

Historical and ethnographic background: Gypsies, Roma, Sinti

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In order to understand the historical experience as well as the ethno-social structure, ethno-cultural features and problems of the Gypsies¹ in present-day Central and Eastern European countries,² we have to consider the following circumstances.

Firstly, Gypsies form a specific ethnic community – an ‘intergroup ethnic community’ – which has no parallel among other European nations. The broader Gypsy community is divided into a widespread archipelago of separate groupings, split in various ways into metagroups, groups and subgroups, each with their own ethnic and cultural features. Sometimes these groupings are even opposed to each other and their problems are frequently completely different in nature and therefore cannot be generalised.

Secondly, the cultural and historical context of Gypsy life during past centuries and the contemporary social, economic and political situation in the different countries of the region are extremely important explanatory factors. The region has a rich and complex history and the conditions today differ markedly from one country to the next. All of these aspects continue to exert a powerful influence on Gypsy life, therefore all attempts at analysing the current situation of Gypsies must always take account of the specific experience of each country (or group of countries).

In this chapter we are able to give only a brief outline of the overall picture of Central and Eastern European Gypsies (or Roma).³ We will try to explain both the complex subdivisions of this diverse community and their unique history which has played such an important part, not only in moulding group perceptions of their own identity but also in determining their fate. Before starting it is helpful to explain some of the difficulties – not just in the past but just as much today – in obtaining reliable data about the people we are writing about.

Estimating population figures for Gypsies in Central and Eastern Europe

No one knows exactly how many Gypsies currently live – and used to live – in Central and Eastern Europe. There are no reliable statistical and demographic data for their distribution or their internal subdivisions, only a significant amount of imprecise and fluctuating information. Until now no model has been created which enables such data to be verified and one can only combine information from different censuses with personal observation and subject these figures to critical analysis, and even this cautious approach only provides approximations. The problem is complex and is related to questions of preferred ethnic identification (the intentionally misleading or genuine affirmation of another, non-Roma identity). Many Gypsy groups in these countries do not want to be considered as Roma, many more do not wish to declare their ethnic identity for fear of repression, while others frequently cannot understand the questionnaires; and in many cases, censuses are carried out by officials who, in dealing with Gypsies, deliberately or inadvertently alter the information they have obtained.

Consequently, we would argue that recent official statistical censuses generally record only about one third of the real number of Gypsies in each country.⁴ In some instances the discrepancies can be even greater. A number of examples support this conclusion. For example, only 32,903 people declared themselves as Roma in the Czech Republic's 1991 census but experts estimated their numbers as up to ten times higher. According to data provided by the National Institute of Statistics there were 83,988 Roma living in Slovakia in 1999 in contrast to estimates by informed researchers of around 500,000. Similarly, in the 1992 Romanian census 409,723 people declared themselves as Gypsies, while others estimated their numbers as varying between 800,000 and 1,500,000 and some even thought that the total could be as high as 2,500,000. In Bulgaria 313,396 people declared themselves as Gypsies in the 1992 census but according to the unofficial census of the Ministry of the Interior their number was between 500,000 and 600,000, whilst experts estimated the true number to be from 700,000 to 800,000 and Roma leaders claimed a figure of more than a million. In the 1981 Yugoslav census 1,471 people declared themselves as Gypsies in the Republic of Montenegro, while a decade later, according to the 1991 census, not a single person claimed to be a Gypsy.

Similar examples can be cited for other Central and Eastern European countries but even without them it is evident that population statistics are unreliable with estimates varying for the number of Gypsies in each country and in the region as a whole. The minimum number for the region based on national censuses is about 1,500,000 while the maximum estimate, if one includes those of Roma leaders, is around 6,300,000.⁵

One can summarise this complex and confusing picture by stating that today, as in the past, the population of Gypsies varies considerably from country to country and the proportion they represent of the population as a whole also differs. In some countries (Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and possibly the Czech Republic) they currently represent 5–10 per cent of the total population, while in others (the countries of the former Soviet Union) they constitute less than 1 per cent.

Gypsies in the history of the region and their internal structures

The Gypsies constitute a specific ethnic community within south-eastern Europe.⁶ The first evidence we have of the presence of Gypsies in Europe is on the territory of the Byzantine Empire. Large-scale settlement of Gypsies in Balkan lands can be traced to a period between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, although some believe an earlier arrival is plausible, perhaps as far back as the ninth century. Later, numerous historical sources recorded the presence of Gypsies in Byzantium and their entry into Serbia, Bulgaria, Wallachia and Moldavia. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries Gypsies gradually spread to many other European countries and by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries relatively large numbers of Gypsies were permanently settled in Central and Eastern Europe where they were influenced by the surrounding social and political environment.

The demographic pattern of Gypsies in Central and Eastern Europe shifted with each alteration in state borders which usually led to an exchange of Gypsy groups between neighbouring countries. The population balance was also affected by mass migration of Gypsies at certain periods. The most important of these migrations in modern times were:

from the second half of the nineteenth century to the first half of twentieth

The ending of slavery in Wallachia and Moldavia and the subsequent scattering of Gypsies all over the world – known as the 'great Kelderara invasion'.

1960s and 1970s

The open borders of former Yugoslavia during the period of Tito's rule which led to the 'Yugoslav wave' of Gypsy migrations, mainly heading for West Germany.

1990 onwards

The end of the so-called socialist period in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the subsequent changes leading to the most recent of Gypsy migrations – westwards. These migrants included Roma refugees from former

Yugoslavia (at first mainly from Bosnia and Herzegovina, and subsequently from Kosovo).

As well as these great migratory waves across national borders there were also cases of considerable internal migration within countries, which affected previous population balances. Following the end of the Second World War large numbers of Gypsies from eastern Poland moved to the newly acquired western territories that had formerly been part of Germany. At the same time Gypsies from East Slovakia were migrating to Czech cities, particularly the industrialised Czech border regions from which the previous German inhabitants had been expelled. Within Yugoslavia, Kosovo Gypsies settled in the more prosperous regions of Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia as early as the 1960s and 70s and this process intensified with the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s.

The present-day Roma of Central and Eastern Europe are extremely diverse and can be classified on the basis of certain key criteria such as their language, lifestyle, boundaries of endogamy, professional specialisation, duration of settlement in their respective countries, and so on. All these specific features strongly influence their self-consciousness and sense of identity and, taken together, provide a full picture of the current state of the wider Roma community. However, since situations change and Roma are adaptable, such a picture can be regarded as a snapshot, valid at the time it was taken but not necessarily true of the past and likely to change in future as conditions alter over generations.

Gypsies have been settled for centuries in the Balkans – specifically in the countries of former Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Albania – and *Romanes*-speaking communities who use variants of the Balkan dialect group are the oldest Gypsy settlers in this area. Gypsies speaking *Romanes* belonging to the Old Vlax dialect group are the descendants of a substantial migratory wave from Wallachia and Moldavia, who dispersed all over the Balkan Peninsula in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The area of the Balkans is also home to a relatively long-established variety of groups and metagroup communities who practice either Islam or Christianity. Some evidently converted from one religion to the other in different periods. The main difference between these communities is the distinction drawn between Muslims (*Xoraxane Roma*) and Christians (*Dasikane Roma*), who form more or less autonomous groups within each locality. The groups are differentiated at various hierarchical levels and are often internally divided into separate subgroups.⁷

Fewer Gypsies belong to groups who mostly entered these lands at the time of the 'great Kelderara invasion' and who speak the *Romanes* of the New Vlax dialect group. Today they live primarily in Bulgaria and Serbia. This community is most commonly referred to in general terms as

Kaldarashi/Kardarasha and in some places also as *Layesha* or *Katunari* (i.e. Nomads). A very popular self-appellation is that of *Rom Tsiganyaka* (meaning 'true Gypsies'). Within this group there are numerous subgroups and subdivisions (for example in Bulgaria: *Zlatari*, *Tasmanari*, *Zhaplesh*, *Dodolania*, *Layneshi*, *Nyamtsoria*), and in addition family and kinship subdivisions.

The numerous community of *Rudara/Ludara* are spread throughout the whole Balkan peninsula. They are also called *Kopanari* (cradle-makers), *Koritari* (trough-makers), *Vlasi* (Wallachians), *Karavlasi* (black Wallachians), etc. by the surrounding population. The *Rudara* have preserved a certain extent of intergroup subdivisions based on their occupations, such as *Lingurara* (spoon-makers), *Ursara* or *Mechkara* (bear-trainers), and on regional features, e.g. *Monteni*, *Istreni*, *Thracieni*, etc. Instead of *Romanes* they speak their own dialect of Romanian.

The *Rudara* are among those Balkan Gypsies, who have forgotten their mother tongue and discarded certain other ethnic and cultural traits. They are also inclined to change their ethnic allegiance and are examples of the phenomenon of 'preferred ethnic identification'. The *Rudara* often present themselves as true *Vlaxs* (old Romanians) and some are even involved in the search for a distinct identity for themselves, which is both non-Romanian and non-Romani.

Other numerous Muslim Gypsy communities are also experiencing processes of identity change. Most of them speak Turkish or are bilingual (using both Turkish and *Romanes*) and pretend to be Turks – mostly in Bulgaria and in Eastern Macedonia. In Kosovo and Western Macedonia the preferred community for self-identification is Albanian. Among others preferring Albanian identity are some of the Albanian speaking *Ashkali* in former Yugoslavia. At the same time, some Gypsies are gradually accepting the identity of the surrounding population. These developments are similar in content to those described above, although expressed in different ways, and affect those in groups referred to as *Dzhorevsi* (mules) in Bulgaria or *Beli tsigani* (white Gypsies) in Serbia.

The search for and affirmation of a different, non-Gypsy identity has taken new forms among the *Egypti* in Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia, as well as the *Yevgi* in Albania, where many in both groups present themselves as Egyptians and insist on being recognised as an Egyptian minority. This tendency has also been observed recently among the *Ashkali* in Kosovo.

In Romania,⁸ too, there is a complex mosaic of Gypsy groups which up till now has not been fully researched. The main patterns in this mosaic are largely determined by the former division of Gypsies into different categories during their period of slavery in the Danubian principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia. Over time the ancestors of the *Yatrashi* category have lost their distinctive characteristics as a group and have merged into a large metagroup community where regional or occupational traits are still noticeable. The

Vatrashi derive their name from *vatra* (fireplace in Romanian), hence settled, domestic slaves, and are also called *kherutno* (meaning those who live in houses). Most of this group speak only Romanian and many prefer to affirm a Romanian identity. Only a few of them speak *Romanes* as well.

There are many other groups in Romania that have maintained distinctive characteristics, mostly descendants of the *Leyasha* category. These used to be nomads and paid an annual tax to their patrons (the prince, boyars, or monasteries). Such groups and subgroups, which have preserved to a certain extent their own cultural and other features, include: *Kalderara*, *Zlatara*, *Kolari*, *Gabori*, *Kazandzhi*, *Pletoshi*, *Korbeni*, *Modorani*, *Tismanari*, *Lautari*, *Ursari*, *Spottori* and others.⁹ The Romanian speaking *Rudara* (or *Aurari*) form another large community that was also assigned a special status at the time of slavery, but only a few speak *Romanes* as well. In Dobruzha there are Turkish- or Tatar-speaking Muslim Gypsies whose preferred identity derives from the language they speak. Transylvania is the home of a significant number of *Romanes*-speaking *Rumungri* (*Roma Ungrika*), who are internally differentiated according to the region where they live, as well as Hungarian-speaking *Rumungri*, who prefer to affirm Hungarian identity.

In Central Europe the variety of Gypsy groups is smaller than in the Balkans and in Romania. In Slovakia more than two thirds of the Gypsy population have been settled for centuries, mostly *Slovenska* (Slovak) *Roma* (divided into *Servika Roma* and *Bergitka Roma*), speaking Carpathian dialects of *Romanes*. In the south there are also *Ungrika* (Hungarian) *Roma* or *Rumungri*, who mostly speak only Hungarian, and some of whom prefer to affirm a Hungarian identity. This country is also the home to *Vlaska* or *Olahi* (Wallachian) *Roma*, although their numbers are far smaller, subdivided into *Lovara*, *Bougeshti*, *Drizdari* and others. The *Vlaska Roma* are former nomads, part of a wave of *Kelderara* migrants, who have preserved their new Vlax dialects of *Romanes*, related to those of the *Kalderara/Kalderasha* in the Balkans. Small communities of Romanian speaking *Koritari*, who are related to *Rudara* in the Balkans and *Boyasha* in Hungary, are settled in Eastern Slovakia.

The situation in the Czech Republic mirrors the situation in Slovakia because during the Second World War the local Czech and Moravian *Roma* and *Sinti* were almost entirely annihilated in Nazi concentration camps. After the war the Czech lands were repopulated by Gypsies who came from Slovakia, primarily from the region of Eastern Slovakia. Only a few families of Czech and Moravian Gypsies survived the Holocaust and have mostly lost their *Romanes* language and elements of their ethnic culture. In spite of their small numbers the South Moravian Gypsies, who were relatively integrated and educated, provided the leadership for the Czech *Roma* movement of the late 1960s and early 70s.

In Hungary the overwhelming majority are the settled *Rumungri* who no

longer speak *Romanes* and have lost many of their ethnic and cultural characteristics. There are also small numbers of Romani-speaking *Rumungri*, mostly in Eastern Hungary, as well as an insignificant presence of *Slovenska Roma*. Even fewer are the *Vlaska Roma* or *Olahi* Gypsies, subdivided into *Lovari*, *Kelderari*, *Churari*, *Drizari*, *Posolari*, *Kherara*, *Cherhara*, *Khangliari*, *Tsolari*, *Mashari*, *Bugara* and others. Hungary is also home to a community of Romanian speaking *Boyasha*, corresponding to the *Rudara* in the Balkans, subdivided into *Ardelean*, *Munitian*, *Titian*, etc. amongst some of whom a *Roma* identity is developing.

Poland is a country with a relatively small Gypsy population. In the regions which used to be parts of the former Russian Empire live the *Polska* (Polish) *Roma*, former nomads who are now scattered all over Poland. Their community also includes the group referred to as *Xaladitka* (or *Ruska Roma*), living near the borders of the former Soviet Union, as well as the related *Savitka* (German) *Roma*, located near the former Prussian border. *Bergitka Roma*, who have been settled for centuries, live along the Polish-Slovak border, and groups related to them live on the other side of the border. In addition some *Kelderara* and *Lovara* are scattered throughout the country. In recent years many Romanian *Roma* travelled to Poland, mostly from Transylvania, and nowadays these are often more numerous than the local *Roma*.

The European countries of the former Soviet Union are populated predominantly by related Gypsy communities. Divisions are not clear cut and are often a consequence of their historical experience. The largest community is the Orthodox *Xaladitka* or *Ruska* (Russian) *Roma*, subdivided on the basis of the territory they inhabit into *Veshtika*, *Smolyaki*, *Pterska Roma*, *Bobri*, *Uralisi* and *Toboliaki*, etc. Closely related to them are the *Polska Roma* (also called *Xaladitka Roma*) in Lithuania, and *Litovska* (Lithuanian) *Roma* in Lithuania and Belarus, with various subdivisions such as *Beni*, *Fandari*, *Lipentsi*, *Pitichuki* and others, most of whom are Catholics. They are also related to the *Lofitka* (Latvian) *Roma* (sometimes also called *Tchuxni*, i.e. Finns) living in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia and territorially subdivided into *Kurzemyeki*, *Vidzemeyeki* and *Laloro* (Estonian Gypsies) etc., who are Lutherans.

The second largest Gypsy grouping in terms of numbers is the community referred to as Ukrainian *Roma* but who call themselves *Servii/Servuria*. Their dialect is defined by some linguists as proto-Vlax. These Gypsies settled in eastern Ukraine and the southern parts of Russia as early as the middle of the sixteenth century after migrating from Wallachia and Moldavia. Nowadays they are scattered all over Russia. In addition a considerable number of *Vlaxs/Vlaxuria* live in the Ukraine. Their *Romanes* belongs to the old Vlax dialect group since they arrived as part of a later wave of migration from the Danubian principalities. Smaller communities, such as *Plashchuni* in south-

ern Russia, *Chukuriari* in Moldova and others, also came from these principalities at different times.

Gypsy communities speaking *Romanes* belonging to the Balkan dialect groups are relatively numerous in this region. They migrated from the Balkan peninsula in the eighteenth century and include the *Ursara* (*Richinara*) in Moldova and south Ukraine with two subgroups – the *Bessarabiyana* and *Prutyaniya*. Related to them linguistically are the *Kirimittikal/Kirimittika* (Crimean) *Roma* who inhabit the Crimea, southern Ukraine, southern Russia and the area of the northern Caucasus. These have a number of subdivisions – *Kirides*, *Chornomorhades*, *Oriades*, *Kubanindex*, etc.

As a result of the 'great Kelderara invasion' there are a few groups in Russia who speak the new Vlach dialects of *Romanes*. These groups are referred to as *Moldovanskite tsigane* (Moldovan Gypsies) (*Kishinyovtsi*) in southern Ukraine and southern Russia. These *Kalderara* communities, subdivided into *Vingri*, *Serbiaia*, *Bugari*, *Moldovaia*, *Dobrozhitia*, *Grekuria*, etc., and *Lovara*, subdivided into *Ungri*, *Prayzura* etc., who arrived in Russia mainly by way of the territories of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, are scattered in small family and kinship groups throughout the former Soviet Union.

The *Servitka Roma* and *Rumungri* are long settled in the Transcarpathian Ukraine and some of these *Rumungri* are Hungarian speaking. There are also Romanian-speaking Gypsies, such as *Besarabi*, *Lingurara* and others, living in Moldova, the Ukraine and Russia, who travelled there at various times from the territory of present day Romania.

As well as the *Sinti*, from the subdivisions of *Prayzi*, *Poyaki* and *Esterxaria*, there are other non-Roma Gypsies living in the European countries of the former Soviet Union. Armenian-speaking *Bosha* as well as individual families of Asian Gypsies, *Karachi* from Azerbaïdjan, can now be seen – mainly in the larger cities.

These complex, internal subdivisions among the Gypsies of the region help to explain seemingly contradictory and paradoxical facts about the situation of present-day Roma. Some of these subgroups, such as the *Rimungri* in Central Europe, have lost their language, their distinctive ethnic culture and to a great extent even their Roma identity and nowadays many of them are poor and socially marginalised. Meanwhile, other subgroups have managed to preserve much of their *Romanes* language and traditional ethnic culture, including the internal self-government institutions such as the public tribunals or assemblies – the *Kris* of the *Olach* Gypsies in Central Europe, the *Meschariana* of the *Kardarashta* in Bulgaria and the *Sendai/Syonda* of the *RuskalPolska Roma*. Even within the same country the varied experience of separate groups is inevitably reflected in their contrasting ways of life and social standing. For example, the *Bergitka Roma* in southern Poland mainly live in segregated villages and have acute social and economic problems, while

in the rest of the country other Roma are scattered among the surrounding population, are considered wealthy and their problems are of an entirely different nature. Likewise, in some Bulgarian cities there are 'Gypsy ghettos' where Roma live on the brink of human existence, while only a few kilometres away, in some villages and small towns, the largest house belongs to a Roma family who are the richest people in the neighbourhood.

Differences in attitudes to self-ascription have already been noted in connection with preferred ethnic identification at censuses and on other less formal occasions. This sense of identity within a particular group or subgroup¹⁰ is evidently influenced by the long-established, if changing, patterns of internal subdivision among Gypsies. At the same time, and in parallel with this sense of identity derived from their group or subgroup, most Gypsies in Central and Eastern Europe have added a qualitatively different, new level to the complex structure of their communal identity. This is the feeling of belonging to the state in each respective country where they live. Examples of this feeling are adherence to the now superseded ideas of Yugoslavism, Czechoslovakism or even the united nations of the Soviet Union, the so-called 'Soviet nation'. The presence of such a level in their identity structure as a result of their developed sense of civic awareness seems somewhat puzzling when compared with the Gypsies in Western Europe and the United States. However, this becomes more explicable in the light of their fluctuating historical experience including the effects of varied policies aimed at regulating them. Equally important is their sustained participation in the social life of the countries and regions where they have been settled for many years – often centuries – which, in turn, has affected their relations with the surrounding population as well as the internal development of their ethnic community.

Policies towards Gypsies: alternative models

The ethnic and cultural characteristics of the Gypsy communities of the region, as well as the underlying attitudes of the authorities and surrounding population towards them, were formed and moulded within the particular structures of the states where Gypsies lived after their arrival in Europe. Initially this was the Byzantine Empire, then afterwards – for those who remained on the Balkan peninsula – its successor, the Ottoman Empire. Later the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Russian Empire became the home to Gypsies who continued their migration. For those living in the Danubian principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia¹¹ their status was especially sharply defined. The situation of the Gypsies in these historical states and political formations is particularly important since it sheds light on the origin of their distinctive status and subsequent inequalities in Central and Eastern Europe states which later emerged from the ruins of these empires.

There is a wealth of historical information about the Gypsy presence in Balkan lands during the period of the Ottoman Empire. In the fourteenth century many Gypsies came to the Balkans with the Ottomans, either serving the army in various ways or simply as camp followers. Thereafter, the civil status of Gypsies in the Ottoman Empire is somewhat complex since they occupied a unique position in the overall social and administrative organisation of the Empire. Despite the classification of subjects into two main categories, the faithful as opposed to the gentiles, Gypsies had their own, specific dual status outside these two categories. Gypsies were classified on the basis of their ethnicity, an anomaly for the Ottoman Empire, with no clear distinction between Muslim and Christian Gypsies as regards tax and social status. On the whole, Gypsies shared the subordinate position of the local non-Gypsy population. The only exceptions were that Muslim Gypsies and those who worked for the army enjoyed some minor privileges.

In spite of their relative subordination many Gypsies preserved ethnic and cultural characteristics such as a nomadic lifestyle and some traditional occupations. Yet at the same time, many others began to establish themselves in towns and villages and by the fifteenth century there were settled Gypsies in the Balkans who made a living as agricultural labourers in villages and as unskilled workers, petty craftsmen or service providers in towns. Meanwhile, a new type of semi-nomadic lifestyle emerged, where some Gypsies took shelter in a permanent dwelling during the winter but travelled locally in other seasons. Nowadays, however, many Roma in the Balkans still live in urban quarters or neighbourhoods, inhabited predominantly by members of their own ethnic group. This originated as an early pattern of settlement during the Ottoman Empire and created a specific Balkan Roma ethnic culture.

Elsewhere the Gypsy groups living in the Austro-Hungarian Empire felt the effects of the period of Enlightenment when, under its powerful influence, the first systematic attempts were made to integrate them into wider society. The main aim of state policy at that time was to transform Gypsies from a largely nomadic people with no civil status into settled, tax-paying subjects of the Empire. Imperial decrees issued by Maria Theresa in 1761 and 1767 and by her son, Joseph II, in 1783 were particularly significant as landmarks in the so-called 'new policy' towards Gypsies.¹² In this transformation process Gypsies were to abandon their nomadic way of life for a permanently settled one as agricultural workers or craftsmen. To achieve the goal of full integration they were no longer allowed to speak their language, were obliged to dress like peasants and were even issued with replacement, non-Gypsy names. In return, they were granted rights and corresponding responsibilities before the law, including the duty to pay taxes. Special efforts were made to capture the younger generation. Gypsy children were separated from their parents at the age of four, forbidden contact with them and brought up in peasant families. Meanwhile, state and religious education were made compulsory for

Gypsy children and after the age of ten they were required to learn useful trades. The ultimate aim of this comprehensive series of measures was the annihilation of a distinct Gypsy community as such and the complete assimilation of all Gypsies.

However, the final outcome of this policy differed considerably from that intended and the consequences are now evident in the countries which later emerged from the Empire. These included the establishment of segregated Gypsy settlements (called *kolonija* in Hungary, *osada* in Slovakia and Poland and *tabor* in Transcarpathian Ukraine) some distance from villages and towns as well as the loss of their language and fundamental ethnic and cultural characteristics for most Gypsies in Hungary and some in the present-day Slovak and Czech Republics.

The situation of Gypsies in the Russian Empire was quite different. There, they were not usually the targets of special attention and mostly stayed beyond the reach of state politics, except for some inconsistent attempts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to apply Austro-Hungarian legislation to Gypsies. These measures included a ban on nomadic life, compulsory settlement in villages, denial of entry to larger cities, etc. However, these attempts invariably failed. For example, the ban on nomadic life turned out to be inapplicable in the vast territories of the Russian Empire and plans to build special Gypsy villages in Bessarabia were unsuccessful. Consequently the authorities soon abandoned any further attempts to regulate Gypsies. The lack of a consistent policy towards Gypsies and the relatively small number of them in comparison with the total population largely explain how these Gypsies managed to preserve their community identity and ethnic culture. Until the end of the Russian Empire most Gypsies lived as nomads or semi-nomads, scattered all over the vast territory of the empire, with the exception of Gypsy musicians in large towns and the settled Gypsies in certain regions such as the Crimea and Bessarabia.

The experience of Gypsies was altogether different in the territory of much of present-day Romania for soon after settling in the Danubian principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia they were enslaved. Gypsy slaves were divided into several categories: slaves of the crown, of the monasteries and of the boyars, as well as the above mentioned distinction into *Vatrashi* or domestic slaves (mostly of boyars or monasteries) and *Layashi* (mostly slaves of the crown). The latter were nomads who were exempted from compulsory settlement on payment of an annual tribute and were permitted to continue travelling while pursuing their traditional occupations. Gypsy groups of this type remained predisposed to nomadism and so have been one source of migratory waves until modern times. Many Gypsies from the principalities emigrated to the Ottoman Empire as early as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Later, what is known as the 'great Kelderara invasion' began as a result of social and economic changes in this region and peaked after the

abolition of Gypsy slavery in Wallachia and Moldavia in the aftermath of the Crimean War. These new waves of Gypsy groups moving westwards across Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century changed the previous ethnic balance within the wider Gypsy community throughout Central and Eastern Europe.

The extended account given above has outlined the main patterns of development among the varied Gypsy groups of Central and Eastern Europe set in their specific historical contexts. This background is crucial in explaining both the formation of different patterns and the resulting attitudes of non-Gypsy macro-society, including the adoption of particular state policies, towards this whole community. In the process several basic policy models have been identified, which are still very relevant in seeking to understand the contemporary situation. These models are of the Ottoman Empire (applied on the territory of the present-day Bulgaria, Macedonia, Albania, Serbia and Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina), the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, as well as parts of Romania and Poland), the Russian Empire (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, the Baltic countries and parts of Poland) and finally the unique case of the Danube Principalities (Wallachia and Moldavia in Romania), where Gypsies were enslaved, not regarded as human beings but bought and sold as property.

The three main models¹³ can be characterised in the following way as regards the general treatment of Gypsies and ultimate policy aims:

1. Ottoman Empire: civil status of Gypsies preserved but lower than that of non-Gypsies. Policy aim: maintenance of status quo – but free option of voluntary assimilation.
2. Austro-Hungarian Empire: state control over lives of Gypsies, paternalistic role of state in deciding Gypsies' 'best interests', deliberate policy of 'civilising' a 'primitive' people. Policy aim: enforced total assimilation.
3. Russian Empire: on the whole, non-interference in the internal life of Gypsies. Policy aim: sporadic attempts at integration but lack of any consistent policy.

However, these models are clearly only generalised 'ideal types', which actually occur in different variants specific to the individual countries of Central and Eastern Europe. This is especially true of those countries (such as Croatia) or regions (such as Transcarpathian Ukraine) which, due to changes in state borders, were included in different cultural and political regions at different historical periods. Romania, whose present-day territory includes not only the former principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia but also parts of all the three great empires (Transylvania, Dobruzha and Bukovina) is another specific case.

These basic models exerted considerable influence on state policies adopted by the new ethno-national states that emerged in the nineteenth and

twentieth centuries in Central and Eastern Europe. There Gypsies were viewed through the nationalistic lens of the dominant ethnic group in each new 'nation state' of the region and consequently were considered a minor problem compared to the realisation of major 'national goals'. That is to say the governments of these countries did not regard a 'Gypsy policy' as a priority and any such policy was always secondary to more important national interests, e.g. other minorities which were of more immediate concern for various reasons. To give a few examples – in Bulgaria the determining factor in Gypsy policy has always been the prevalent attitude towards the Turkish minority; in Slovakia by the attitude towards the Hungarian minority; in Hungary by the attitude towards the Hungarian minorities outside of Hungary, etc.

In Central and Eastern Europe two fundamental patterns in the relationship between the non-Gypsy population (and its corresponding state) and Gypsies can be distinguished:

1. 'Traditional' pattern (typical for the pre-industrial age)

This pattern is manifested differently in particular cultural and historical regions. According to this model the Gypsies, although categorised as 'alien' and regarded as having a 'detached' status in relation to mainstream society,¹⁴ are nevertheless seen as an inseparable part of society and of the common cultural environment, with their own place in it. However, they are not perceived as an integral (let alone equal) part of the wider macro-society. They are not seen as having any particular problems, since 'they know their place' and do not aspire to change it. This largely explains why Gypsies today constitute a relatively high proportion of the population in a number of countries or regions, especially in the Balkans (including Wallachia and Moldavia) where pre-industrial patterns and social structures are relatively better preserved than, for example, in the West. This helps account for the much lower numbers of their brothers and sisters in Western Europe.

2. 'National' pattern (first appeared during the Enlightenment)

This pattern gradually became dominant in the era of modern nation states – including the so-called 'socialist era'. During this period attitudes towards Gypsies are determined by the requirements of the ethno-national state, which considers them self-evidently as an actual or more commonly potential threat. This is the origin of the general view of them as second-rate humans, whose only positive future is to be initially 'integrated' (i.e. annihilated as a distinct community) and finally – assimilated completely. (In certain historical periods this takes the more extreme form of being seen as sub-human and the 'destiny' proposed is physical extermination.)

In fact, whatever the pattern of relationship, Gypsies are influenced by processes of change in wider macro-society and endeavour to improve their social status as well as seeking ways for their total emancipation as communities, especially during the past century within their respective ethno-national states. These Gypsy responses provoke counter-responses, in various forms, of society and state institutions. Such processes are still continuing, especially in those countries or regions of Central and Eastern Europe where the processes of national (and respectively state) development are far from being completed.

During the past decade the development of the countries in the region and the 'Gypsy policies' of their governments have been influenced by the shadow of the previous political order, to be more specific the 'socialist era'. The policies of the state socialist countries towards Gypsies were largely similar and relatively co-ordinated. The best example of this is the enforced settlement of nomadic Gypsies. In 1956 the Soviet Union issued a decree banning nomadism and shortly afterwards, in 1958-9, this action was repeated in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Poland.¹⁵ This process of compulsory sedentarisation took place a little later, in the 1960s and 70s, in Romania, Yugoslavia and Albania because of their special circumstances and history. The implementation of the decree took a different form in each country where it was imposed. For example, in Czechoslovakia the authorities made the nomads cease travelling in the place they were when the decree was enacted, and the local authorities then determined where and how they were to settle, while in Bulgaria the Gypsies were moving from place to place in search of suitable villages until the end of the 1970s.

In state socialist countries Gypsies were not granted an equivalent status to that of other minorities. On the basis of Marxist-Leninist theory regarding the hierarchical development of human societies – tribe, nationality, nation – Gypsies were thought to be a community still insufficiently developed to be considered as a nationality, let alone a nation. Moreover, since they lacked a territory, they were regarded as at best an ethnic group and were thus deprived of the rights of minorities recognised as nationalities or nations.

After the Second World War and the assumption of power by the Communist Party there was a short initial period when the state encouraged the Gypsy ethnic community and the development of its culture in all state socialist countries. These few relaxed years were soon followed by prohibitions and restrictions that were relatively severe in some countries (Romania, Bulgaria), while in others (the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Hungary) the ostentatious presentation of selected aspects of Gypsy culture still continued, mostly limited to folklore performances of music and dance. Such policy inconsistencies persisted, both between and within state socialist countries. Occasionally the creation of 'Gypsy cultural and educational organisations' was encouraged, only for them to be dissolved later and their organisers

frequently persecuted. Meanwhile, hostility to any manifestations of Gypsy ethnicity or culture, condemned as undesirable relics of previous social orders, was gradually mounting throughout the region. Another cause of alarm was the rate of natural increase among Gypsies. Because of their large numbers in most countries, with the exception of Russia and Poland, Gypsies were regarded as a demographic threat. They were a population with a young age structure and high birth rate, giving them the potential to destroy the ethnic balance where they lived and in places even outnumber the surrounding population.

The general aim of Communist policy was to make Gypsies equal citizens of their countries but successful equalisation was understood to mean the complete assimilation of Gypsies, so that they would swiftly vanish as a distinct community. In each country of the region this assimilation attempt had specific forms of implementation. Traditions inherited from earlier periods resulted in subtle nuances in the policy of 'enforced assimilation' in each region and subsequently affected the present-day status of Roma in these countries. In the countries of former Austro-Hungary, Gypsies were regarded first and foremost as a social problem and state policy assumed a mainly paternalistic nature, while in other countries Gypsy-related problems were seen as primarily ethnic in character, with an added touch of religion in the Balkans.

After the 1989-90 regime changes in Central and Eastern Europe the policy¹⁶ of each state towards Gypsies – increasingly referred to as Roma – remained mostly within the established parameters of the corresponding cultural and historical region. Indeed, changes in the ideological foundations of such policies (e.g. the replacement of the concept of socialist internationalism by that of civil society) did not bring about any tangible changes in the attitude of wider macro-society towards the Gypsies or in the main thrust of state policy towards them. In this respect the centuries-old historical patterns of attitude towards Gypsies (both of the society and the state) turned out to be extremely durable without any real hope of change in the foreseeable future.

Development trends in the Roma community

The Roma in Central and Eastern Europe should not be regarded simply as the passive object of experiments in social engineering throughout different historical periods. They live within broader macro-society and are affected by its many varied influences (economic, political, ideological, etc.), which have had a marked impact on the development of their community. This development is uneven, multi-directional, sometimes even contradictory, but nevertheless three principal interrelated and interacting trends are discernible.

Development within the community

Internal change is an intrinsic characteristic of community development. The Roma community, like any other community, is not static either in terms of its ethno-social structure or features. Developments within the community bring about continual fundamental changes in its overall structure – divisions within subgroups are established from which new Roma groups are created, while at the same time internal group distinctions dissolve and previously separate groups merge creating different hierarchical levels of metagroup unity. After the break-up of the old empires and the emergence of new states in Central and Eastern Europe this kind of development in the Roma community is now largely confined within state boundaries. Consequently this leads to the appearance of a new level of Romani identity, as mentioned above – a feeling of belonging to particular states.

Development of the community as citizens of the state

Greater participation in mainstream society is a relatively new phenomenon, typical of the new era, which first appeared at the end of the nineteenth and during the first half of the twentieth centuries. These processes were particularly influenced by the 'socialist era', and it would not be too far-fetched to say that this period was a key factor in the development of the wider Roma community in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. State socialist policy initiatives, which stimulated and supported the development of the Roma as a community, were mostly limited in duration and contradictory when implemented. These innovative schemes rapidly gave way to the old-established, national patterns of attitudes towards Gypsies. Nevertheless, the effect of such policies in combination with the overall social and political context, was to create and guarantee the existence of a number of opportunities for the relatively equal participation of Roma in social life and the growth of their civil awareness. The end results of these processes for the Roma of Central and Eastern Europe are markedly different from the fate of their brothers and sisters all over the world. In this region there are now many thousands of relatively well-educated Roma, some with prestigious jobs – teachers, medical doctors, lawyers, military officers, journalists, artists, scientists and so on. In this way a new type of Roma élite was created, with new qualities and values, and very different from the traditional Roma élite. Nowadays both types of élite exist alongside each other. The members of this new Roma élite, including their children, are now an important factor in the overall community development of Roma. However, the emergence of this group is not entirely unproblematic and its members should not be considered as the only and necessarily leading representatives of their community.

Development within global Roma nationalism

Roma nationalism, as a twentieth century phenomenon, is the most recent development trend in the Roma community. Even since the birth and the first steps of the organised Romani movement, representatives of the Roma community from Central and Eastern Europe (or emigrants from this region) have been both its moving and leading force. A central feature of this fresh trend in community development is the construction of a new national ideology. In the process a series of surrounding ideas and tasks is vigorously promoted. Some of the most important are: the use of the general name 'Roma' for all Gypsy subdivisions, an aspiration to union of all Roma, a denial of the right of existence to Roma with a preferred or new, non-Roma identity, changing dimensions in the Roma – gadje dichotomy involving political confrontation (either genuine or pretended), a fresh approach to Roma history strongly emphasising the Holocaust and the standardisation of the *Romanes* language. These developments have attracted a very thin layer of educated Roma, termed 'international Roma' or 'professional Roma'. Amongst their number some are even now endeavouring to rediscover their forgotten Romani ancestors (possibly imaginary). These individuals are not bound to a specific country but to an international institution or non-governmental organisation and have worked at a global level (often without the support of the Roma in their own country).

At present the future development of this third major trend in Central and Eastern Europe is unclear. Many factors are influential – such as the influx of new ideas after the collapse of the Communist regimes, the critical experience of transition in the countries of the region, the rise of nationalism and consequent inter-ethnic tensions, the enlargement of the European Union, the interest in Roma displayed by the human rights movement and its powerful lobby within international institutions, the rapidly developing 'Gypsy industry' of the non-governmental sector and many more besides. Because of the complexity of these processes, it is impossible to predict what might be the outcome of this embryonic global nationalism but there is no doubt that its relative importance in the overall development of the community will continue to grow for the foreseeable future. However, in spite of the many imponderables, Roma nationalism will be unable to develop at all without the active participation of Roma from Central and Eastern Europe. Their presence, in terms of their numbers and abilities, will be the decisive factor in its progress.

These three main trends in Roma community development constantly intertwine and in this way draw strength from each other. In this escalating process members of the new Roma élite in Central and Eastern Europe occupy a key position. A product of state socialist policy, they have made a significant contribution to the growth and promotion of global Roma

nationalism, as was demonstrated at the most recent World Congress of the International Romani Union in Prague where Roma from this region played a dominant part. Meanwhile, the expansion of Roma nationalism on a global scale and the effective lobbying of international and human rights organisations have given Roma self-confidence and validated their ambition for participation by Roma, in their own right, in political life. Indeed, such involvement has increased in recent years in many of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. At the same time representatives of the 'traditional' élite of the Roma community (mainly the *Kalderasha* and other related groups) are becoming more active in the Roma movement at both a national and international level. All these developments are also affected by many external factors operating at quite different levels. These range from the specific situations in the various countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the common procedures for the enlargement of the European Union and the effects of world globalisation. At this stage, therefore, it is difficult to predict how this whole issue might appear in the near or more distant future.

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Notes

- 1 Before the changes in 1989–90, the name 'Roma' was used most commonly as an endonym (an internal community self-appellation) in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (except for former Yugoslavia) when the Gypsies spoke *Romanes* (the Gypsy language). This name was not widely popular and did not have an official status. In order to be faithful to the historical principle we use the word Roma only for the period after 1989. In all other instances we use the term 'Gypsies'. We think that 'Gypsies' is wider in scope than 'Roma' and we also use it to include the Gypsy communities who are not Roma or who are considered to be 'Gypsies' by the surrounding population but do not wish to be considered as such.
- 2 The term 'Central and Eastern Europe', as used in that region, refers to the countries from the former 'socialist block', i.e. the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, as well as the new states which have emerged from former Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia). It also includes the European part of the former Soviet Union, i.e. Russia, the Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus and the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.
- 3 Since the Sinti in this region are nowadays very low in numbers, with only a few families in Russia, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia, we will speak mostly about Roma without needing to make a special distinction between them and other Gypsies.
- 4 The 1995 estimates accepted by European institutions reflect expert opinion rather than unreliable census data. For these figures, see Liégeois and Gheorghe (1995: 7).
- 5 According to the 1995 estimates accepted by the EU the maximum number for the region is 6,199,000 (Liégeois and Gheorghe 1995: 7) which is only slightly less than our figure.
- 6 South eastern Europe includes the previously Communist-ruled countries of former Yugoslavia, Albania and Bulgaria.
- 7 Examples of such subdivisions, differentiated at various levels on the basis of specific features, in the countries of former Yugoslavia are the following: Arli, Gurbeti, Džambazi, Bugurdžhi, Muhadžhiri, Madžhupi, Gabeli, Čergara, Khanjari, Tamari, Romtsi (Šijajsi), Slovenska Roma, etc. There is corresponding differentiation between groups in Bulgaria, namely: Džambazija, Kalaydzhia, Čilingiri, Koshnicharia, Burgudzhia, Futadzha, Fichiria, Drindari, Vlaxoria (Vlaxicki, Laxo), etc., while in Albania can be found: Kaburdzhi, Mechkara, Kurtiofi, Čergara, Bamlic, etc.
- 8 Consisting of the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia and later also the annexed

- territories of Transylvania, Bamat, Maramuresh and Dobruzdha.
- 9 The *Usvari* and *Spoitori* are linguistically closer to the Balkan dialect group.
- 10 This is not to suggest that all members of a specific group or subgroup necessarily share the same sense of identity. Within a single group individuals may well, and often do, pursue contrasting strategies involving differences in preferred ethnic identification. For example, attempts at 'passing' by individuals of non-Roma appearance as members of the majority community.
- 11 The status of the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia within the Ottoman Empire was nominally that of vassals but in practice they were relatively autonomous.
- 12 In fact, the very name 'Gypsies' was forbidden and replaced with the terms 'new peasants', and 'new Hungarians' on Hungarian territory which at the time included Slovakia.
- 13 The treatment of Gypsies during the Nazi period could be regarded as an extreme variant of the Danube Principalities model in that in some countries Gypsies were sent to forced labour camps. It is also worth remembering that a contemporary populist solution to the 'Gypsy problem' is to segregate them in special work camps – or worse.
- 14 As determined by the dominant world-view of the period.
- 15 In Poland the process of settling nomads was prolonged and a new law for compulsory sedentarisation was passed in 1964.
- 16 In referring to the 'policies' of these new, post-Communist regimes it should be noted that in some cases a more accurate description would be the lack or pretence of a policy.