



THE EUROPEAN ROMA QUESTION

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Since the collapse of communism, 'the Roma' have become a subject of increasing political interest and significance. The most visible effect in the UK and other EU member states has been the migration of thousands of east European Roma, many of whom have claimed political asylum. This phenomenon is a symptom of a deepening malaise in a number of post-communist states where the circumstances of Roma minorities represent one of the most difficult problems arising from the 'transition' process. The internationalization of the 'Roma question' means that European institutions, in particular the EU, have a vital role to play in preventing further disintegration and ethnic fragmentation in the region and averting the social conflict, political instability and economic stagnation that may otherwise ensue. However, identifying this role and effectively engaging with the Roma issue is no easy task. Policy-makers need to take into account the complex interplay of a wide variety of factors that determine the contemporary situation. In addition, for historical and cultural reasons, there is a profound gulf between perception and reality in respect of people about whom more is believed than is actually known. As a political discourse on the Roma increasingly develops, the problem of knowledge contributes to, and is compounded by, a notable lack of political accountability. This paper provides an introduction to the main aspects of the politicization of 'Roma' people and their circumstances, in the hope of stimulating a wider and better informed debate as the issue rises up the agendas of national and international institutions in the years to come.

'Roma' identity and the idea of 'Europe'

The concept of 'Gypsy' is found in all European societies and has its origins in the late Middle Ages. The idea of a culturally distinct Gypsy 'people' of common origin is a product of late eighteenth-century Romanticism and has remained largely unchallenged down to the present day, primarily because of the marginalization of the communities to which it has been applied. The contemporary 'Gypsy question' can be understood as the evolution of a long-standing sociological discourse about the Roma/Gypsy 'people' into an explicit political form. In other words, Roma/Gypsy identity is becoming a political identity, the development of which needs to be understood in the context of the wider political environment. Of particular importance has been the end of the Cold War division of Europe, which has allowed for the (political) association of a number of distinct populations within a transcontinental Romani 'diaspora'.

Prior to 1990 'European' institutions paid little attention to Roma/Gypsies, but they have since been enthusiastically embraced, especially by the OSCE and the Council of Europe, which include

post-communist states among their members. Over the last decade these organizations have taken numerous initiatives and established special offices to deal explicitly with Roma/Gypsy issues. The European Union's activities have concentrated primarily on initiatives to support the education of Gypsies and other itinerant groups in member states and, in respect of the larger east European Roma minorities, are mainly focused on the accession process for candidate countries.

The portrayal of Roma/Gypsies as a coherent ethnic group has particular resonance for European institutions. Not only have Roma/Gypsy populations been identified in every European country, but the manifest disadvantages experienced by these communities throughout the continent appear to indicate a limitation of nation-states and to provide an opportunity to demonstrate a superior form of supranational governance. The symbolic significance of Roma/Gypsies is reflected in Council of Europe Resolution 1203 (1993), which declares them to be 'a true European minority' requiring 'special protection'.

This paper makes an arbitrary and necessarily inconsistent distinction between east European Roma and west European Gypsies in order to emphasize the differences between the two halves of the continent. However, the groups covered by these labels are known by many (not necessarily exclusive) names and, as some scholars have noted, 'from the Gypsy point of view there is no such group as Gypsies'.¹ The increasing use, in academic and other public discourse, of the universal appellation 'Roma' can be understood as reflecting a politically driven aspiration to create a single identity for these communities; creating a 'nation' or, as Nicolae Gheorghie, Head of the OSCE's Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues, puts it, 'ethno-genesis', rather than reflecting an extant reality. The persistence of group labels such as Gypsy, Cigány and Sinti illustrates the incompleteness of this process, underlining the difficulties inherent in trying to construct a single political identity for all those within the notional European diaspora.

A diverse diaspora

There are profound historical, social, economic, linguistic and cultural differences between Roma/Gypsies in the two halves of the continent, as well as considerable diversity within each of these two regions, between the Roma/Gypsy populations of neighbouring states, and even between these communities within individual countries. As the OSCE's High Commissioner on National Minorities has noted, Roma/Gypsies 'comprise an extremely heterogeneous set of communities that are perhaps best understood in their own specific circumstances'.²

Although it is often claimed that 'the Romani language [is] the

¹ J-P. Liégeois, *Gypsies – An Illustrated History* (London: Al Saqi, 1986), p. 57.

² 'Roma (Gypsies) in the CSCE Region – Report of the High Commissioner on National Minorities', OSCE, 1993, p. 3.

language of the Gypsies',³ there is no common tongue within the 'diaspora' as 'there are between 50-100 dialects. Romani dialects are not mutually comprehensible except at very basic levels, such as words relating to food and family'.⁴ It is estimated that only around 2.5m of Europe's putative 8m Roma/Gypsies speak Romani, while almost all are fluent in the national language of the country in which they live.⁵

Roma/Gypsy lifestyles vary enormously: some live in large urban communities; others form small itinerant groups; and they may be anywhere on the spectrum from close integration with mainstream society to extreme isolation from it. Therefore, it is important to resist the inherent bias of the Roma/Gypsy discourse, exemplified by the Council of Europe's explicit proposal 'to replace the socio-economic image of Gypsies by a cultural one'.⁶ As Maria Neményi points out (referring to the Gypsies in only one country – Hungary) 'when we say Gypsy, in fact we are talking about a highly diverse group of people as if they were homogeneous'.⁷

One of the problems associated with analysing Roma/Gypsies for policy purposes is the wide variation in estimates of the size of their populations. There is no consistent way of 'counting' them: methods include estimating from a count of the number of caravans, self-identification and the opinion of neighbours. The official European Commission figures on which the activities of European institutions are based note that 'their number in Europe is estimated to be at least 8 million, with the majority, almost six million, living in central and eastern Europe' (see Table 1). However, these figures can most charitably be described as educated guesses, and surveys consistently show that Gypsy identity is far more often given to others by outsiders than it is volunteered by individuals themselves.⁸

³ P. Bakker and H. Kyuchukov (eds), *What is the Romani Language?* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2000), p. 7.

⁴ D. Kenrick, 'Inflections in Flux', *Transitions Online* (April 2000), p. 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Mrs Verspaget, 'On Gypsies in Europe', Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly ADOC6733, 1403-7/1/93-4-E, Doc 6733, 11 January 1993, p. 1.

⁷ M. Neményi, 'Ez egy etnicizálódott szegénység', *Mozgó Világ*, No. 12, 2000, pp. 9–13.

⁸ For example, in 1990 only 140,000 people in Hungary declared themselves to be Gypsies, whereas public discourse invariably puts the population at half a million. Similarly, in 1991 just over 400,000 people in Romania declared themselves to be Gypsies, yet figures of up to 2.5m are commonly quoted. There are many reasons behind these discrepancies, the most important of

Table 1: Roma/Gypsy populations in selected EU and post-communist countries (official estimates)

Country	Total population (millions)	Roma/Gypsy population (est.)	% Roma/Gypsies in total population
<i>EU members</i>			
France	59.3	340,000	0.6
Germany	82.8	130,000	0.2
Italy	57.0	100,000	0.2
Spain	40.0	800,000	2.0
UK	59.5	120,000	0.2
<i>Post-communist states</i>			
Bulgaria	7.8	800,000	10.3
Czech Republic	10.3	300,000	2.9
Hungary	10.1	600,000	5.9
Romania	22.4	2,000,000	8.9
Slovakia	5.4	520,000	9.6

Sources: European Commission, DG-Enlargement, *Enlargement Briefing, EU Support for Roma Communities in Central and Eastern Europe*, December 1999; *Roma/Gypsies: A European Minority* (Minority Rights Group, 1995); *CIA Fact Book*, 2000.

Note: Though these figures should not be taken literally, Table 1 demonstrates that the absolute and relative sizes of (perceived) Roma populations (and thus their political significance) are far greater in east-europe than in western Europe.

The contemporary political significance of Roma/Gypsies

Roma/Gypsy diversity means there is considerable variation in the policy needs, aspirations and political capacities of the different communities. There are also important differences in the wider economic, social, political and cultural contexts of the countries within which these populations live. In particular, there is a profound difference in the political significance of the Roma/Gypsy issue between the states of western Europe and those of eastern Europe. In the former, Gypsies are a peripheral issue, rarely receiving attention from national governments. In many east European countries, the Roma issue goes to the heart of the meaning of the state⁹ and has important implications for the economic, social and political development of individual countries. This discrepancy is partially due to the relatively greater size of

which are that Gypsy (ethnic) identity is essentially subjective and that 'Gypsy' people have little influence over the public discourse about themselves. The numbers game manifests itself in many other aspects of the Roma/Gypsy discourse. As Zoltan Barany observes, '[w]hether it is the proportion of the Gypsy population that fell victim to the Nazis, the size of the Romani community in a given state or region, or the number of Gypsies fleeing Eastern Europe for the West, one cannot but be baffled by the truly incredible statistical disparities one perennially encounters when dealing with Gypsy affairs'. Z. Barany, *The East European Gypsies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 7.

⁹ The political promotion of a distinct Roma (ethnic) identity needs to be understood within the context of a proliferation of ethnically defined political entities including Czech, Slovak,

Roma populations in east European states, but is also rooted in objective conditions, the political culture of the region and the emergence of explicit Roma political activity.

Objective conditions

Rising Roma numbers¹⁰ result from better pre-natal and post-natal care rather than increased longevity. The youthfulness of Roma populations reflects the fact that their life expectancy is significantly lower than national averages in most European states, and indicates that the number of Roma will continue to rise in coming years. The living conditions of many Roma are constrained by isolated, poor-quality or overcrowded housing. These problems have been exacerbated by the decline of social housing and mounting insecurity of tenure, which have led to an increasing number of evictions and tensions with local authorities over debt, rehousing, squatting and the like. Political consequences include the notoriety achieved in 2000 by the Czech town of Usti nad Labem through its ethnic partition of a run-down housing estate, and successful claims by Hungarian Roma from Zámoly for political asylum in Strasbourg in 2001, where housing was at the root of the claim.

Education is widely seen as providing a solution to Roma marginalization.

Croatian, Slovenian, and Macedonian nation-states and sub-state entities in Bosnia and Kosovo, as well as the wider reassessment of the relationship between ethnic/national identity and political power/institutions in the light of the prospective enlargement of the EU and the creation of a 'Europe without borders'.

¹⁰ In terms of public discourse, Roma numbers have risen approximately fivefold since the end of the Second World War.

However, the gap between Roma educational attainment and the national average remains enormous and has even widened in recent years. Despite steady growth in the number of Roma pupils completing primary school, the vocational education chosen by the vast majority of Roma secondary school pupils gives them outdated skills for which there is little or no demand in increasingly technological economies. Educational segregation has intensified in the form of remedial schools, separate Roma classes and even separate educational institutions. While some of these, such as the Gandhi Grammar School in Hungary, provide high-quality, elite education, for the most part special Roma schools and classes represent an educational dead-end.

As a group, Roma are conspicuously disadvantaged in relation to the criminal justice system. In many countries they are the main victims of racial violence and have become the particular target of skinheads. Physical insecurity and lack of confidence in domestic remedies appear frequently in Roma claims for asylum. The stereotype of criminality is continually reinforced while Roma remain grossly over-represented among the region's prison population.

These problems are partially related to the decline in the quality and accessibility of public services that resulted from the rolling-back of the ubiquitous socialist state across central and eastern Europe in the 1990s. The introduction of a market economy has severely constrained the ability of many Roma people to cope with change by depriving them of income and employment. A recent study by the World Bank found extensive impoverishment. Roma unemployment, which is long-term and structural, ranges from 45% to 70%, with some communities in isolated settlements or in regions of industrial decline experiencing 100% unemployment.¹¹ Enormous investment is required to ensure that Roma people can enjoy living conditions and opportunities similar to those of their non-Roma neighbours. As Nicolae Gheorghe and Andrej Mirga note, there is a 'danger of [Roma] evolving into an ethno-class or underclass and thus perpetuat[ing] its marginality in society. Such a development could lead to deadly conflicts with majority society'.¹²

¹¹ D. Ringold, *Roma and the Transition in Central and Eastern Europe: Trends and Challenges* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2000), pp. 10–16.

¹² N. Gheorghe and A. Mirga, 'The Roma in the Twenty-First Century: A Policy Paper', Project on Ethnic Relations, New York, 1997, p. 35.

Political culture

The primary responsibility for ensuring equality of opportunity and for improving the living conditions of their Roma citizens falls on national governments. However, post-communist states operate under considerable economic and political constraints. They have experienced years of economic stagnation and recession. Even where production has recovered to 1989 levels, economies have been restructured to encourage competitive capital accumulation rather than to achieve full employment or the elimination of poverty. The introduction of pluralist political systems has intensified competition for scarce governmental resources and attention.

Government activity is limited by the recognition that the fundamentals of the contemporary 'Roma question' (unemployment, poverty, poor housing, health, social tensions and educational disadvantage) are essentially the same as 50 or 100 years ago. Governments have to contend with the legacy of communist policies, the gains of which proved smaller than anticipated and were swiftly undermined at the change of system. The old problem of public antipathy towards public spending on Roma is exacerbated in political systems based on public scrutiny of government expenditure.¹³ The ineffectiveness of the rhetoric of tolerance can be explained by Will Guy's observation that impoverishment means that 'Roma are forced daily to confirm their negative stereotype in local eyes as workshy, scrounging thieves, while those who behave quite differently are nevertheless branded with the same image'.¹⁴

Although the responses of governments vary in detail in accordance with the different conditions prevailing in individual states, overall post-communist Roma policies can be characterized as 'crisis management'. Given the extensive costs of effective integration policies, the trend is towards low-cost solutions,¹⁵ the encour-

¹³ For example, in Hungary, research in 1980 found that whilst most respondents agreed with the aims of communist social policy towards the Roma, its implementation had actually increased antipathy amongst certain sections of the population. By 1993, only 15% of respondents agreed that 'more help should be given to Gypsies than to non-Gypsies', while 89% agreed that 'the Gypsies' problems could be solved if they would finally start to work'.

¹⁴ W. Guy, 'Roma Identity and Post-Communist Policy', in W. Guy (ed.), *Between Past and Future: The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001), pp. 3–32.

¹⁵ These include public work schemes, subsistence farming programmes and micro investment in entrepreneurial initiatives.

agement of non-state actors,¹⁶ the formal recognition of Roma as an ethnic minority possessing a distinctive culture and the creation of a tiny Roma 'middle class'. On a political level, the disconnection of Roma citizens from mainstream society manifests itself in the growing number of Roma programmes, institutions and even legal entitlements stemming from the concept of minority rights. In public discourse emphasis is placed more on cultural difference than social exclusion, and on positive discrimination rather than equal opportunities.

In the short run, the promotion of Roma 'difference' over 'equality' helps reduce expectations by allowing governments to focus policy on the cheaper abstraction of 'cultural development'. However, the ethnicification of objective policy problems places them within the contentious arena of national identity politics. This not only constructs a barrier to societal solidarity along the lines of 'I'm not a Gypsy, why should I help them?', but also touches upon deep-rooted anxieties about the fate of the (majority) 'nation'.

The emergence of Roma politics

A minority rights framework, whether it is based on international agreements or on domestic legislation,¹⁷ offers a way to respond to the recognition that policy can be made more effective by including Roma people within the policy-making and implementation processes. However, the creation of a separate development path for Roma politics disconnects Roma people and their concerns from the wider political scene.¹⁸ The strategy entails increasing risks. In embracing an explicit Roma politics, states hope to control its development, but the stimulation of political consciousness increases the aspirations and capacity of Roma people to demand greater concessions.

Accelerated and distorted by the state, the development of an explicit Roma politics is nevertheless fundamentally driven by the need of Roma people to engage with mainstream authorities to secure the bene-

¹⁶ In particular, NGOs and, increasingly, funding and political support from European institutions.

¹⁷ Such as the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (Council of Europe) or Hungary's Law on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities (1993).

¹⁸ For example, in 1992, 11 Roma sat as MPs in the Czech, Slovak or Czechoslovak legislatures, now there is only one (in the Czech Republic). In 1994, three Roma sat in the Hungarian parliament, but following the rolling-out of a special institutional framework for minority representation, the minority self-government system, there were none in 1998.

fits and protections of modern society. Today we are witnessing the earliest stage of what is likely to be a sustained political phenomenon. Roma populations face considerable difficulties in constructing a coherent political lobby, which reduces their ability to put pressure on the state. However, Roma activists are driven to win improvements for their 'constituents' and thus will pursue all available political avenues. To avoid political crisis governments must maintain a balance between expectations and concessions.

The current immaturity of Roma political development creates a false sense of security, allowing governments to delay confronting the need to pursue policies that will improve the material conditions of most Roma, in the belief that 'cultural development' will suffice.¹⁹ Furthermore, the encouragement of Roma political ethnocentrism impedes solidarity between Roma and non-Roma and means that any coherent Roma mobilization can be countered by elements from mainstream society. Confidence in democracy can be sustained only if it effectively addresses clearly visible needs. Otherwise, east European societies face the danger of a growing, frustrated, impoverished and politicized minority seeking better living conditions within a zero-sum game of exclusive ethno-political identities.

The role of the European Union

The 'ethnification' of deepening social division reflects the inability of national governments to cope effectively with all the political and economic challenges of transition. What this means is that the engagement of European institutions, especially the EU, with east European Roma issues is a matter less of choice than of necessity. However, the question of quite what kind of engagement this should be is far more difficult to determine.

To be successful, the EU needs to appreciate not only its strengths but also its limitations. Historically, east European states have devoted far more resources and attention to their domestic Roma/Gypsies, so despite the region's difficult contemporary circumstances, western Europe (and the EU) have little moral authority on this subject. It also means that there are fundamental differences between the Gypsies (and their circumstances) within EU member

¹⁹ Throughout the region Roma policies are coalescing around a two-track approach: integration and preserving Roma culture and identity. However, in practice, the enormous costs of improving living conditions and establishing equality of opportunity mean that the result is managed segregation.

states and the Roma in post-communist countries. In most instances, situations are not comparable, and most social indicators are far superior for east European countries than even for west European states with larger and more sedentarized populations, such as Greece and Spain.²⁰ Clearly, there is no model western Gypsy policy that the EU can apply to eastern Europe. However, this does not mean that EU involvement has no antecedents. Indeed, it is crucial to recognize that over the last 200 years or so, numerous well-intentioned initiatives have been taken by either imperial or national central authorities, although they have foundered at the local level.²¹ Thus, while the EU is itself formally a new player in the game, in reality, it represents yet another, more remote layer in the policy pyramid.

The EU confronts the same dichotomy as national governments between the individual and the collective, i.e. supporting equality of opportunity for Roma/Gypsy people and defining a place for their identities and cultures. The EU also needs to take into account the representations of authorities (especially national governments), as well as its wider obligations to Roma people and the societies in which they live. Therefore, the EU must not be seduced by the romantic abstraction of a mythical Gypsy 'nation', but should be guided by its fundamental interest in ensuring the development of peaceful and stable democracies in eastern Europe, basing its activities on objective analysis of political conditions.

National focus

EU activities should be designed to break the economic and political impasse in individual states that is obstructing the development of effective Roma policies, and so should be based on a country-by-country approach. This would maximize the flow of information and promote the necessary accountability to ensure that initiatives were appropriate to the different needs of Roma populations, taking account of the condition and traditions of each country. European institutions cannot possess the knowledge and expertise required to understand the diversity of Roma communities and the complexity of specific situations. Thus the EU must rely on local experience (Roma

²⁰ It is estimated that in EU states only 30-40% of Gypsy children attend school with any kind of regularity, whereas in many post-communist countries the overwhelming majority of Roma children obtain educational qualifications.

²¹ The most notable examples are the governments of the Habsburg Empress Maria-Theresa and her successor Joseph II and of the communist regimes of the twentieth century.

and non-Roma) and aim to facilitate domestic consensus rather than try to take Roma policy out of the national context.

To date, the main relationship with east European states is within the accession negotiations, where the Roma issue is dealt with under the 'political criteria' on a state-by-state basis. Since 1997 Roma have attracted increasing attention in the annual 'Opinions on Progress Towards Accession'. Each report is based on analysis of specific national circumstances and the process allows for (limited) dialogue between states and the EU. However, the 'political criteria' are vague and consideration needs to be given to ensure that the Roma issue does not become a source of ambiguity as 'enlargement' approaches. Furthermore, thought needs to be given to the post-accession environment and the need to maintain flexibility and a state-by-state approach to EU activities within a new framework.

However, as a result of a notable lack of intellectual and political accountability at all levels,²² the Roma issue exhibits a strong tendency towards centralization. The symbolic attraction of a supposed trans-European 'people' has inspired the burgeoning Roma/Gypsy-related activities of the OSCE and the Council of Europe which seek to standardize policy across the region on the basis of an increasingly simplistic interpretation (racism) of the complex economic, social, political and cultural factors that underpin the Roma issue, but which accords with their narrow institutional remit. Their influence in constructing a European Roma policy was illustrated in 1999 when the EU adopted the superficial and contradictory 'Guiding principles for improving the situation of the Roma', drafted by the OSCE's High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Council of Europe's Specialist Group on Roma/Gypsies.²³

²² For example, in 1995 the Council of Europe accepted the report 'Overview of the situation of Gypsies (Roma and Sinti)' which, among other things, argued that the movement of tens of thousands of (sedentarized) Roma westwards to escape poverty or to claim asylum was, in fact, 'merely a return to the normal mobility of Gypsies', a statement that Dr Will Guy has described as 'so misconceived it amounted to misinformation' (W. Guy, 'Roma Identity and Post-Communist Policy', p. 18). Nevertheless, its acceptance led to the creation of the Council's influential Specialist Group on Roma/Gypsies which is in fact chaired by the report's author.

²³ See M. Kovats, 'The Emergence of European Roma Policy', in W. Guy (ed.), *Between Past and Future*, pp. 93-116. An expanded version of is available from the author.

The enthusiasm of European institutions to define a role for themselves in respect of Roma is complemented by the desire of some post-communist states to off-load responsibility for their domestic Roma populations, exemplified by the statement of the Slovak Prime Minister, Mikulas Dzurinda, that 'it is not a Slovak or a Hungarian problem, it's a European problem'. The revival of international Roma politics strengthens the illusion that it is possible to create European-level representation. At its fifth World Romani Congress in 2000 (co-financed by the Czech government and the OSCE), the International Romani Union issued its 'Declaration of a Nation', demanding explicit Roma representation in international political fora and announcing the creation of Roma embassies in European states. However, such initiatives are primarily designed to provide funding and status to a few dozen activists and there is absolutely no possibility of highly diverse, widely dispersed and marginalized Roma/Gypsy communities exercising any democratic control over those who claim to speak in their name.

The internationalization of the Roma issue is driven by narrow sectional interests that play on the good intentions of individuals and institutions possessing little or no other information about the subject. The EU is not immune from this and since the Finnish Presidency of 1999, it has become a tradition for the Presidency to convene a seminar of administrators and activists to discuss 'European' Roma issues.

Of greater concern to the EU is an initiative within the Council of Europe to establish a European Roma Parliament. Such a move is antithetical to the EU's conception of multiculturalism and would be unacceptable for any other minority group. It would reduce the responsibility of national governments towards their Roma citizens and further undermine accountability in Roma policy, thus leading to further delays in addressing objective needs while promoting an exclusive ethnic nationalism.

Resources

As important as flexibility and sensitivity to

national conditions are the resources needed to make meaningful improvements in Roma people's lives. The investment required to address objective problems is so immense as to be beyond the scope of national governments: hence there is a clear role here for the EU. The scale of problems produces a culture of low expectations, which limits political commitment to integration and encourages the conceptual and political separation of Roma from mainstream society. Money is not the whole 'solution' as societies also need to address cultural and legal problems of inclusion and anti-discrimination. However, money is a precondition for all these changes as politicians are unlikely to court unpopularity by engaging positively in dialogue with the Roma if the prospect of substantive progress is remote. Only by providing them with the means to address objective problems can east European societies be realistically expected to undertake the painful process of effectively tackling anti-Roma prejudices and discriminatory practices.

The EU already provides financial support for Roma-related initiatives through the PHARE programme although, to date, the sums involved have been very small. Between 1993 and 1999 only 20m euros were allocated across six countries. Such support needs to be massively increased to reduce social tensions and create equality of opportunity, though by how much is unknown, as east European governments are understandably reluctant to reveal the scale of their requirements while they are still negotiating membership. The challenge for the EU is to collect resources centrally but to permit considerable decentralization in their dispersal. In addition, methods for the effective and transparent use of resources need to be developed and greater emphasis placed on outputs such as income and employment levels, educational attainment, houses and roads built rather than, as is currently the case, on inputs such as money spent, legal changes and administrative structures..

It is important not to adopt too rigid a concept of 'integration'. Roma communities are highly diverse and have different needs.

Some are economically independent, though many are destitute, but there are considerable differences between former industrial workers and those in isolated rural communities. Communities may be more or less 'traditional' and have different experiences of mainstream authorities, factors that have important implications for policy.

Nevertheless, it should be recognized that, as a political issue, most pressure is likely to come from those Roma who aspire to equal treatment with their neighbours. The low social status of Roma also needs to be taken into account, as indicated in the OSCE High Commissioner's warning that 'intra-community tensions [Roma and non-Roma] should not be exacerbated by (the appearance of) unfavourable treatment for one group over others'.²⁴ Special attention should therefore be given to allocating a significant proportion of the substantial funds that will be made available to new members on accession to enable them to address structural poverty in the region, especially in respect of the economically inactive of working age and larger families in disadvantaged (rural) areas. For just as political problems have been caused largely by economic and social disintegration, these problems too can be successfully addressed only by effective integration policies.

Conclusion

The situation of east European Roma provides an opportunity for the EU to demonstrate that it can add something new to domestic political circumstances. It should not seek to create a distinct Roma/Gypsy polity or to define Roma/Gypsy culture, but should promote equality of opportunity by facilitating significant improvements in the life chances and living conditions of these people, in a way that is widely perceived as being of benefit to all within their home societies. The challenge is to avoid the many pitfalls of an increasingly sensitive and complex political situation and to prevent the further disintegration and ethnic fragmentation of east European societies.

²⁴ 'Roma (Gypsies) in the CSCE Region', p. 5.

Dr Martin Kovats has been researching the development of Roma politics in Hungary for much of the last ten years. Having completed his doctoral thesis on the subject in 1998, he worked at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies examining Hungary's Minority Self-Government system. Dr Kovats has been part of the 'Fuzzy Statehood' project of the Centre for Russian and East European Studies (University of Birmingham), part of the ESRC's 'One Europe or Several?' research Initiative. He is currently a Marie Curie Research Fellow at the University of Economic Sciences and Public Administration, Budapest, where he is conducting research into the changing relationship between Gypsy and Magyar identities in Hungary.

The European Programme

The European Programme serves as a forum for research and debate on questions of politics, economics and security in Europe. Covering EU and non-EU countries alike, the Programme seeks to stimulate informed discussion and to brief politicians, officials, business, journalists and the wider public. Activities include seminars, meetings, roundtable discussions and workshops on a wide range of topics, as well as several major research projects, some of which are outlined below.

Research projects

1 **Insiders and Outsiders in the New Europe.** This project considers EU enlargement in terms of its implications for relations between EU member states, candidate states and their neighbours. In some cases enlargement will mean a tightening of borders between states that have previously cooperated well.

1 **The New Bilateralism.** Bilateral relations have always played an important part in decision-making within the EU. In some ways this seems to go against the spirit of European integration but in practice it has been an effective way to make progress. This project evaluates the changing nature of bilateral relations and to assess their impact on decision-making in the EU.

1 **European Aspects of Immigration and Asylum Policy.** Media interest in the asylum question is indicative of the significance of this issue, and EU enlargement will inevitably push questions of the free movement of people even higher up the political agenda. This project examines beneficial aspects of immigration, the sensitive question of burden-sharing, internal and external security issues and the development of EU-level policy.

1 **Europe in 2004 and Beyond.** While there has been considerable discussion across the EU about possible institutional reform in 2004, there has been relatively little systematic and detailed research of the mechanics and practicalities of such reform. This project therefore aims to rectify this omission from current discussions about the 'Future of Europe'. Phase one considers the nature of the debate within the EU member states and candidate countries. Phase two will offer a comparative analysis of systems of governance within and outside the EU and generate potential models of governance for an enlarged EU.

New and forthcoming publications

Julie Smith and Mariana Tsatsas, *The New Bilateralism: The UK's Relations Within the EU* (February 2002)

Kataryna Wolczuk and Roman Wolczuk, *Poland and Ukraine: Maintaining a Strategic Partnership Through a New Iron Curtain?* (July 2002)

Charles Jenkins and Julie Smith, eds, *Behind the Paper Curtain: Insiders and Outsiders in the New Europe* (November 2002)

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For details for forthcoming events, please contact Laura Hamilton, Programme Administrator, European Programme, on lhamilton@riia.org or telephone 020 7314 2760.

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