

How does the EU matter for the Roma? Transnational Roma activism and EU social policy formation

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ABSTRACT

Perhaps more than any other minority group in Europe, the Roma have tried to reach beyond the boundaries of the national state to change local realities of socio-economic marginalization and poverty. Roma activists have counted on the support of transnational advocacy networks and EU institutions to turn around the negligent attitudes of local and national governments. They have also tried to use the institutional and public spaces that have opened up for minority consultation at the European level. The further development of an EU framework that stimulates national states to design and implement new social policies that protect and support Roma is no doubt necessary, but it may not be enough. In order to have real impact on the ground, the EU will also have to address key obstacles in the field of social policy and human rights protection more broadly.

Key words: Minorities, Central Europe, European Union, Roma, citizenship

INTRODUCTION

Minority populations in Central and Eastern Europe often face challenges of socio-economic and political exclusion, even if they are formally included in a state as national citizens. One response to this problem has been the establishment of separate institutions where minority representatives can critically engage with policymakers. The underlying idea is that such special channels for consultation and collaboration are needed to compensate for the lack of leverage minorities have through regular political participation. But is the increased presence of minority citizens in policy-making institutions sufficient to improve conditions for minority members in society more broadly?

The question is particularly relevant for the Roma in Central and Eastern Europe, a population that overwhelmingly belongs to the stratum of Europe's socio-economically most vulnerable citizens and suffers from rising hatred (EU Agency for Fundamental Rights 2012, 80-81; Rubin et al. 2014, Stewart 2012).¹ The usual mechanisms of political participation have clearly left the Roma underrepresented. Even in the countries with the highest average estimated Roma populations in Central and Eastern Europe – Bulgaria (9.94 per cent of the population), Slovakia (9.2 per cent), Romania (8.63 per cent), and Hungary (7.49) (figures from the Council of Europe 2012) – the number of elected politicians on local or national level who come from a Roma background, or have lived in a Roma community, is extremely low. National and local electoral campaigns by Roma activists have resulted in some small

¹ In this article I define Roma activism as any activity directed toward policy actors in the name of the Roma (and therefore in the name of any population that is broadly considered to be included under that label) and seeks to improve the socio-economic and/or political situation of this population. I fully realize that this means I am using the term “Roma” primarily as a political label – one promoted by many but not all activists – and not as a term to indicate ethnic or cultural belonging or affiliation; the name has been introduced to tackle the problems associated with other designations, which often carry derogatory connotations (e.g. “Gypsies”) (Stewart 2013). Among scholars and activists alike, such deliberate political usage of the term Roma is not uncontroversial (see e.g. Stewart 2010, Gheorghe 1991, Matras 2012), but nevertheless widespread.

victories, especially at the local level, but the overall ethnic electoral representation of Roma is negligible, both in ethnic parties and in mainstream political parties (Barany 2001, National Democratic Institute 2009, Degro 2015, McGarry 2009). Mainstream political parties, local or national administrations, and governing bodies seldom have Roma members. Even if Roma organize activist groups on an ethnic basis, or, as happens in some countries, are allowed to elect ethnic minority representatives – in Romania, e.g., through reserved seats in parliament, or in Hungary through a system of local and national minority ‘self-governments’ responsible for some matters of cultural policy – their influence remains limited and their voice is usually on the margins, even in debates on policies that affect them.

Over the last two decades many Roma activists have tried to strengthen their local and national position by joining forces across national borders (Ram 2010, Vermeersch 2005), a practice that finds precedent in earlier traditions of transnational Roma activism in the 1970s and 1980s (see, e.g. the International Romani Union (IRU) (Klímová-Alexander 2005)). This emerging transnational movement has put high hopes on support from several Europe-wide structures and agencies, including the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and mainly the EU. In a way, the EU became for the Roma the most self-evident post-national avenue towards minority activism and “claims-making” (Koopmans et al. 2005). And the EU has indeed more or less accepted this role. Recent years have seen the establishment of various EU mechanisms that encourage EU member states to introduce better policies to improve the position of “their” Roma and ensure that Roma themselves become part of a conversation with national governments and local policy makers.

Can these EU efforts led to any meaningful change on the ground? Do the current channels for minority consultation at the level of the EU meaningfully increase the involvement of Roma in national policy formation? And is it likely that such involvement

will help realize substantial socio-economic and political change in the countries where the situation of the Roma is the most problematic?

I begin this paper with a section that outlines why the European integration process has become so important for the Roma. I focus on the role of the EU's enlargement process and the EU's social policy agenda. I also discuss the establishment of special consultative bodies for Roma at the level of the European Commission. The section that follows addresses the limits of the EU's post-national route towards a better position for the Roma. I discuss one important context-related obstacle hindering the potential impact of the current EU framework on the advancement of national policies that help Roma: the diminishing mobilizing power of the cross-border human rights ideals in the EU. In the last section I examine the ways in which the EU can still matter for the Roma, despite some remaining key challenges.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION FOR THE ROMA

EU enlargement

The EU would never have been as crucial for Roma activism as it is today without the enlargement process. The European Commission progress reports in the late 1990s and early 2000s, which reviewed candidate countries in Central Europe against a set of membership conditions, often highlighted the position of the Roma. There was a lot of normative pressure on prospective EU members during that period, and in response to this leverage the candidate member states were sometimes quick to review, revise and strengthen some of their minority policies (Schimmelfennig 2010) or adopt international minority protection legislation such as the Council of Europe's multilateral instruments devoted to the protection of national

minorities: the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

Yet the story of enlargement is not all positive for Roma. Policy responses and legal regulations often turned out to be more symbolic and rhetorical than substantive and effective. Moreover, while some ongoing domestic reforms in the field of minority protection were no doubt given extra impetus by the EU's membership conditionality and enlargement funding schemes, these reforms and legal adaptations often did not lead to any noticeable positive changes for Roma communities on the ground. Sometimes the developments were even negative – several communities became poorer and more socially excluded than before 1989 (Guy 2001).

This uneven result may in part have been inevitable given the EU's strategy of setting broad preconditions for all candidate member states before entering into more specific negotiations with each of the states separately. As Grabbe has argued, the EU did not have equal traction in all candidate states; there was more influence and leverage in places where EU demands were congruent with domestic priorities and where there was already a "national project" in place to "return to Europe" (Grabbe 2014). In addition, there remained general problems of implementation and backlash within the framework of the conditionality policy, especially in the field of human rights. Vague requirements and flexible membership preconditions provided ample maneuvering room to states that were criticized by the European Commission for failing to protect or to improve the situation of marginalized Roma. In some cases, politicians used the conditionality pretext to begin or continue to mobilize *against* the Roma. Among Roma activists there was a high level of uncertainty about whether the EU could really push states to pursue radical policy changes on this issue and many realized that the EU's enlargement policies could only go so far in helping to change socio-economic realities (Nicolae 2012).

The EU's social policy agenda

The situation of the Roma not only rose to prominence because of the enlargement process; there was also some attention from EU institutions because the EU, over the last two decades, has tried to promote the active inclusion of vulnerable citizens in governance structures (see, e.g. Daly 2008, Bee and Guerrina 2014) and create more meaningful forms of European citizenship, also for minorities (Isin and Saward 2013). In the field of social policy in general, for example, we see the roots of such efforts in the early 2000s in the context of the social Open Method of Coordination, a process of voluntary cooperation between member states geared toward reaching common goals in social affairs (Frazer 2010). Since then, European policy-makers have used and promoted various participatory techniques to communicate and collaborate with secondary stakeholders, i.e. organized networks or NGOs such as FEANTSA (the European Federation of National Organizations working with the Homeless) or EAPN (the European Anti-Poverty Network) and to a lesser extent, with so-called primary stakeholders, i.e. selected people from the target group. In the latter case, for example, people experiencing poverty themselves have been involved in consultative conferences, deliberative events and participatory processes. Such initiatives have fulfilled some important goals – they have kept social issues, including the position of vulnerable minorities, on the EU agenda and they have provided opportunities for policy exchange and learning (Frazer 2010, 20-21).

But here too, the story is not all positive. As the 2014 mid-term review of the EU's jobs and growth strategy "Europe 2020" has revealed, such efforts have not been able to create expected substantial progress. Policy initiatives have mostly addressed the preparatory phase or design of new social policies; implementation continues to be a problem (Frazer et al. 2014). Moreover, consultations (sometimes done online, see Quittkat 2011) and

participatory processes often encounter problems of transparency and representation (Lord and Pollak 2013). It remains unclear what outcomes consultation and participation should seek to achieve, how exactly a vulnerable group should be represented or a sufficiently diverse set of representatives can be included, and how tokenism or stigmatization can be avoided.

Roma consultation mechanisms on the EU level

In response to some of the disappointments associated with shortcomings of the EU enlargement policy and the social policy agenda, the EU has looked for new ways to prompt member state governments to take action on the issue of the Roma. Member state governments, for their part, have been increasingly interested in tackling the issue – even if only as a way to address (or in some cases avoid) intra-EU mobility of Roma (Nacu 2012).

It is in this context that we have to understand the series of *European Roma Summits* that the European Commission organized in 2008, 2010 and 2014. These highly visible meetings brought together a broad range of representatives from EU institutions, national governments, regional and local public authorities, and (Roma) civil society organizations, and were meant to provide a public forum for various stakeholders in order to increase general political awareness about the situation of Roma in the EU, especially among high-level national policymakers. Some specific outcomes followed from this large-scale participatory effort. The first Roma Summit, for instance, concluded with the creation of the *European Platform for Roma Inclusion*, a smaller and more focused deliberative forum that, since 2010, has regularly facilitated meetings between state representatives, Roma activists and experts to identify promising developments and stimulate cooperation where needed. Among other things, these meetings worked out the basic principles guiding the European Commission's action in this field. The EC tries to strike a balance between highlighting

national accountability and stimulating European monitoring, on the one hand, and advocating special measures to support Roma and propagating a mainstream approach, on the other. These meetings have also encouraged member state governments to provide quantifiable targets to reduce the employment and education gaps between Roma and other sections of the population, offer Roma access to micro-credit, or employ more Roma as qualified civil servants in the public sector.

The culmination point of this phase came in April 2011, when a Communication of the European Commission announced an overall European framework for demanding clear policy commitments on Roma from all EU member states (COM(2011) 173). Since then, member state governments have been urged to draw up “national Roma integration strategies” (NRISs). The logic here was that bringing such national policy plans together under the umbrella of a coordinated European effort would make it easier to compare national policy ideas, practices and commitments, and create new pathways toward more robust monitoring by independent agencies and civil society actors.

Since 2011, the European Commission has reviewed policy progress and examined more closely the ways in which member states have used (or failed to use) European Structural and Investment Funds for projects in which Roma are involved – all of this in order to ensure that the budgetary opportunities for Roma inclusion policies that come with European membership are not squandered. Through the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EARDF), relatively large budgets are now available for tackling various aspects of the situation facing the Roma, and conditions have been put into place in order to avoid such funds being used to segregate the Roma even further. In the case of the ERDF, for example, projects that are not explicitly aimed at desegregation – such as those that seek to improve housing conditions in a segregated area – will *not* be eligible for funding

(Vermeersch and Sobotka 2012). In response to such monitoring and reviewing efforts by the European Commission, several member states have revised their national strategies or action plans and set up consultation forums on the implementation of these plans. Expert reports and independent shadow monitoring by NGOs (e.g. Rorke 2012) try to push this development further.

THE LIMITS OF EUROPEAN POST-NATIONAL CITIZENSHIP FOR THE ROMA

These European consultative efforts, which amount to a certain type of Europeanization for the Roma — i.e. they address the problems that appear in separate national contexts *indirectly*, by giving the Roma a European voice in a set of transnational institutions and initiatives — present both an opportunity and a challenge for Roma activists. The Europeanizing of policy demands and deliberations certainly has advantages over promoting policy ideas and discussions only locally or nationally. European awareness-raising campaigns can have more clout than local or national ones; individual, local, and national activists now find support from cross-border NGOs that are not only working on issues related to Roma, but are active in more broadly defined fields such as human rights and anti-poverty, and on this basis, build new transnational European alliances. However, this must be weighed against the risks. For instance the European institutionalization of Roma policies and the actions on Roma issues by transnational human rights networks has led some politicians to reinforce the idea that Roma activism is by necessity a practice of “post-national citizenship” (Tambini 2010) – rather than one of national citizenship – and that Roma are therefore best served by EU institutions rather than national ones (Vermeersch 2012). Such a post-national conceptualization of a group’s identity should, in theory, perhaps not be entirely problematic (indeed, there have been calls to think in these terms about other social groups as

well) yet, in the absence of a substantial legal and political European citizenship regime it can, in practice, be used to frame the Roma as *only* European, and therefore not national or local. This informal status reifies the Roma as a group that is somehow separate from the national population of a state and does not share interests with so-called “regular” citizens of that state, who are still overwhelmingly viewed and defined on the basis of their national citizenship – they are, unlike the minority, *not* framed or understood as “European”. Moreover, the structures which are needed to improve the situation on the ground for the Roma (social welfare systems, redistribution mechanisms, and anti-discrimination policies) fall primarily under the authority of national states, not the European institutions (see, e.g. Schall 2012).

There are several ways in which the risk of the Europeanization of the Roma can be understood. One way is to consider the previously growing but now diminishing power of post-national and universal human rights standards as a basic framework for claiming rights across the borders of sovereign states in the EU. Activists who defend the interests of cross-national minority populations and cross-national interest groups (e.g. LGBTIQ) have been able to benefit from the idea of such cross-border principles. But they are also the first to suffer from its diminishing traction in states that turn away from human rights ideals. In the case of the Roma, we see that states that were previously scrutinized for their human rights record by international monitoring agencies in the context of EU accession, now oppose such criticism more vigorously. The Hungarian government, for example, has rejected accusations that it has breached human rights laws and has instead endorsed new forms of exclusionary nationalism (Szikra 2014, Fox and Vermeersch 2010).

The development of universal human rights standards within the EU should be seen as part of a larger global trend. Over the course of the 1990s, one could observe the importance of the normative idea that an individual state’s human rights record is of concern not only to

that individual state and its national citizens, but to the whole world, and that human rights protection is therefore enforceable across borders through “naming and shaming”.

Throughout the 1990s it became clear that in this way, significant global wrongs could be identified, publicized, and in some cases, righted. This was in large part the work of international NGOs such as Open Society Foundations, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (which, incidentally, were the organizations that managed to attract a lot of attention to the poor treatment of the Roma in the 1990s, when this was still an issue rather unknown to EU institutions). Such non-governmental international advocacy networks reinforced the global human rights agenda by moral consciousness-raising and by monitoring domestic change in individual states (Risse 1999). The human rights strategy, which gained influence in the wider world but certainly also in the EU, was based on the conviction that reporting human rights violations and publicly exposing human rights violators to a world increasingly convinced of the universal value of human rights, would lead to the emergence of a truly global human rights community. The optimism of cross-border non-governmental human rights advocates and their cross-border networks had an impact on the functioning of international governmental institutions. Clearly, human rights were something more than lofty ideals; they were adopted by governments and became part and parcel of hard international arrangements and judicial documents such as the European Convention on Human Rights. In Europe, the codification of human rights went hand in hand with the political and economic integration process. In 2009, when the Treaty of Lisbon entered into force, the Charter of Fundamental rights, consistent with the European Convention on Human Rights, became legally binding for EU institutions as well as for (most) individual EU member states. Respect for human rights is now among the requirements for EU membership: through membership conditionality and external policy measures in the field of human rights, the EU attempts to be a “transformative power” (Grabbe 2006, Wetzel 2012).

And it may also work the other way around, from the bottom up: aspiring EU member states may rely on human rights norms to exert pressure on the EU. They may foreground their own human rights achievements to signal their legitimacy, sovereignty and readiness to become a member of the EU.

In recent years, however, several developments have put the human rights goal, and the associated “spiral effect” for influencing state behavior (Risse 1999, 18), under enormous pressure. This is illustrated by the emergence of a rhetoric and politics that emphasizes the safety of national citizens in the face of external violence from non-state actors such as terrorist groups, and the retreat of human rights concerns that has come with this (Luban 2002, 10). In several ways, the slow retreat of human rights as a political ideal and the rise of alternative regimes of rightlessness have important implications for the Roma, even in states that adhere human rights conventions. In the field of territorial state governance, there are now various places and spaces where security concerns involving Roma populations eclipse human rights concerns. Many Roma have, for example, been the subject of collective ethnic expulsion campaigns within the EU, for example in France (Nacu 2012). Responding to riots after a police shooting in July 2010, then President Nicolas Sarkozy called an emergency ministerial meeting at which it was decided to shut down a large number of irregular Roma dwellings and single out Bulgarian and Romanian Roma for an expulsion campaign that would bring them back to their countries of origin, even if only temporary. France had been sending Romanian and Bulgarian citizens back home even before 2010. In 2009, the French government already deported about 9,000 Roma to Romania and Bulgaria, and also other Western European countries (Italy, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and the United Kingdom) have for a number of years pursued targeted return campaigns (Vermeersch 2011). At the highly policed external borders of the EU, where practices of exclusion are visible through novel monitoring technologies and techniques, the category of citizenship is not one

of shared rights across borders but of exclusion, and this too directly affects Roma migrants. While the internal borders of the EU soften and disappear, the external borders harden; and while the equipment to protect those latter borders becomes more sophisticated, the concern for the human rights situation of those who seek to move across them diminishes. The media in these cases are often not an ally of the human rights organizations that criticize these new policies and practices. To be sure, the mistreatments do not go entirely unreported, but the media stories about Roma migrants often represent them in a less than favorable light. They are seen not as fellow human beings but as “objects to be controlled or as unwanted numbers or ‘flows’ of ‘illegals’” (Rygiel 2014, 62).

Furthermore, it has now become rewarding rather than costly for politicians to oppose external demands for human rights protection. In several countries, not least in the EU member states that were under close scrutiny for their treatment of minorities when they were still candidate states, external demands to respect human rights norms have come to serve as a foil against which nationalist aspirations can be articulated and legitimated. Such political dynamics bring the human rights spiral model to a halt. Reinforced political nationalism can create exclusions in a double way: it preemptively cancels out any external criticism on its human rights record, because that criticism is framed as an attack on the nation and hence as an argument for inward-looking national protection (the argument that “they” are against “us”); and it foregrounds the idea of ethnonational belonging as a basis for citizenship at the expense of cultural “others.” In such instances, the Roma are often framed as “others,” even in cases where they have been, in historical terms, part of the national population. This has clearly been the case in the rhetoric of the extreme right in Hungary, where Jobbik successfully thematized the issue of the Roma by relying on, reviving and constructing the notion of “Gypsy crime” (a previously discredited term that suggests a causal link between ethnic belonging and criminal behavior). According to Zsuzsanna Vidra and Jon Fox these

“racist discourses were not challenged by mainstream politicians, (...) but condoned by them. Indeed, in many respects, politicians from the governing center-right party but also to a lesser extent from the left opposition became complicit in the reproduction of these racist and racialized discourses on Roma issues” (2014, 437-438).

The formulation and framing of the “other” has real consequences in legitimizing strategies to expel ethnically defined groups of people from their home environment and create places of exception. Take, for example, the creation not only of particular “camps” of migrants of Roma background, but also of special zones of non-migrant Roma in countries where they are citizens – this has happened for example in Italy (Sigona 2005, Lippai 2011).

HOW CAN THE EU STILL MATTER FOR THE ROMA?

What we have seen in the last decade is thus a double development: on the one hand, an increasing number of channels for policy consultation around social inclusion have opened up through EU institutions, and on the other hand, the politics of minority claims-making in the EU has become a more complicated matter as backlashes against human rights abuses are increasingly hard to avoid. As a result, Roma activists often find themselves in double jeopardy – they may gain access to EU policy-making institutions and become stakeholders in the debate about social policy, but if they do so under the label of ethnic Roma (rather than in the name of a non-ethnic population) they run the risk of actively subscribing to an identity label that is widely seen as removed from the national (and nationalized) public arena. Furthermore, this label is associated with the ideals of transnational rights that served as a backbone for the democratization of CEE and the enlargement of the EU – ideals that are increasingly contested by nationalist and populist political movements.

How can the EU still matter for the Roma? A review of the literature on the evolving EU context and its impact on the position of minorities such as the Roma should lead to nuanced conclusions about the effect this process has had on the possibilities of activists to find real access to the policy-making process on national and European levels. Clearly, the European Commission has put a lot of effort into providing financial support for projects addressing issues related to Roma, through various types of funding schemes. This has given a strong incentive to (transnational) NGOs, resulting in increased activity on Roma issues and the rise to prominence of a number of transnational Roma activist organizations (Ram 2010). But from various reports and surveys, and from the June 2015 Communication of the European Commission, it is also clear that the post-enlargement period has so far not led to an overall larger role of Roma in government consultations on the *national* level (COM(2015)299). For this reason, the European Commission will start providing financial support for “the development of national platforms for Roma inclusion.”

There is now an EU Framework for NRISs in place, which provides, a method for annual reporting of progress (or lack thereof) in the various member states; in theory, this is an important tool for shaming. In practice, however it is clear that the active involvement of the Roma communities themselves in social policy formation and implementation continues to be a weak point. The recent meetings of the *European Platform for Roma Inclusion* (the 9th meeting was held in March 2015) show that the Commission now highlights more than ever the importance of the involvement of Roma NGOs as active participants in the process of policy formation and implementation. Through such techniques as stakeholder engagement and participatory deliberation, the European Commission has included NGO representatives more directly in the policy conversation with EC administrators and politicians (in particular some MEPs) and also in the design of the European Platform meetings in the future.

How have Roma activists responded to this trend? One may distinguish at least four ways.

First, they have organized to respond to opportunities directly linked to the participatory spaces established by the European Commission. Various activists have been keen to collaborate with EU administrators through the now-available consultative mechanisms. In preparation for the Platform meeting of March 2015, the Roma coordination Unit of Directorate-General Justice of the European Commission organized a small-scale brainstorm session with civil society representatives from Roma organizations, academics, representatives of networks of local authorities, and international organizations active on Roma inclusion (Working Meeting on the European Platform for Roma inclusion Brussels, 25 November 2014). As the report of the meeting shows, the informal gathering concluded that the Platform meetings needed to be more reflective of the way it involved the various relevant actors, including Roma, in shaping European actions on Roma (Toft 2014). In essence, the message from that meeting to the European Commission was a request to turn the Platform into a truly consultative participatory forum where the voices of stakeholders can be heard, where opportunities to promote networking and sharing of expertise can be created, and where political commitments and accountability among participating politicians and policymakers can be fostered.

Second, Roma activists have organized to respond more aptly to opportunities in the context of EU electoral politics. On several occasions, the European Parliament (EP) has debated the issue of the Roma in the presence of Roma activists. In 2013 it adopted the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategy 2020, a resolution acknowledging the progress made on the implementation of the national Roma integration strategies. Some political parties have brought Roma politicians to Brussels and Strasbourg as MEPs (in the current EP, this is the Swede Soraya Post and the Romanian Damian Drăghici). Moreover,

the EP itself (more precisely its Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs) has requested studies on the subject (e.g. European Parliament 2011). It must be noted that the EP has also provided a floor for nationalist politicians with an anti-Roma agenda (Vermeersch 2012).

The third form of engagement by Roma activists has been in the field of developing and disseminating data on the situation of the Roma in EU member states. Roma organizations have increasingly attempted to become sources of reliable information and knowledge, sometimes in collaboration with international agencies (such as the UNDP, World Bank, or EU Agency for Fundamental Rights²), and existing or newly established (academic) research networks. Roma activists have sought to go a step further than simply collecting data; they have engaged in concerted efforts to bring fact sheets and progress reports to the attention of both policymakers and the media (see e.g., the publications of the European Roma and Travelers Forum, ERTF). As van Baar (2011, 265) writes, such information is “both productive and performative” and has the chance of making the situation of the Roma “visible as quantifiable ‘facts’.” In other words, the knowledge production based on a specific Roma perspective of the social situation at hand is itself a political strategy; one which goes beyond previous strategies of naming and shaming and is much more geared towards informing governments on how they can improve their policies.

Fourth, Roma activists have increasingly felt the need to create and cultivate transnational advocacy networks. Since the EU Framework for NRISs has been in place, several NGOs have tried to develop more effective and comprehensive transnational advocacy networks with stronger links between various organizations (including non-Roma

² The EU Agency for Fundamental Rights has since multi-annual research program specifically devoted to the topic of the Roma. Collaboration with Roma themselves is part of the research effort in the form of “participatory action research, which means researchers will work in local communities, engaging directly with Roma and non-Roma, and local authorities” (<http://fra.europa.eu/en/project/2013/multi-annual-roma-programme>).

organizations). Some Roma NGOs work across national borders or have formed their own transnational collaborative networks, such as the European Grassroots Organizations Network (ERGO), the European Roma Policy Coalition (ERPC) and the European Roma and Traveler's Forum (ERTF), or have become part of international government-supported arrangements such as the Decade for Roma Inclusion, which was a project that ran from 2005 to 2015 and sought to monitor government commitments in the priority areas of education, employment, health, and housing while managing to secure direct collaboration with the governments of twelve countries (eight of which are current EU member states) in its activities. The most recent effort in the field of the promotion of Roma culture and creative arts has been the establishment of the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAN), a joint initiative of the Alliance for the European Roma Institute, the Council of Europe, and the Open Society Foundations. Some Roma activists have also become part of (or started working together with) more broadly-defined civil society networks such as the Open Society Foundations (see, OSF's Roma Initiatives Office), or the European Foundation Center (Forum of Roma Inclusion). Although some of these initiatives have been set up outside of the context of the EU, they have indirectly relied on growing cooperation between EU member states and have been involved in, as they will likely be in the future, in consultation processes initiated by the EU.

These four developments hold some promise, but a lot of what will happen to them is dependent on whether improvement can be reached on a number of broader issues that loom large. One is the persistently negative image of the Roma that informs even the most positive policy measures. While Roma citizens may have now all equal rights regarding education, welfare or political participation, it is not always possible for them to exercise those rights or secure access to particular entitlements. Increased political participation of Roma and pressure from Roma activism has certainly made politicians more aware of the need to

implement measures that increase the possibilities for disadvantaged and marginalized populations to enjoy their rights, but deeply-rooted social patterns and political practices still continue to pose barriers. Once they are stigmatized and categorized as people outside the normal citizenry, Roma need strong advocates to promote their acceptance as citizens and their access to citizenship rights. Of course, in theory these barriers can be changed – one may recall Charles Tilly’s definition of categories as “not specific sets of people or unmistakable attributes, but standardized, movable social relations” (Tilly 1998, 66) – but so far this “moving” has not happened despite increased EU policy attention. See, for example, the continued practice in several EU member states of segregating Roma children in special schools or classes (see Rostas 2012), sometimes with the explicit explanation that this practice is done to “help” the Roma.³

One can argue that inequalities between Roma and other social groups persist not only *despite* recent policy efforts to help the Roma but also, to a significant degree, *because of* these efforts. This is because they fail to address – and in some cases, even reinforce – the underlying view of Roma as an exceptional category. Measures that are aimed at saving the Roma from being “at risk” are implemented as part of a wider range of practices that mark Roma as a “risky group”. Such measures “fail to counter the essentializing categorization schemes that have produced earlier forms of categorized inequality” (van Baar and Vermeersch 2015, 13).

³ In 2007, the Czech Republic was convicted for this type of discrimination in a landmark judgment (*D.H. and Others v. the Czech Republic*) of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), but since then matters have remained largely unchanged. In 2012, an ODIHR/OSCE field mission concluded that “the steps taken by the Czech Government have not ‘put an end’ to the practice the ECtHR ruled a violation of the Convention; Roma children are still overrepresented in segregated educational arrangements for children with special educational needs” (ODIHR 2012, 5). In 2015, the Council of Europe published findings from new research in the Czech Republic that showed that “Although the total number of pupils (Roma and non-Roma) in special schools or classes has dropped, year-on-year, from 17,755 in 2008 to 10,695 in 2014, the proportion of Roma pupils in such institutions increased from 28.2% (previous year) to 32.4% (school year 2014/2015)” (Council of Europe 2015).

In addition, although most activists and organizations are strongly supportive of government institutions that demand policy attention for Roma issues across Europe, there are also rising concerns about the lack of political will to implement the policies, to foster real change on the ground, and to address discrimination and marginalization in ways that go beyond symbolic denouncements. The European Roma Policy Coalition, for example, has, while welcoming the EU's Council Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in EU member states, cautioned against rising levels of discrimination and lack of progress in Roma access to government institutions. The chair of the European Roma Policy Coalition (ERPC), Belén Sánchez-Rubio, stated in July 2013 that "So far, the EU Framework has not improved [the Roma's] socio-economic situation nor visibly decreased anti-Gypsyism" and has called for "the introduction of indicators for genuine Roma participation and empowerment" (ERPC 2013).

EU policy makers have been fully aware of this challenge. Already in 2012, then European Commissioner Viviane Reding admitted that drawing up the national Roma integration strategies and sets of policy measures for Roma integration was "only the first step." She added that "it remains to be seen how the strategies will be implemented. ... I can say already that there is still a lot of room for improvement, in particular when it comes to securing sufficient funding for Roma inclusion and putting monitoring mechanisms in place" (Reding 2012). In October 2014, Věra Jourová, the European Commissioner on Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, announced that the marginalization and exclusion of Roma would continue to be an important concern of the European Commission (Jourová 2014) as the goals were not reached.

CONCLUSION

More than any other minority group in Europe that has been formally included in citizenship but has remained socio-economically marginalized, the Roma have tried to reach beyond the boundaries of national citizenship and have counted on the support of transnational advocacy networks and EU institutions to change realities on the ground. They have done so, in large part, in response to the institutional and public spaces that have opened up for minority consultation at the level of the EU. The latest developments seem to hold some promise. The European Commission has supported and stimulated the emergence of arrangements for Roma participation at the highest political level. Roma activists are now more organized within structures, networks and associations that allow them to be part of these increased consultative efforts. At the same time, however, such Europeanization leaves the Roma in an ambiguous position. Many Roma are faced with an inherent tension in the way European citizenship currently functions: it places them apart from national populations who, while in practice enjoy intra-EU mobility, still derive most of their citizenship rights from national membership. This is not unlike the situation of other marginalized subjects (Aradau et al. 2010). Moreover, hate speech against Roma and anti-Roma political campaigning has risen, and hate crimes against them have soared, both in the home countries and in the countries where they have arrived as refugees or migrants. Although Romaphobia has a long history in Europe, in some countries Roma were never before more explicitly targeted as adversaries of the “national” population than today.

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