience problems, rather than individual Roma pupils (A Kisebbségi Ombudsman 1998: 22). Governments consistently rejected calls for an anti-discrimination law which would co-ordinate existing provisions, define discrimination and provide appropriate and accessible remedies. Over half the

provisions of the two action plans for 'Improving the Circumstances of the Gypsy Population' involved commissioning further research and neither contained targets for measuring the success of policies. This meant that, despite the rhetoric, it remained unclear quite what level of improvement might be expected and by when. The kind of timetable to which the plans are working was indicated, in 1996, when the government expressed the view that 'it will take twenty years for the Roma to reach the level of [social and economic] integration achieved during the 1980s' (Szilágyi and Heizer 1996: 20).

It is insufficient to explain away the inadequacies of the action plans as a temporary problem of 'transition'. Instead, we must look at the more profound obstacles to the development of policies to ensure Roma obtain material and social equality with other citizens. The first of these is the cost, complexity and perceived unpopularity of government providing 'too much' support for Roma. The free-market ideology of the post-Communist era does not encourage job creation for a large number of superfluous workers, support for whom would also inevitably mean depriving other interests of resources. Furthermore, as the Kádár regime experienced, even if resources are available it is very difficult to ensure that they are used effectively and desired outcomes are achieved. The low social status of Roma, their lack of voting power and of influential allies, mean that politicians see the Roma as a contentious issue and a vote loser. Nevertheless, Hungary has good grounds for arguing that it needs the support of outside agencies, particularly European institutions, in managing a serious situation inherited from previous eras. Furthermore, it is becoming increasingly obvious that 'Europe' will have to devote more attention and resources to the Central and Eastern European Roma if the process of enlarging the European Union is to be successful. However, it is unlikely that Hungary will be willing to draw attention to such a serious economic, social and political situation while its application for EU membership is still under review. Once a full EU member Hungary could lobby hard for support for its Roma population but it may be many years before such political security is achieved.

Finally, and probably most intractably, the fate of the Roma is inextricably linked to the problematic of Magyar identity. The philosopher, Miklós Tamás Gáspár, has pointed out the unresolved tension between viewing Magyar identity as representing a distinct ethnic group or as an essentially linguistically defined group including all who live and participate in Hungarian society and its culture (Gáspár 1998: 28). It could be argued that minority rights create the possibility of an inclusive civic identity acknowledging non-Magyar identities and culture as integral to and contributing to a broader Hungarian identity and culture.[18] However, this view appears hard to sustain when the promotion of Roma identity is viewed alongside the dis-integration of most Roma from mainstream society. In practice the embrace of minority rights is very much part of a process of reviving links with Magyar communi-

ties abroad in anticipation of their 'return' to the nation within a common European home.[19] As János Kenedi observed as early as 1986, 'Hungarian ethnic consciousness regains self awareness by differentiating itself from the Gypsies' (Kenedi 1986: 13).

Conclusion

During the second half of the twentieth century, tension between the existence of distinct Roma identities and culture, and the role of Roma as citizens of the state remained unresolved. The Kádár regime unambiguously promoted the establishment of equality at the expense of identity. Industrialisation led to significant improvement in the living conditions of Roma people. Meanwhile, instead of eliminating Roma identity, such development increased the size and significance of the Roma population, while also providing the material and intellectual basis for an unprecedented representation and expression of Roma identity. However, as a result of national economic crises, the policy of assimilation was abandoned in the mid-1980s. Since then the pendulum has swung far in the other direction with policy focused on promoting Roma 'difference' at the expense of supporting living standards and opportunities.

By the end of the 1990s Hungary had got itself into a very strange political situation. On the one hand, the state encouraged Roma political activity within the context of the 'new consensus' and the wider policy of reasserting national identities. Yet, at the same time, government was concerned to prevent Roma politics making demands, based upon the needs of Roma people, which it was unable or unwilling to accede to. Therefore, a political mechanism was put in place to reduce pressure upon the state – the minority self-government system. As a result, because pressure was reduced, the state was able to limit its investment in the Roma, thus perpetuating disadvantage and inequality. The situation is stable for as long as Roma expectations and lobbying capacity remain at a level low enough for the state to satisfy its limited demands. However, there are grounds to be doubtful on this matter, not least because the problems governments have faced in constructing an effective Roma policy over the centuries have been fundamentally due to the state's failure to recognise the aspirations and capabilities of Roma people. The growing political significance of the Roma in Hungary means that, if the country is to avoid a political crisis, steps need to be taken soon which will effectively and significantly reduce the disadvantage and discrimination from which Roma have increasingly suffered since the ending of Communist rule.

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Notes

1 There are a number of earlier examples of formal Roma/Gypsy political activity such as in Bulgaria during the nineteenth century and that of the Kweik family in Poland in the 1930s. Initiatives in Western Europe date from the late 1960s and the emergence of international Roma organisations starting with the meeting of the first World Romany Congress in 1971. However, we are now living in a qualitatively new historical period, particularly with regard to Central and Eastern Europe, where three-quarters of the European Roma/Gypsy population lives. This new situation was created by the growth of Roma populations, in both absolute and relative terms, and the effect of communist industrialisation, which led to an unprecedented level of dependency for Roma people on extra-communal bodies. These factors have made survival strategies based on isolation and avoiding conflict increasingly obsolete by requiring ever more engagement with mainstream authorities (banks, employers, welfare agencies, hospitals, local authorities, schools, the legal system, NGOs, sponsors of cultural activities, etc.).

2 Over the last 1,000 years, the territory nominally attributed to the Hungarian Crown has varied dramatically. The borders of today (imposed by the Treaty of Trianon in 1920) represent an historical low point for a country which, for many centuries, also included Transylvania, Slovakia, Croatia and northern Serbia. In this chapter, Hungary should be taken to refer to the kingdom/state as it existed at the time under discussion.

3 The early Hungarian policy of 'multiculturalism' is illustrated by the advice to his son of the founder of the Hungarian state, King István, that 'a country which has only one language and one set of customs is weak and bound to fall' (Szigethy 1982: 17).

4 Transylvania was ruled by Magyar aristocrats under Ottoman supervision; central Hungary

was occupied by the Turks, though local administration remained in the hands of the native élites; Royal (western) Hungary was under Habsburg control.

5 For a detailed discussion of assimilation policies, see Crowe (1995: 73–7). For the full text (in Hungarian) of the 1767 decree see Nagy (1998: 45).

6 Census returns from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries showed a rapid decline in those registering Romani as their mother tongue. The process of exchanging Romani (and to a lesser extent Beash) for Hungarian continues with almost 90 per cent of Roma surveyed in 1993–4 claiming Hungarian as their mother tongue. It can be hypothesised that the formation of the Romungro (literally Hungarian Roma) identity is related to the adoption of Hungarian (Pomogyi 1995: 7, Kemény 1999a: 8–9).

7 *Ausgleich* is the term given to the Compromise between the Habsburg monarchy and the Hungarian Diet in 1867 which gave Hungary autonomy over its internal affairs. Despite the passage of a Nationalities Act in 1868, which 'guaranteed' non-Magyars (around 50 per cent of the total population) civil equality and free use of their languages, in 1870 the policy of 'magyarisation' was adopted which made Hungarian the language of the civil service, courts and the educational system (Barany 1994: 269–79).

8 Admiral Miklós Horthy came to power by overthrowing the Hungarian Soviet Republic of Béla Kun and instigating the White Terror which targeted Communists and Jews and led to the loss of over 5,000 lives. In the 1920s a series of laws were passed restricting access of Jews to higher education and to the professions (*numerus clausus*). Hungary became an ally of Nazi Germany, with whose help it temporarily recovered part of the territory lost in 1920 (Pamlényi 1975: 454–7 and 472–3).

9 The scale of Roma losses during World War Two is still hotly debated with estimates ranging from 28,000 to 'a few hundred' (Kenrick and Puxon 1972: 125, Karsai 1992: 144).

10 In 1945 elections produced a parliamentary majority for the Smallholders Party but a coalition government was formed with socialists and Communists. The latter secured supreme power in 1949.

11 The research did not consider culture as folklore but as referring to matters such as radio and television ownership, cinema visits, consumption of newspapers, etc.

12 Ferenc Pártos' research in 1979 showed significant levels of antagonism towards Roma, especially in areas where there had previously been little to no Roma presence (Pártos 1980: 12–16).

13 From the late 1960s poetry and prose works by Roma writers began to be published in Hungary including, Károly Bari's *Holtak Arcok Fölé* (1969) and Menyhért Lakatos *Füstölt Arcok* (1972).

14 The 1979 Decree clearly illustrated this compromise, stating that the 'Gypsy population cannot be seen as a nationality, but as an ethnic group which is gradually integrating, rather assimilating, into society' (Mezey 1986: 274).

15 Positive discrimination was included in the 1997 Medium Term Action Plan for Improving the Circumstances of the Gypsy Population and again in 1999 (see section on the Action Plans).

16 Such as at Székesfehervár and Zámoly. For a full account of the attempt by Székesfehervár Town Council's attempt to expel a number of Roma families, see *Phralipe*, January 1998 (special edition).

17 The Public Foundation for Gypsies is a government-funded body and the primary mechanism for financing explicit Roma projects. It was created in 1995, initially with a budget of 150 million forints, rising to 250 million in 1998. Its main tasks were to support Roma pupils through grants, encourage Roma entrepreneurs and to invest in subsistence farming projects (Szijjártó 1998: 33–4).

18 In English, it is easy to distinguish between Hungarian (someone/something from Hungary) and Magyar. This is not the case in the Hungarian language where the word 'Magyar' is the ubiquitous adjective for both (for example, the country is *Magyarország*, 'Magyar Country'). Therefore, it is important that Hungarian Roma identity is not considered as representing an exclusive ethnic identity distinct from (ethnic) Magyar identity, but that Hungarian Roma can continue to maintain a Magyar Roma identity. Put another way, 'Magyar' needs to be understood in a way which also includes Roma identity. If this seems a difficult concept to express, it can begin to be appreciated just how much more difficult it is to put into practice, as well as the problem of a minority rights discourse that promotes a world based on emphasising ethnic 'difference'.

19 The preamble to the Minorities Law reveals its role within the context of the decline of nation-state and European enlargement in stating that the Law is 'guided by the aim of creating Europe without borders'.