

**Title**

**Immigrations & Minorities in Europe**

***“The Roma in Europe”***

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## Introduction

### THE ROMA IN EUROPE

The Roma or Gypsies are one of the largest<sup>1</sup> and perhaps the most wronged transnational minority in Europe. According to the findings of linguistics, cultural anthropology, history and, in more recent years, population genetics, the Indian origin of the Roma can be considered a fact. However, in what way their ancestors came from India to Europe, when this migration took place, its reasons and who exactly these people are – these questions all remain open to speculation. For those who want direct evidence, the pre-European history of the Roma is a matter of reconstruction. The Roma are traditionally nomadic people who are now, for the most part, at the limits of integration in the societies where they live. They are also traditionally victims of extreme racial prejudice – directed at the philosophy and lifestyle choices of their communities. Their fundamental rights have been violated systematically in all states. The Roma have been the most vulnerable and silent victims - from the Holocaust<sup>2</sup> era to the recent crisis in Kosovo<sup>3</sup>.

It is only recently that the problems of the Roma have been widely acknowledged<sup>4</sup>. Specific measures have gradually been adopted in all European countries in order to resolve problems with employment, education and housing for the Roma.

At the European level there is also an active Roma network which seeks their recognition as people without land, with proper representation in the UN and the EU<sup>5</sup>. All countries have been asked – under NGO supervision – to show more hospitality to the Roma in their territories, to take specific measures to abolish discrimination against them, to eliminate the marginalization to which they have been condemned, by adopting positive actions for complete recognition of their social, economic, cultural and political rights.

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<sup>1</sup> According to an estimate by the International Congress of Roma, they account for 7-8,000,000 people in Europe, up to 15,000,000 worldwide. Precise figures do not provide any source. Roma Foundation at: [www.roma.org](http://www.roma.org)

<sup>2</sup> The losses they suffered as victims of discrimination and racism have only been recognized very recently. (in CERD, General Recommendation XXVII “Discrimination against Roma”, art. 10) the need to eliminate this phenomenon ( in ECRI General Policy Recommendation no 3: Combating racism and intolerance against Roma Gypsies).

<sup>3</sup> Information at: [www.romnews.com](http://www.romnews.com)

<sup>4</sup> In central and eastern Europe, for example, where the problem has become acute owing to the fact that there has been a recrudescence of racial supremacy theories, the Roma have created commissions in many countries in order to gain collective rights, with the status of ethnic minority. For example Slovenia has also decided to collaborate with Austria to improve generally Roma living conditions

<sup>5</sup> In “Statement by the participants in the meeting of NGOs from Eastern and Central Europe, No 5”, 15-18, Nov. 2000, Warsaw, at: <http://icare.to/docpagen.html>

The question that arises from the above is whether a nation can exist without a state and without a common language<sup>6</sup>. Many scholars have answered this question in the affirmative, as they know that the Roma are the most significant national minority in Europe.

Hence, we shall attempt to investigate the living conditions of the Roma people, who have been confronted with racism, political extremism and nationalism (especially after the collapse of the communist regimes) since their appearance in Europe. The attempt to study the issues and draw firm conclusions will be based on review of the implementation of various policies that are supported by NGOs, institutions of the European Union, the European Council, the United Nations, the OSCE and the organizations created by the Roma themselves.

***Key words: Minority, Roma History, Persecutions, European Union, OSCE, Committee International Roma***

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<sup>6</sup> Frazer, Angus, (1995), *The Gypsies*, p 12, 302

## **The term ‘minority’**

### **Historical context**

It is essential that we define the precise meaning of the concept of ‘minority’, and what exactly it expresses, if we are to understand the main theme of this study. We shall offer a brief historical review of the international treaties that have constituted milestones in the protection of minority groups, as well as the conceptual approaches to the term. It is true that defining the concept of a ‘minority’ has always been difficult.<sup>7</sup>

Since the collapse of communist rule in eastern Europe the problem of minorities has been exacerbated. International organizations have sought to safeguard human rights, which are closely linked to the preservation of international peace. In the new states which have emerged in central and eastern Europe and the Balkan region, there is no homogeneity, the oppression exercised through censorship by the former regimes has now disappeared, and therefore there are now numerous military and economic forces at play, oppressing minority groups or highlighting their claims. This situation has led to the appearance of numerous nationalist movements, and an overturning of the old demographic equilibriums.<sup>8</sup>

Minorities first emerged as a problem in international law, and more generally in political-economic relations, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a time of religious wars when the concept of the state was less powerful than it is today. It was at this period that the first religious minorities appeared.<sup>9</sup>

The Edict of Nantes in 1598 was the first official document to refer to the protection of religion, and is in essence the first to offer protection to minority religious groups. Later, in 1789, the French Revolution saw the declaration of religious tolerance, while many of its principles were adopted in various peace treaties in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>10</sup>.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were more concrete attempts to deal with the minority problem, as it became clear that minorities were not a transient phenomenon and they ceased to be seen solely as religious groups. Protection of minorities was now a precondition of the recognition of new states and the annexation of new territories, as was the principle of non-discrimination and the equality of all citizens.

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<sup>7</sup> Roukounas, E., (1995), « *International protection of human rights* », Estia Press, Athens, p. 292.

<sup>8</sup> Malkidis, T., (2002), « *Economy and Society in the Black Sea Region* », Gordios Press, p 36.

<sup>9</sup> Diakofotakis, G., (2001), « *On minorities in international law* », Sakkoula Press, Athens, p 29.

<sup>10</sup> The Treaty of Vienna (1606), the Treaty of Westphalia (1648), of Breslau (1742), Paris (1763), etc. In regard to the Ottoman Empire, see the Treaty of Karlowitz (1699) and the Treaty of Kiutsouk-Kainartzi in 1774.

The regional conflicts of 1912-1913, the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the two World Wars of 1914 -1918 and 1939-1945, brought to light many minority populations, as new frontiers were drawn up between states<sup>11</sup>. However, owing to the irredentist tendencies of the German-speaking populations during the regional wars and the political disputes within the United Nations, a confusion arose between the concepts of nation and minority. Thus the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 does not make any reference to minorities, while the International Convention on Individual and Civil Rights of 1966 makes only one unclear reference in Article 27.

The collapse of communist rule and the polarized system led to a change in the map of Europe, while again bringing to the surface the issue of minorities. During this period there were attempts at international cooperation on minority rights, leading to involvement by the European organizations and the United Nations<sup>12</sup>.

### **Theoretical framework**

As we have said, it has proved difficult to frame a specific definition of a minority. Over the course of time various attempts have been made to describe the concept<sup>13</sup>.

In 1930 the International Court of Justice adopted the view that, ‘...a minority is the existence of a group of persons living in a particular country or region and joined by bonds of solidarity based on race, religion, language and tradition’. Likewise, the United Nations rapporteur to the competent committee, Professor Capotorti, asserted that, ‘... a minority is a group of persons numerically smaller than the rest of the population of the state where it lives, not enjoying a prominent position, and whose members, citizens of this state, have ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics different from those of the rest of the population, and who express, indirectly, a sense of solidarity in their attempts to preserve their cultural identity, traditions, religion and language’<sup>14</sup>.

There is also a problem in the linguistic interpretation of the concepts «ethnic» and «national minorities», seen in the Greek language where ‘ethnic’ is expressed by the word ‘εθνοτική’ and ‘national’ by the word ‘εθνική’. In French the corresponding terms are different in content, without any generally accepted interpretation.

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<sup>11</sup> Roukounas, E., *op. cit.*, p. 292.

<sup>12</sup> Diakofotakis, G., *op. cit.* p. 40.

<sup>13</sup> Ermakora, F., “The Protection”, in Diakofotakis, G., *op. cit.* p. 251, Sohn, L., “The Rights of Minorities”, in Diakofotakis, G., *op. cit.* p. 270.

<sup>14</sup> Minority Rights Group (Ed), *World Directory of Minorities* (1991), (Harlow, Essex: Longman Group U.K. Ltd, p 14.

On this issue Professor Ermacora maintains that the ‘national’ minority group has its own language, culture and history, and its members wish to retain their special identity, while an ‘ethnic’ minority group, in addition to the above, wishes to exercise its right to participate in the public life of the geographical region where it lives, or in the context of a state, and does not enjoy the same rights and privileges as the other members of that state<sup>15</sup>.

The foregoing lead to the identification of criteria for defining a minority – criteria which can be characterized as objective and subjective. The former include such characteristics as the existence of a discrete group, their cultural, ethnic and linguistic characteristics, while the second include the discrimination experienced by the group, the desire to preserve their distinctive characteristics, the desire to survive and to attain the goal of equality. It might be said that the first group are the core of a minority, and remain constant, while the second group can be changed or ignored, depending on circumstances<sup>16</sup>.

A very significant factor affecting the outcome of minority issues is the stance of the state (oppression, social and political life, etc.), international factors and circumstances, as well as the characteristics of its leaders and the more general position of the minority (ethos, religion) within the state. On the part of the minorities one sees different behavioural trends and policies, such as a law-abiding participation in politics and public life, under certain conditions, and the policy of secessionist tendencies. In the first case there are benefits for the minority; in the second, they are led to clear secessionist tendencies.<sup>17</sup>

It is in central and eastern Europe, owing to political developments and ongoing instability (tensions, conflicts, nationalist secessions) that we see the most serious minority problems, including that of the Roma.

### **Roma, Atsingan, Acigan, Cingan History<sup>18</sup> Rom, Sinti, Zott, Dom, Kale, Louroi<sup>19</sup>**

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<sup>15</sup> Roukounas, E., *op. cit.*, p. 295.

<sup>16</sup> Diakofotakis, G., *op. cit.*, p. 110

<sup>17</sup> Malkidis, *op. cit.*, p. 39

<sup>18</sup> Frazer, A., (1995), “*The Gypsies*”, Oxford, p 39-47

<sup>19</sup> Information on the different tribes dispersed across Europe: Kenrick, D., (1997), “*Gypsies: from the Indies to the Mediterranean*”, Interface Collection, Kastanioti Press, Athens, pp. 14, 23, 33, 37, 38 and Distribution of the Romany people in Europe based on self-designation (Map 1) at:  
[http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/media\\_nm.php?ModuleId=10005143&MediaId=353](http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/media_nm.php?ModuleId=10005143&MediaId=353), 22-03-2011



**Map. 1**

The scholar wishing to learn more about the Gypsies in European history will not find a wealth of references to this minority. However, the researcher into Gypsies can now find considerable information and numerous analyses and studies which will allow him to follow the path of the Gypsies through space and time.<sup>20</sup>

First of all it is important to stress that much of the Roma history and tradition has been preserved in oral form. Little information is preserved in written sources.

The Roma people, then, are a European ethnic group with Indian origins. These origins are attested to mainly in their language, Romany<sup>21</sup>, which most of them still speak. The term Roma is currently used to refer to:

- Various ethnic groups making up the Roma population and speaking variations of the Romany language.
- Any person referred to as a ‘Gypsy’ in central and eastern Europe and Turkey, as well as those not originating from eastern Europe.
- Roma people (Gypsies) in the general sense of the term.

<sup>20</sup> Lucasen, L., “Eternal Vagrants? State Formation, Migration and Traveling Groups in Western Europe, 1350-1914, “, in *Gypsies and Other Itinerant Groups: A Socio-Historical Approach*, (ed.) by Lucasen, L, Willems, W., Cotaar, A., London, 1998, p 1.

<sup>21</sup> Frazer, A., (1995), “*The Gypsies*”, Oxford, p 187. The discovery of the link between Romany and the Indian language is attributed to the Hungarian Istvan Vali (1753—1754), *ibid.*, p 193.



The term ‘Gypsy’ is used to refer to ethnic groups formed from the dispersal of traders, nomads and others from the heart of India, from the 10<sup>th</sup> century onwards, who mixed to various extents with European and other groups during this process of dispersal.

The Roma were probably already living in the territories of the Byzantine Empire<sup>22</sup>, and the broader region, as early as before the year 1200 AD. By 1450 they had spread all across Europe. On arrival they were treated as intruders and saw their culture and language spurned and rejected<sup>23</sup>.

Local, closed communities reacted to the new arrivals with suspicion, fear and rejection, beginning to take measures against them. At the same time they were already beginning to face deportation from central Europe. Isolated incidents began to take the form of organized persecution.

In the Balkans, the Roma did not live cut off from the cultural and historical context. On the contrary, they were an integral part of that context and were significantly influenced by the peoples of the region. A large number of Roma have remained in the Balkan region, for centuries now, while others emigrated from the region to destinations all over the world, and continue to do so today, taking with them elements of the culture and traditions of the Balkan countries<sup>24</sup>. The Ottoman Empire, of which the Balkans formed part for more than five centuries, had a significant influence on the culture and history of the region. Inevitably it also played an important role in the evolution of Roma culture and history.

The Roma of the former Wallachia and Moldavia (the modern Romania)<sup>25</sup>, in contrast with those in other regions, lived in a state of slavery for more than five hundred years. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, when slavery was officially abolished, a large number of Roma abandoned the country and moved to central and western Europe, as well as America.

In central Europe the fate of the Roma – from their arrival until the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century – was determined to a significant extent by the innumerable wars and political changes afflicting the region.

In western Europe, from the early 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards ever harsher laws led to the deportation and persecution of the Roma, even to their systematic extermination.

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<sup>22</sup> Liezoua, P. Z., (1999), «*Roma, Gypsies and Travellers*», Kastanioti Press, Athens. p. 24.

<sup>23</sup> Soulis, C., G., (1961), “*The Gypsies in the Byzantine Empire and the Balkans in the late Middle Ages*”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 15, p 142-165

<sup>24</sup> Frazer, A., (1995), “*The Gypsies*”, Oxford, p 58

<sup>25</sup> Dousas, D., (1997), «*Roma and Racial Discrimination*», Gutenberg Press, Athens, p. 48, Zoltan Barany, “Ethnic Mobilization in the Post Communist Context”, *Gypsy/Romani Political Mobilization in Eastern Europe*, in Zoltan Barany and Robert G. Moser, (ed), “*Ethnic Politics After Communism*” Cornell Univ. Press, Ithaca and London, (2005), p 97.

Until the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the Roma were treated in two different ways. On the one hand their skills and musical abilities earned them warm appreciation, but on the other hand there were regions where they were not welcomed. In some areas, in fact, they found both forms of treatment co-existed.<sup>26</sup> They were thus forced to accustom themselves to lives of constant change. The 18<sup>th</sup> century saw a culmination of the violence of the persecutions directed against them.

The period of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1867-1918) saw attempts to stop the Roma from living in their own way, following their own traditions. In some cases they were given land to live on, forbidden to use their own language or to marry. Censuses of the population were conducted and in the end their children were even taken away from them. However, such measures enjoyed little success, and were seen only in certain areas. In general terms, attempts to assimilate the Roma population failed.<sup>27</sup>

Unlike other countries in Europe, Imperial Russia (1721-1917) granted the Roma equal status with its other citizens. Attempts were made mainly to encourage the Roma to live up to their obligations as citizens, in line with the prevailing policy.

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century a second migratory wave altered the Roma population and its distribution across the world. Various groups of Roma from central and south-eastern Europe moved both East and West, in some cases travelling as far as America and Australia. This second wave (following the first movement of Roma into Europe in 1400) was the result of the major social changes of the time, particularly the abolition of slavery in Wallachia and Moldavia, as well as the dawn of the industrial era.

During the period 1850-1938 regulations introduced by the monarchy in Austria and Hungary limited the opportunities of Roma people to find work, with a ban on their engaging in certain occupations. Prohibitions on their movements also forced them to live in specific areas<sup>28</sup>. Their situation became even more difficult when they were subjected to forced labour, deportation and the sterilization of their women.

The policy to the Roma implemented by the Soviet Union, after its founding in 1922, can be divided into two phases: until 1938 they were treated as different people who had to evolve into a component of Soviet society, while after 1938 they were treated as an integral element in that society.

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<sup>26</sup> Frazer, A., (1995), "The Gypsies", Oxford, p 186.

<sup>27</sup> Frazer, A., (1995), *ibid.*, p 157-161, Liezoua, *op. cit.*, pp 106-110.

<sup>28</sup> [www.roma.org](http://www.roma.org), 20-02-2011.

This does not mean, of course, that they did not still have to face constraints or difficult social conditions<sup>29</sup>.

The third migratory wave of Roma from eastern to western Europe took place in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. War, political changes and economic crises forced many people to abandon their countries, but in the case of the Roma we must add mass racism and discrimination in all aspects of daily life.

From the foregoing review we can draw the conclusion that the policies implemented in respect of the Roma have always been – in one way or another – policies of rejection of themselves, their culture and language. In general terms, these policies have involved exclusion, restriction and assimilation of the Roma people, without this meaning that these different aspects have occurred in succession, or not occurred at the same time in all their forms, in different states, at the same period.

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<sup>29</sup> «While not directly persecuted, Roma in countries with communist regimes lived nevertheless under difficult circumstances. In October 1956, Russian Roma were forbidden to travel, and they were forced to settle in selected villages and work in kolkhozes. Similar measures were taken by all other communist countries. In Bulgaria there was officially no Roma minority between the 1950's and 1980's. The publication of books and newspapers in Romany was forbidden, as was their music. *Mahalas*, the Roma quarters in cities, were hidden behind concrete walls, so that tourists could not see them. The same was done in Seville during the 1992 World Fair», at [www.roma.org](http://www.roma.org), 20-03-2011.

## Persecution

Imprisonment and persecution of the Roma, phenomena seen over many centuries, culminated after 1938 in their attempted genocide by the Nazi regime. The Roma were described as a ‘problem’, as ‘anti-social elements’, as ‘social inferiors’, and were arrested and sent to death camps in the German Reich and in the occupied countries. By 1945 almost one in four of the Roma living in pre-war Europe had fallen victim to Nazi persecution<sup>30</sup>.



Map 2.

In Italy too the Roma were among the victims of the fascist dictatorship<sup>31</sup>. In France, they suffered persecution from 1940-1946. Whole families were sent to camps all across the country, both before and after the German Occupation. In the Baltic countries the extermination of the Roma began immediately after the German invasions in 1941. In Romania, only about half the Roma population deported managed to stay alive until 1944<sup>32</sup>. Most of those Roma who survived the Holocaust and returned to their own countries had lost their families and possessions.

<sup>30</sup> Map 2. Persecution of Roma (Gypsies) 1939-1945 at: [http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/gallery\\_nm.php?ModuleId=10005219](http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/gallery_nm.php?ModuleId=10005219), 24-03-2011.

<sup>31</sup> Council of Europe, “The Nazi Period in Italy”: [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/roma/Source/FS2/5.2\\_italy\\_english.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/roma/Source/FS2/5.2_italy_english.pdf), 23-03-2010

<sup>32</sup> Fings, K., Heuss, H., Sparing, F., (1997), “*The Sinti and Roma under the Nazi regime. From ‘racial research’ to the concentration camps*», 1, Kastanioti Press, Athens, pp 33, 36, 38.

And all too often, they faced the same prejudices from the authorities, often being accused of lying about their incarceration in concentration camps and receiving no financial help.

It was not until 1970 that effective action began to be taken to emancipate the Roma. During this decade numerous Roma organizations were set up, on the local and international levels, with noteworthy efforts being made to represent the Roma in international organizations.

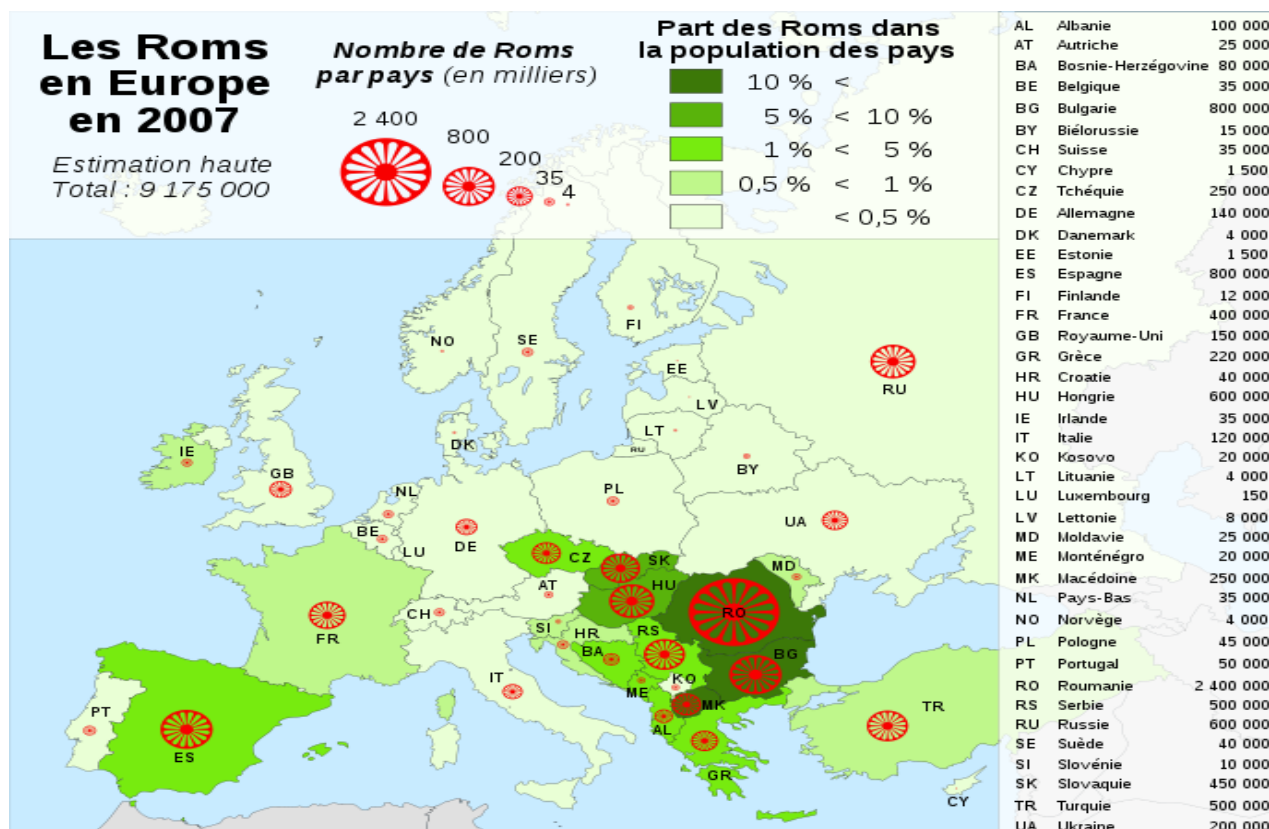
Nevertheless, in the summer of 2010 France took the decision to implement a wholesale deportation of Gypsies. Bulgarian and Romanian citizens, of Roma origin were obliged to leave France and return to their countries. Roma camps were branded ‘a source of illegal trafficking, shocking living conditions and exploitation of children in begging, prostitution and crime’. French President Nicolas Sarkozy called an emergency cabinet meeting and signaled the start of the manhunt<sup>33</sup>.

‘This is a disgrace! Personally, I have been shocked by a state of affairs which gives the impression that people have been persecuted by a Member State of the EU, purely because they belong to an ethnic minority. I never expected Europe to witness anything like this again after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War!’, declared the then European Commissioner for Justice and Human Rights, Vivian Redding<sup>34</sup>, setting off a storm of reactions on the diplomatic level within the European Union.

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<sup>33</sup> Newspaper *Investor's World*, article «*Rabid racism: European shame over voluntary repatriations*», (2010), pp. 20-21, EXANTAS, Documentary in the World «*With no Homeland*» at, <http://www.exandasdocumentaries.com/series/without-homeland/exandas-roma-europe-today.php>, 12-03-2010

<sup>34</sup> *Eleftherotypia* e-newspaper, at: <http://enet.gr/?i=news.el.article&id=250984>, 21-03-2011,



**Map 3. The Roma in Europe**<sup>35</sup>

France is not the only country to implement a policy of this kind towards the Roma. In 2008 Italy launched a series of measures against the Roma population, when the Berlusconi government proceeded to mass deportations, declaring a ‘state of national emergency’ and a threat to the country’s security. The government’s plans included taking the fingerprints of about 60,000 Roma, and their children, who did not have Italian citizenship<sup>36</sup>.

Gypsy camps were set on fire, and in two cases two individuals were burned alive. In a recent interview the Italian Minister for the Interior, Roberto Marroni, declared that the Berlusconi government was planning once again to deport citizens of other Member States convicted of crimes, defending his country’s right to deport EU citizens who ‘do not have a minimum level of income or suitable housing and are a burden on the welfare systems of the countries in which they live’. Thus despite the intense disapproval voiced at France’s policy towards the Roma, it appears that similar measures are now to be adopted as the policy of many other states.

<sup>35</sup> Council of Europe at: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Roma\\_in\\_Europe\\_2007\\_map-fr.svg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Roma_in_Europe_2007_map-fr.svg), 22-03-2011.

<sup>36</sup> *Investor’s World*, *op. cit.*

Even Scandinavian countries like Denmark and Sweden have recently deported Gypsies, while Finland continues to demolish Gypsy camps<sup>37</sup>. Even in Germany, where around 120,000 Roma live as economic or political refugees, they face daily deportations (cash inducements are offered to persuade them to return to Bulgaria and Romania), while UNICEF has asked Berlin to give residence permits at least to those children born in Germany and integrated into German society.

In Hungary at least six Gypsies have been murdered over the last two years, while dozens have been injured and around 15 settlements destroyed in attacks by groups armed with Molotov cocktails and guns. In Russia, home to the largest movement of far-right skinheads in Europe, masked men executed, in 2007, the father and two sons of a Roma family in Ingushetia, while two years earlier a mother and her 7-year-old child were burned alive. In Serbia police demolished a Roma camp in New Belgrade, forcibly evicting the residents. In 2009, organized gangs drove more than 100 Roma from their homes. The list is endless<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-21

<sup>38</sup> EXANTAS, *op. cit.*

## Roma and European Organizations

The stance of the international community on Roma issues is characterised by policies of assimilation, inconsistencies of all kinds and a hostile climate. Nevertheless, through the various official bodies there have been attempts, since 1989, to improve the position of the Roma. According to Council of Europe estimates there are now about 10m Roma living in Europe, from the UK to Russia, forming the most numerous of all transnational minorities.

As Troumbetta has written<sup>39</sup> ‘... a host of studies have attempted to document the dimensions of exclusion and violation of rights of the Roma, or simply to record their living conditions in the countries of eastern and south-eastern Europe’. A variety of agencies fund such studies, such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the European Union, the World Bank, the OECD, the Council of Europe, as well as private charities, the most important being the Soros Foundation (The Roma Foundation, Zurich), as well as a number of NGOs.

At the initiative of the European Union and the World Bank, the decade 2005-2015 has been declared the ‘Decade of Roma Integration’<sup>40</sup>, intended to facilitate their access to education, work, health and housing. Yet almost six years on from the launch of the initiative, experts have pronounced the results to be disappointing. Public opinion appears to have appreciated the transnational nature of the Roma question, but states continue to ignore or to fail to complete those measures which would lead to full Roma integration.

More specifically, the European Parliament, in collaboration with the European Commission and the Roma Research Institute of the Rene Descartes University, Paris, have undertaken, since 1984, the organization of conferences on school education for Roma children and the application of pilot programmes<sup>41</sup>. Many ongoing programmes such as the Second Programme to Combat Poverty assist groups in Ireland, Portugal and Spain.

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<sup>39</sup> Troumbetta, S. (ed.), (2008), «*The Roma in the Contemporary Greek State: Symbiosis-Denial-Absence*», Kritiki Press, Athens, pp. 1-75.

<sup>40</sup> 2005-2015: Decade for Roma Integration

This initiative was approved by the governments of Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, FYROM, Romania, Serbia, Montenegro and Slovakia in February 2005. It is supported by the Open Society Foundation, the World Bank and certain international organizations. The purpose of the initiative, which will be completed in 2015, is to bridge the gap between the Roma and the main population of the countries involved. The international coordinating committee, made up of representatives of the governments involved, international sponsors and the Roma themselves, has defined four priority areas for action – education, employment, health and housing – as well as three cross-sectoral issues – poverty, discrimination and gender equality; European Commission, «Equality and elimination of discrimination», Annual Report 2005, <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=1608&langId=en>, 24-03-2011.

<sup>41</sup> ‘Schooling for Gypsies’ and Travelers’ Children: Evaluating innovation, Council for Cultural Cooperation, Council of Europe, document DECS/EGT(87)36, Strasbourg, 1987, at [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/roma/Source/TextsActivitiesISBN\\_EN.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/roma/Source/TextsActivitiesISBN_EN.pdf), 22-03-2011



Likewise the sequel programme ‘Poverty 3’ covers groups in Greece, Ireland, Spain and Italy.<sup>42</sup>

The Council of Europe and the European Social Fund have done valuable work for Roma and other nomadic groups in Europe, with decisions dating back to 1969 (Recommendation 563). Briefly, we might mention the RomEco initiatives, involving Roma and the labour market, the Equal programme for job-finding, the RomaEDEM promoting equal treatment in education, the Transpose-Traveller Roma programme, safeguarding equality for travelling Roma, and so on<sup>43</sup>.

As part of its mandate to assist participating States in their efforts to support integration of their Roma and Sinti populations, the ODIHR<sup>44</sup> in collaboration with the OSCE, conducts the following activities:

- “Reviews of implementation of the OSCE’s Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti Within the OSCE Area;
- Provides expert advice and assistance to governments and civil society with regard to the implementation of OSCE commitments;
- Addresses emerging challenges or crisis situations affecting Roma and Sinti, e.g., by conducting field visits in the wake of crises;
- Supports capacity-building projects for Roma and Sinti organizations and the empowerment of Roma communities;
- Supports awareness-raising activities in Roma and Sinti communities with respect to the consequences of trafficking in human beings, the exploitation of children, and early/arranged marriages;
- Raises awareness among Roma parents and communities of the importance and benefits of early education and promotes broader access to early education for Roma and Sinti children;
- Supports civic education, voter education, and awareness-raising and information campaigns targeting Roma and Sinti communities, including campaigns that address voting irregularities within Roma and Sinti communities;
- Helps participating States find lasting solutions to the plight of internally displaced Roma and Roma refugees;
- Works with interior ministries and law-enforcement institutions to build trust and understanding between police and Roma and to encourage young Roma to join police forces”<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=1608&langId=en>, 24-03-2011

<sup>43</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=1608&langId=en>, 24-03-2011

<sup>44</sup> Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)

<sup>45</sup> OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe), Supplementary Meeting, Vienna, 2008 “Sustainable Policies for Roma and Sinti Integration” <http://www.osce.org/odihr/33663>, 29-03-2011

The history of Roma organizations has passed through many different stages. The first such organization was founded in Russia in 1920, with counterparts in Belarus and Romania. At the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War there were Roma populations in all the states of Europe, and attempts were made to set up associations on the local, regional and international levels<sup>46</sup>.

The most important event in the history of Roma organizations was the founding in 1970 of the International Gypsy Union, whose name was subsequently changed to the International Roma Union, which organized the 1<sup>st</sup> Global Roma Conference in London in 1971<sup>47</sup>. The Committee became a member of the Council of Europe the following year. The Committee was changed again at the 1978 World Romany Congress and given its present name. It was given consultative status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council the following year. The Union became a registered NGO with UNICEF in 1986. In 1993, it was promoted to Category II, Special Consultative Status at the United Nations. Over the years the IRU has adopted a Roma anthem and flag, set up committees on education, war crimes, language issues and culture, and so on. Through its various actions it has set objectives such as the recognition of the cultural identity of the Roma and its preservation and development, and the combating of policies of rejection and assimilation.

Much has been written on the role of international bodies and of NGOs, with different views being expressed on their work and contribution – their value often being questioned. Of particular interest is the statement of Rudko Kaouzinski, of the George Soros Open Society Foundation, that ‘We Roma are the yardstick for measuring the new democracies of eastern

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<sup>46</sup> Liezoua, *op. cit.*

<sup>47</sup> The second Congress in April 1978 was held in Geneva and attended by 120 delegates from 26 countries. Delegates helped transform the International Rom Committee into the International Romany Union. The third Congress was held in Göttingen, Germany in May 1981, with 600 delegates and observers from 28 different countries. Delegates supported the call for the Roma to be recognized as a national minority of Indian origin. In 1990, the fourth Congress was held in Serock, Poland with 250 delegates attending. Discussion topics included World War II reparations, education, culture, public relations, language, and a Romany language encyclopedia. The International Day of the Roma was also officially declared as April 8, in honour of the first World Romany Congress meeting in 1971. The fifth World Romany Congress was held in Prague in July, 2000. Emil Ščuka was elected as president of the International Romany Union. The Congress produced the official Declaration of the Romany non-territorial nation. The sixth Congress was held in Lanciano, Italy on October 8 & 9, 2004, with participation from over 200 delegates from 39 countries. Delegates chose a new president for the International Romany Union (Stanisław Stankiewicz of Poland) and a new president of the World Parliament of the IRU (Dragan Jevremovic of Austria). A new committee was set up to examine issues surrounding women, families and children. The seventh Congress was held in Zagreb, Croatia in October 2008. Almost 300 delegates from 28 different countries attended the meeting, which released The Roma Nation Building Action Plan, a document which outlined plans for the development of Romany nationalism and representation. Esma Redzepova (Stage name "The Queen of the Gypsies") performed the Romany anthem.  
[http://www.greekhelsinki.gr/bhr/greek/articles\\_2002/roma-c.doc](http://www.greekhelsinki.gr/bhr/greek/articles_2002/roma-c.doc) , 30-03-2011.

Europe...’, ‘The Roma organizations do not communicate, this is the constant refrain of ‘experts’ on Roma issues. But these experts are not from our community’<sup>48</sup>.

Referring to the historically constructed European stereotype of the Gypsy, from a sociological perspective, Troumbetta writes ‘...if one thinks of the by no means negligible funds made available ... then one can see the importance not only for the Roma but for all the researchers, activists and lobbyists involved. Roma issues have become a very lucrative business, a sort of “ethno-business”’<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> Tsiorou, Viki, «Hard times for gypsies», *Eleftherotypia*, special feature on Gypsies, Saturday 11 March 2000, p. 23.

<sup>49</sup> Troumbetta, *op. cit.*

## **Conclusions**

Until recently there was very little recognition of the Roma/Gypsies as a distinct ethnic, linguistic and cultural group; there was, therefore, insufficient acknowledgment that many of their problems sprang from violation of their rights as a minority. Our concern must focus mainly on the countries of central and eastern Europe, recognizing at the same time that the states of western Europe cannot boast a good record in this respect. Roma communities have suffered disproportionately from the political and economic changes which have followed on the fall of communism.

Also, the failure of the assimilation policies followed until recently is now gradually being admitted. In general we are seeing new developments and many states need to admit that families of migrants, which it had initially been assumed would return to their countries of origin, are set to stay. There thus needs to be serious study of the changes needed to improve coexistence in the countries which have now become multicultural. New ideas have emerged and spread, such as 'cross-cultural education' which, slowly and hesitantly, are becoming a reality. Another significant development has been the political and social upheaval in central and eastern Europe in the 1990s, which has resulted in a more general destabilization and an exacerbation of the situation of the Roma. In some parts of the East and West, they are once again being treated as scapegoats by politicians and ordinary people.

Whatever policy on the Roma is pursued, there will always be two fundamental, and inter-linked, questions: the first involves the recognition of the culture, language and lifestyle of the Roma, and the second the ensuring of full legal protection for their rights, as individuals and as a community. Whether, in other words, account is taken of the special identity of the Roma, and if so, in what way, and what resources are available to support this identity, once the stage – hitherto – of interminable discussion is over. Whether the recommended measures are in place, whether they are actually being implemented, whether they are really compatible with the criteria of recognition and respect, and what results they will produce. Special attention must be paid to the content and application of national programmes, and to the gap between theory, practice and results.

We are currently in a transitional period, characterized by lack of decision, hesitation and contradiction. In overall terms, however, the direction of travel is encouraging: the current lack of decisiveness and the questions it raises are opening the way to new ideas and approaches. Now that the opportunities exist, it is the duty and responsibility of all interested parties – politicians, administrators and those working on the ground, whether Roma or not – to ensure that the new era will be an era of innovations.

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Map 3. Council of Europe at:

[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Roma\\_in\\_Europe\\_2007\\_map-fr.svg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Roma_in_Europe_2007_map-fr.svg)

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## Maps

Map 1. Distribution of the Romani people in Europe based on self-designation, in:

[http://www.usmmm.org/wlc/en/media\\_nm.php?ModuleId=10005143&MediaId=353](http://www.usmmm.org/wlc/en/media_nm.php?ModuleId=10005143&MediaId=353)

Map 2. Persecution of Roma (Gypsies) 1939-1945 in:

[http://www.usmmm.org/wlc/en/gallery\\_nm.php?ModuleId=10005219](http://www.usmmm.org/wlc/en/gallery_nm.php?ModuleId=10005219)