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State versus Popular Nationalism and Inclusion/Exclusion Mechanisms

Abstract: The present article provides an analysis of nationalism understood as the process of border-creation and border-maintenance between minority ethnic groups and mainstream society as encountered in the state policies targeting the Roma minority in Romania and in the dominant ethnic majority. It points out that the treatment of the Roma has varied from ethnic nationalism founded on neglect, marginalization and persecution to civic nationalism based on (forceful) inclusion through assimilation rather than integration that fosters acceptance of ethnic difference. It also explores the way in which state and popular nationalism mutually influenced each other while even civic nationalism resulted in the Roma's marginalization and the deepening of negative stereotypes in the surrounding society.

Keywords: nationalism, ethnic groups, marginalization, assimilation, racism, Roma, Romania

UDK: 323.1(498-214.58)

Državni in ljudski nacionalizem in mehanizmi vključevanja/izključevanja

Izveček: Članek analizira nacionalizem kot postopek ustvarjanja in vzdrževanja meja med manjšinskimi etničnimi skupinami in večinsko družbo. Pod drobnogled vzame državno politiko do

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romske manjšine v Romuniji in med tamkajšnjo etnično večino. Kot opozarja, se je odnos do Romov spreminjal od etničnega nacionalizma, osnovanega na zanemarjanju, marginalizaciji in pregonu, do državljanskega nacionalizma, utemeljenega na (prisilni) vključitvi z asimilacijo namesto z integracijo, ki bi spodbujala sprejemanje etničnih razlik. Prispevek nadalje raziskuje, kako sta državni in ljudski nacionalizem vzajemno vplivala drug na drugega in kako je imel celo ljudski nacionalizem za posledico marginalizacijo Romov in poglobljanje negativnih stereotipov v družbi.

Ključne besede: nacionalizem, etnične skupine, marginalizacija, asimilacija, rasizem, Romi, Romunija



The relationship between (ethnic) minorities and majorities is crucial for ensuring the peaceful coexistence of any society, because, depending on the particular context, it can easily lead to ethnic tension, conflicts or even extreme physical violence, which is why such interactions form a fruitful area of study among social scientists. However, what is often missing from the scholarly literature are accounts on how state policies on one hand and the popular attitudes the dominant society holds with regard to a particular minority group on the other hand influence each other, while equally shaping the way in which further interaction and inclusion vs. exclusion mechanisms function.

Hence the aim of the present article is to explore both of these aspects in relation to the Roma minority in Romania. The Romanian case is of particular interest, given the large size of the Roma minority, the second after Hungarians according to official data, and the first if taking into account unofficial estimations. Addition-

ally, as opposed to all other ethnic groups in Romania, the Roma minority is the only one whose number has significantly increased in the past decades and continues to do so at the present moment.

According to Conversi “interactions need norms and regulations, and borders represent the core of such regulations”, the author arguing that such symbolic borders are “essential to all human processes, both at the individual and the social level”, which is why for the purpose of this article I will adopt Conversi’s definition of nationalism as the mechanism of “border maintenance and creation”.² In terms of types of nationalism, one of the most widely-used categorizations of nationalism(s) refers to the historic experience of the nation-state formation. Thus there is a tradition dating back to the mid-twentieth century, indicating that geographically in Europe there are two prevailing types of nationalism, a Western and an Eastern one. In Western Europe nationalism emerged as a result of the formation of the modern nation-states, while in the Eastern part of the continent, nationalism was founded on the battle for cultural hegemony.³ In the West this process took place from the state towards the nation by “experienced ‘territorial’ nations’ occupying fairly well-defined areas” and exhibiting “early ‘bureaucratic-rational’ state-forms”.⁴ The process is the opposite for Eastern Europe, the nation-state being formed from the nation towards the state. As Richards explains, this is the path encountered by ‘ethnic’ nations for whom “cultural awareness is strong whilst existing state forms with which to identify are not”. Moreover, this process gave priority to a reiteration of “genealogy, customs, ‘folkish’ elements etc.” to a greater extent and much less to the “civic rational-legal” dimension than in the West, the author concluding

² Conversi, 2000, 424.

³ Hjerm, 2003, 413.

⁴ Richards, 1999, 18.

that “the Eastern and Central route also placed a stronger emphasis on ethnic homogeneity and ‘purification’”.⁵

The stress on the civic versus ethnic values that one adheres to in order to be ‘loyal’ in Walker Connor’s terms to one’s nation⁶ is of particular interest not only for accounting for the differences in the emergence of nation-states in the two parts of Europe but they also prove to be beneficial for deciphering the crucial transformations Eastern Europe has been facing since the collapse of the communist regimes in these states’ transition to democracy.⁷ On the other hand Snyder, besides the fact that he operates with the same civic/ethnic dichotomy, manages at the same time to capture in his explanation of the two concepts the instances of resurging ethnic nationalism, which in this case is no longer limited to the West like civic nationalism. In this context civic nationalism “normally appears in well institutionalized democracies. Ethnic nationalism, in contrast, appears spontaneously when an institutional vacuum occurs”.⁸

In Snyder’s conception civic nationalism is based on the rights derived from citizenship within a certain territory and relies on a set of laws whose function is to guarantee those rights and on institutions to provide citizens with the framework to assert such rights, while ethnic nationalism primarily relies on cul-

⁵ Ibid. Opponents of the civic West vs. ethnic East model claim that western nation-states were formed along ethnic lines as well and that they became civic only recently. (Cf. E. Kaufmann, “Liberal Ethnicity: Beyond Liberal Nationalism and Minority Rights”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 23 (2000), 1086-1119).

⁶ Nationalism being perceived by Connor in terms of loyalty to one’s nation (distinct from one’s state), where loyalty is manifested in the form of preservation of the nation’s main attributes such as language, values, history or religion. (cf. Connor, 1994, xi)

⁷ Lovell, 1999, 65.

⁸ Snyder, 1993, 26.

ture and not on institutions. Bearing this in mind, //Snyder argues that ethnic nationalism constitutes the “default option: it predominates when institutions collapse, when existing institutions are not fulfilling people’s basic needs, and when satisfactory alternative structures are not readily available”.⁹ In a very similar way Gellner explains that “ethnicity enters the political sphere as ‘nationalism’ at times when cultural homogeneity or continuity (not classlessness) is required by the economic base of social life, and when consequently culture-linked class differences become noxious, while ethnically unmarked gradual class-differences remain tolerable”.¹⁰

Elaborating on the topic of ethnic nationalism, Connor draws attention to the economic element - which was often invoked in theorizing about, the difference between East and West, the East being less economically developed and the West comprised of ‘developed countries’ - and emphasized that ethnic nationalisms can occur irrespective of the stage of economic development a certain territory exhibits,¹¹ while Richards considers that “most modern democratic societies in reality have a mixture of ethnic and civic nationalisms within them”.¹²

Bearing in mind the ethnic/civic categorization, I will discuss in what follows the type of nationalism displayed by the dominant Romanian society as well as by the state policies targeting the ethnic group of the Roma with the aim of identifying to what extent regime changes and different types of policies, almost exclusively striving (at least declaratively, but often also in practice as we shall see below) to “solve” Romania’s Roma minority question, coincided

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Gellner, 1983, 94.

¹¹ Connor, 1984, 342-343.

¹² Richards, 22.

with the form of popular nationalism and the way in which these two processes influenced each other.

Firstly, there is no relevant statistical data in so far as the number of today's Roma and their geographical representation is concerned. The 2011 census indicates a total number of around 600,000 persons who declared that their ethnicity was Roma;¹³ however, this figure seriously under-represents the total number of the Roma. Estimations of their number range from 1 million to as high as 2.5 million, the EU Commission indicating 1.1 to 1.5 million,¹⁴ while the total number of Romania's inhabitants is slightly over 19 million.

Historically, the Roma are said to have arrived in Romania in the Middle Ages, and were enslaved there. In spite of the fact that slavery was not a disparate phenomenon in the region, the relationship Romanians had with the Roma was characterized by prejudice, causing a caste system based on socioeconomics, leading to the "social death" of the Roma while enslaved. The racist discourse targeting the Roma was also an accompanying phenomenon throughout the history of modern Romania and even before. Until the eighteenth century, although they were slaves, inter-marriages between the Roma and Romanians occurred, albeit in isolated cases, nor were their "pariah status" erased, according to Hancock.¹⁵ Later on, mixed marriages were banned by law, which is one of the first accounts of the sustained marginalization of the Roma.

Regarding their economic position, they were a source of unskilled workers in some fields (like agriculture) but also a skilled labor force in certain crafts such as metal working or gold exploitation yet, as underlined by Atănăsoaie, "in spite of their very important eco-

¹³ The exact number is 619,007.

¹⁴ *** *Protection of Minorities in Romania*, 68.

¹⁵ Hancock, 1987.

nomic role, Gypsy slaves were marginalized, considered as outsiders; they were treated with the greatest contempt and even if they were Christians, they were buried separately from the rest of the population”.¹⁶ Moreover, their treatment was similar to that of commodities rather than humans, as a poster advertizing for a slave auction in Wallachia¹⁷ clearly illustrates: “For sale, a prime lot of Gypsy slaves, to be sold at auction at the Monastery of St. Elias, 9 May 1852, consisting of 18 men, 10 boys, 7 women and 3 girls, in fine condition”.¹⁸

The abolition of slavery was achieved through a series of acts in the mid-nineteenth century¹⁹ that neglected the economic and social impact of the abolition, which left the Roma deprived of land property and often lack of work caused by the landowners’ reluctance to allow the Roma to work their land as paid workers. A widespread treatment applied to the Roma was physical abuse, Kogălniceanu noting that the Roma were “human beings with chains around their hands and feet, with iron circles around their foreheads or with metal collars around their neck; bloody whippings and other punishments such as starvation, hanging over a smoking fire, incarceration, throwing into the snow or into the freezing river waters without clothes”²⁰ being widely common. Such treatments did not cease as a result of the abolition of slavery, Romanians treating them as their property even after their emancipation. A popular Romanian saying still in use today comments that “as the willow is not a tree, the Gypsy is not human”.²¹

¹⁶ Atănăsoaie, 2003, 265.

¹⁷ The southern part of Romania.

¹⁸ Fonseca, 1995, 181.

¹⁹ 1843-1856.

²⁰ Kogălniceanu, 1891, 14.

²¹ In Romanian “Așa cum salcia nu e pom, nici țiganul nu e om.”

Although freed and granted land, this was only on condition that they were sedentary, which excluded a large number of the Roma population that was still nomadic at the time. Even after they were freed, the existing attitudes of mainstream society with regard to the Roma were conducive to a climate of antagonism, within which Romanians looked upon the Roma as worthless and “all-purpose scapegoats”.²² Once Transylvania united with Romania in 1918, the number of the Roma doubled, which put additional pressure on the non-Roma witnessing the ever-growing number of Roma.

Nevertheless, their number was to drop significantly as a result of the Holocaust, which in Romania was not exclusively directed towards Jews, but also the Roma. The extermination policy of the Antonescu-led right-wing government during World War Two targeted at the beginning the nomadic Roma (in 1940), to be followed later on by deportations and killings of the sedentary Roma as well.²³ Consequently, until the Second World War, according to Hale, the number of the Roma in Romania remained approximately constant at approximately over 200,000, while in the census of 1956 there were 104,000 registered persons of Roma origin.²⁴

If the first communist constitution²⁵ did not make any distinction between Romanians and other ethnic groups, unanimously treating all Romanian citizens as part of the ‘people’ in the sense of ‘nation’, the phrase ‘Romanian people’ being absent throughout the

²² Beck, 1989, 58.

²³ *** *Final Report of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania*, 2004, 269. The extermination of the Roma during the Holocaust in Romania was carried out according to data on ethnic Roma gathered in a 1942 census, which is one of the reasons why the Roma are reluctant to declare their ethnicity during censuses up until today.

²⁴ Hale, 1971, 181.

²⁵ Adopted in 1948.

text which does mention though the equality of the citizens belonging to national minorities with Romanians,²⁶ four years later the formulation changed with the exclusion of national minorities from the overtly stated ‘Romanian people’: “National minorities in the Popular Republic of Romania enjoy full equality of rights with the Romanian people”²⁷ while other stipulations refer to the ‘Romanian people’ as the legitimate base of the state.²⁸

However, the clear separation of national minorities from the ‘Romanian nation’ did not refer equally to all ethnic groups present within the Romanian territory at that date, for if for some it meant exclusion from the ‘nation’, for others it meant forceful assimilation into the ‘nation’ and denial of their distinct ethnicity and implicitly various group or individual rights as minority members. This is valid for the Roma²⁹ who were not granted “national minority” status under communism.

Since they were unquestionably antifascists, moreover non-bourgeois, uneducated and poor, the Roma were consequently largely recruited for positions both in political and various communist administrative structures, not out of any sense of tolerance but rather in the quest to quickly increase the communists’ power in a country in which communism was not at all the first political choice of the majority. Nevertheless, their mobility on the party ladder was limited irrespective of their performance³⁰. Yet the Roma’s access to a certain level of political power was brief, for as the years went by, communist

²⁶ Constitution of Romania (1948), ch. 1, art. 2, 3 and. 4; ch. 2, art. 5; ch. 3, art. 16 and 24.

²⁷ Constitution of Romania (1952), Introductory title.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ The other ethnic group that did not enjoy “national minority” status among communists were the Jews.

³⁰ Achim, 1998, 154.

structures no longer needed them to create their support base but to professionalize their cadres, which was impossible for a large number of Roma who were undereducated.

The communist regime's measures insofar as the Roma were concerned, limited to their enforced assimilation, were manifested through enforced sedentarization of the nomadic Roma groups during the late 1950s and the first half of the 1960s³¹. In addition, the communist urbanization plans (especially in Bucharest but also in some other cities) involved massive destruction of old houses and the building of the well-known blocks of flats, to which the inhabitants of the city were forcefully moved. On the other hand, there was little control of the population as to where they would move, which resulted in a complete mix of ethnically different populations that affected the Roma in two ways.

Firstly, the Roma had to abandon their houses and move to a completely new environment, which they had major difficulties in adapting to, nonetheless they were segregated to a certain extent as long as their mobility with regard to housing was zero, the communist authorities carefully 'cleansing' the city centers of Roma. Often this was done by bringing various Roma families who had traditional conflicts among themselves into the same block of flats and causing even bigger tensions between the Roma and their new Romanian neighbors, who assisted at sometimes extremely violent fights among these families, hence reinforcing their stereotypes that the Roma were 'uncivilized', 'savage', etc. Secondly, the blocks of flats, especially in the center of the city and the surrounding inner city areas, were reserved for the working class so those Roma who did not fit the communist worker pattern had to find refuge in the very outskirts of the city,

³¹ It has been stated that approximately one third of the Romanian Roma population were nomads cf. Marushiakova and Popov, 3.

slowly creating essentially Roma neighborhoods, which finally caused most Romanians to relocate, especially after 1989.

Forced sedentarization measures aimed at the nomad and semi-nomad Roma groups together with forced education and employment were perceived by the Roma as a means of ethnic homogenization. The Romanian assimilationist model, imported from the Soviet Union, was not only a process of ‘Romanianization’, as it was with all other minorities, but it was also about ‘modernizing’ a ‘backward’ ethnic group through mainstream education and the socialist model of mass production.

A series of educational measures focused on schooling the Roma in the same schools and classes together with Romanians, where the Roma were highly disadvantaged either linguistically for those whose mother tongue was Romani, or through discrimination by both teachers and the majority of students, leading to a high drop-out rate of Roma students all along the educational process from elementary school to high school. Throughout communism there was a complete denial of the existence of the Roma in the official discourse and in the legislation, the Roma, unlike most other ethnic minorities, not receiving any recognition.

Another effect of the communist state’s assimilation project was the destruction of the Roma’s traditional professions and with them “many components of their traditional life”³². The Roma used to be coppersmiths, farriers, locksmiths, bear leaders, musicians, etc. and the Romanian majority depended on their services, ensuring not only the Roma’s economic survival, but also a certain level of tolerance by the majority. Once pushed to abandon their traditional occupations and engage in the socialist mode of production, where the Roma were assigned mainly low-

³² Zamfir and Zamfir, 1993, 157.

paid and non-prestigious jobs as unskilled workers, waste collectors, street cleaners, waiters, etc. the gap between Roma and the surrounding population deepened and considerably reassigned the Roma to a second-class citizen position and fostered the growth of negative stereotypes. In the absence of any state policy whose role would be to minimize stereotyping or to increase the majority's acceptance of the Roma, they envisaged Romanians as their opponents and not as saviors, as the regime would have wished.

An important measure directed against the Roma was a decree through which the communist state legitimately confiscated the Roma's gold, a measure that for the Roma population was symbolically and practically analogous to the nationalization policy for the rest of the population,³³ while another law sanctioned 'social parasitism', 'anarchism' and any other 'deviant behavior',³⁴ all formulations being a convenient umbrella for the authorities to penalize the Roma who would not enroll in education or engage in the labor market.

Unlike all other ethnic groups in Romania that as the result of 'Romanianization' policies, lack of official support for the affirmation of their ethnic identity, emigration, and mixed marriages for one or more generations, diminished in size also through a lower birth-rate, the Roma minority, whose birth-rate was always significantly higher than the average and characterized by zero emigration, was the only ethnic group that considerably increased its size. Although there was a state policy

³³ Decrees 210, 14 June 1960, *Official Gazette of the Popular Republic of Romania*, no. 8, 17 June 1960 and Decree 244, 10 July 1978, *Official Gazette of the Socialist Republic of Romania*, no. 63, 15 July 1978.

³⁴ Decree 153, 24 March 1970, *Official Gazette of the Socialist Republic of Romania*, no. 33, 13 April 1970.

following the constantly declining birth-rate which encouraged the increase of the number of births by making abortion and contraception illegal, the state would not offer any support for families with more than five children, thus often causing Roma women to abandon their children in the hospitals where they gave birth. Moreover, insofar as health institutions are concerned, even when seeking medical treatment, the Roma were often targets of the racism of Romanian doctors and nurses, degraded, ill-treated, refused treatment, etc.

The communist authorities' attempts at assimilating, 'modernizing' or 'civilizing' the Roma were highly inconsistent throughout the communist period and maybe one of the largest inconsistencies refers to their partial tolerance of various Roma groups around the country who undertook illegal activities, especially towards the end of the communist period. At least in the late communist years, when private business was not accepted by law, we find Roma (predominantly women) in most larger urban settings selling roasted sunflower and pumpkin seeds freely in the streets without any interference by the police.

In addition, in a country where foreign consumption goods were absent from shops and where there was no possibility of legal 'private' imports, the Roma selling foreign branded chewing gum, Western magazines, etc. resulting from illicit trade were not scarce, while the relationship between the police and the Roma seemed more than friendly right under the eyes of the anti-Roma majority, who became even more dissatisfied as long as the Roma had both direct access to foreign goods denied to Romanians and the possibility of re-selling them expensively to the increasingly poor majority population. Overall, as Crowe puts it, especially during late communism, the "keen sense of Romanian nationalism [...] combined with the natural animosity and stereotyping of Gypsies

throughout the country, has kept alive and encouraged an ‘ethnic hierarchy’ that deals with the Gypsies as an inferior race or class”.³⁵

Moreover, strictly economic conditions were responsible for strengthening the role of ethnicity. Socialism characterized as “a system of organized shortage”, much like any other shortage, led to the creation of informal networks aimed at overcoming the scarcity that in late communism became extreme (basic food, clothes, personal hygiene products, etc.) and which in mixed areas caused the “tightening of ethnic boundaries or the use of ethnicity as a basis for personal connections. In its most exclusive form, this expels competitors from networks that supply a shortage economy, giving members of one group an edge over claims from ‘other’ groups.”³⁶

It has been claimed that “the problems that ethnicity causes for democratic systems can be understood against the theory that underpins the modern state. Since virtually every state in the world includes citizens of more than one nationality, democracy necessarily means granting some degree of political power to those who are ethnically different”,³⁷ which is the reason why the largest political organization formed immediately after the 1989 revolution and that automatically took the power previously held by the Romanian Communist Party, the National Salvation Front, declared during the first days of January 1990 that “it shall achieve and guarantee the individual and collective rights and liberties of all national minorities”, these rights being planned to be incorporated into the new democratic constitution, the declaration also promising the creation of an “appropriate institutional framework for the exercise of the minorities’ major rights, the use of their mother

³⁵ Crowe, 1991, 73.

³⁶ Verdery, 1993, 183.

³⁷ Aklaev, 1999, 57.

tongues, the promotion of the national culture and the safeguarding of ethnic identity”.³⁸

The first step in establishing the minorities’ collective rights and freedoms derived directly from the multi-party system. The end of the communist dictatorship for the Roma coincided with the end of the illegal ethnic affirmation struggles, given their recognition as a “national minority” after 1989, the beginning of political representation and a chance to make claims for certain rights they had been denied for centuries. However, the Roma found themselves in a highly awkward situation: their political representation was unsuccessful primarily due to its lack of coherence and support by the Roma themselves. The introduction of the multi-party system gave birth to the formation of numerous ethnic Roma parties, representing the most diverse regional or individual Roma ethnic groups³⁹ unable to overcome their individual interests in order to utter a coordinated message. The non-Roma’s negative images of the Roma were largely influenced by their inability to offer a coherent unified message with regard to their claims for collective and individual rights in contrast to other minorities (especially the Hungarian one).

³⁸ Gallagher, 2005, 76.

³⁹ Unlike most other ethnic minorities, the Roma are the most fragmented in terms of experience, traditions, customs, traditional occupations, etc. Additionally, the Roma communities are distinct also from the point of view of their language, some of them speaking Romani while others speak Romanian as their mother tongue. The Roma minority in Transylvania especially was and is up until today faced with a double minority status, since part of the members speak Hungarian as their mother tongue, thus creating a double segregation; besides the difference from the majority Romanian and Hungarian population, they were confronted with segregation based on linguistic grounds even within the larger group of their own minority both under communism and after its collapse.

The formation of Roma political elite was not understood in the sense of democracy as a plurality of views, as it was understood as a severe lack of culture, reassigning the Roma a second-class citizenship role whose place was behind the political arena. As a result of this fragmentation, no Roma party managed to pass the minimum threshold stipulated by the election law for representation in the parliament, the Roma being represented as a “national minority” and consequently automatically assigned one place in the lower chamber, which, considering the official figures of the number of ethnic Roma in Romania, was far below a real proportional representation.

On the other hand, during this time the ethnic minorities’ demands were less and less heard, for in the parliament (where the minorities’ representation was more a formal than a functional matter, especially for those ethnic minority organizations not managing to overcome the minimum percentage to benefit from proportional representation in the parliament) all minority deputies were part of the opposition. Even this formal representation was successfully used by the authorities for proving both inside the country, but most importantly to the West, that Romania was distancing itself from Ceaușescu’s policies aimed at ethnic minorities’ assimilation, not so much because of their respect for minorities’ rights but because Romania was in dire need of Western financial help to boost Romania’s economy, foreign aid that was awarded according to several criteria, respect for human (including minority) rights being one of them.

The Roma, marginalized during the Ceaușescu era unless willing to assimilate, once the regime changed, found themselves systematically pushed away by the same authorities that claimed to be democratic, providing the necessary policies for the inclusion of all Romanian citizens. But the Roma faced discrimination often asso-

ciated with violence, starting with the early months of 1990. Besides being prosecuted in the March 1990 Târgu-Mureş Romanian-Hungarian ethnic conflicts, during which they played an insignificant role, several Roma communities were confronted with violence either from the police forces or from other officials, while during the events of June 1990, when miners were called by the government to intervene for dismissing (violently) the anti-governmental protests that had been continuing Bucharest for two months at that time, police officers deliberately led some groups of miners into Roma-inhabited areas where the latter were attacked. Numerous cases of miners' attacks of the Roma were also recorded in other areas of the city.

Maybe the best case to exemplify the authorities' façade of democracy and populism with regard to ethnic minorities, as well as the deep ethnic hatred between members of different ethnic groups, is the conflict that took place in 1993⁴⁰ in Hădăreni, a multi-ethnic village in Transylvania inhabited by Romanians, Hungarians and Roma, and the way in which the authorities managed the conflict itself and the use of justice afterwards. The conflict, whose origin was the murder of a Romanian man by three Roma, escalated into a racially motivated pogrom of the Roma by Romanians and Hungarians, including physical attacks on the Roma, setting their houses on fire, lynching two of the three Roma murderers, all causing the Roma community members of the village to flee. The riots in Hădăreni are important because they represented a clear instance of the authorities' actively participating in the conflicts on the side of the majority, police officers being among the ones to set the Roma's houses on fire, while the trial following the riots lasted for eleven years, the epilogue being the decision of the European

⁴⁰ On September 20, 1993.

Court of Human Rights, whose verdict was against the attackers and also condemned the Romanian authorities for failing to grant the Roma compensation and the right to a fair trial.

The Romanians' anti-Roma feelings emerging from below, characterized by extreme antipathy towards the Roma, magnified by that of all the other minority ethnic groups, besides the obvious reason connected to a centuries-long history of marginalization and negative stereotyping, also had a very 'transition-oriented' cause rooted in the harsh economic situation generated by communism itself, in the lack of access to the most elementary resources, in the opening of the market, privatization and slow restructuring of the former communist economy. As I have mentioned before, the Roma were the only group allowed a certain degree of 'market-oriented freedom' in the pre-1989 period. Once the market was opened after the collapse of communism, the Roma were among the first to engage in petty commerce, especially as long as they were the only ones already possessing some valuable skills regarding a market economy, which almost no Romanians possessed at the time.

Although this commercial activity, in contrast to that under communism, was not always illicit, it provided a high visibility level of the Roma among the majority, while it reinforced the negative attitudes associated with their laziness (selling goods in the streets or markets was not exactly the idea the average Romanian had about honest work, particularly after nearly half a century of preaching industry or at best agriculture-connected work as the most prestigious). The Roma's domination in petty-commerce related activities often restricted access for other groups. Additionally, though not always valid, the general perception of the mainstream population was that the Roma stole the goods they later on sold.

Since the Roma minority, as we have seen, was unacknowledged as a 'national minority' under communism, it did not benefit from

the already established education institutions in minority languages until 1989. However, the granting of national minority status did not see any improvements with regard to the establishment of a coherent Romani language instruction education system in spite of the *de jure* right to mother-tongue education for national minorities. Though we are aware that such attempts would imply a considerably increased effort by the authorities in the absence of a standard written Romani language, not even the first steps have been initiated, such as affirmative action measures for training teachers of Romani in the first years of the post-communist period.

Moreover, even the gate for positive discrimination measures for supporting minority ethnics' pursuing their studies at the tertiary level (post-high school or university) was left to the discretion of the academic institutions themselves. For example, it was not until the late 1990s that Romani courses started being offered by the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Bucharest University, which inevitably delayed the prospects of forming a formally trained academic corpus qualified to further implement minority language education programs. Other sections or universities introduced a separate quota for Roma students also at the end of the 1990s and such measures were limited to the study of Social Assistance (University of Bucharest) or Political Science (National School of Political and Administrative Studies, Bucharest).

Generally throughout the education process the presence of the Roma is not seen as desirable, although the law stipulates that education is compulsory for all Romanian citizens until the age of fifteen. Teachers are the first to discriminate against Roma children, isolating them at the back of the classroom, spending less time helping them or allowing other children to commit discriminatory acts, while when possible non-Roma parents avoid enrolling their children in schools or classes attended by Roma children. During

their school years, the Roma are still perceived as self-evident dropout candidates, based on previous experience of the increased dropout rate of Roma pupils and consequently they are treated as such, whereas more often than not schools for children with special needs are overpopulated with Roma children.⁴¹ In this context the inclusion of the Roma in the nation is viewed as acceptable only by complete assimilation, as it was during the communist period. Such assimilation is often impossible, even when sought for due to the persistence of racism.

Romania's integration into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and into the European Union was accompanied by a series of requirements regarding the respect of universal human rights and the non-discrimination of minorities, with a particular emphasis on the situation of the Roma. Due to the increasing external pressure for respect of ethnic minority rights, the government adopted in 2001 the Strategy for Improving the Situation of the Roma⁴², which, although not succeeding in significantly improving the situation of the Roma, managed to take an important step forward by ensuring the Roma's representation at various levels of administration (local and central) and by providing the basis for the establishment of specific programs in several fields such as education, the labor force, etc. as well as the collaboration between the central, local government and non-governmental organizations focusing on Roma inclusion.⁴³ Some of the strategy's seven objectives included the elimination of stereotypes, prejudices and practices of certain pub-

⁴¹ Schvey, Flaherty, and Higgins, 2005, 17.

⁴² Government decision 430/ 25 April 2001, *Official Gazette of Romania*, no. 252, 16 May 2001

⁴³ *** *O necesară schimbare de strategie - Raport privind stadiul de aplicare a Strategiei Guvernamentale de Îmbunătățire a Situației Romilor din România*, 2004, 43.

lic servants who encouraged the Roma's discrimination in relation to other citizens and the positive shift in public opinion about the Roma minority based on solidarity and tolerance together with the Roma's participation in economic, political, cultural and educational life.⁴⁴

It has been stressed by Roma activists that the authorities have perceived this strategy as a task that should be accomplished as part of the European Union pre-accession criteria rather than as a real desire of the authorities to actually integrate the Roma in the spirit of multiculturalism, visible also from the way in which the authorities treated the Roma. The Government's strategy referred, among other goals, to the necessity of improving the Roma's living conditions which has, under the noble umbrella of offering a better standard or in many cases a decent one (as long as many Roma lived in precarious conditions, sometimes without running water or electricity access), offered local authorities the necessary legal ground for targeted ethnic discrimination, residential segregation and forced evacuations.

The first and most widely discussed case of such residential segregation was the case of the local authorities from Piatra Neamț, a town in the region of Moldavia that evacuated the Roma, the mayor publicly announcing his decision to build a special neighborhood for the town's Roma community, a neighborhood that would be surrounded by a barbed-wire fence and guarded by the gendarmerie. One of the expected results of such a solution was the creation of a town without "Gypsies". The case was massively presented in the media, depending on the publication, inflaming the non-Roma majority, for instance through titles like "The Gypsies in Piatra Neamț will live in a neighborhood equipped according to the latest 'Euro-

⁴⁴ Ibid., 44.

pean standards”⁴⁵ at a time when Romanians themselves were still largely living in communist blocks of flats, or attempting to reveal the dangers of the Roma’s isolation: “The Gypsy ‘ghetto’ in Piatra Neamț compared to extermination camps”⁴⁶. It is worthwhile mentioning that this neighborhood was several kilometers away from the town, without any additional infrastructure.

The solution of Roma segregation was immediately embraced by the representatives of the local authorities from other regions, themselves having ‘problems’ with their own Roma communities, to which they finally thought they had the answer⁴⁷. Moreover, the representatives of the national authorities also encouraged the mayor of Piatra Neamț. For instance, the Minister of Public Information at the time⁴⁸ declared that the project was very innovative and that it did not seek the Roma community’s isolation. The effervescent debates around the subject, after a considerable amount of time, forced both the country’s president and prime minister to offer their stance in the matter, both of them declaring that “the idea of Roma residential districts was good, but they disapproved of the way in which the Piatra Neamț mayor made his decision public”.⁴⁹

Such measures were not unique, and in spite of the wide publicity received by the topic, similar cases were registered even years later, for example, in 2004 in a majority-Hungarian city in Transylvania approximately one hundred ethnic Roma were evacuated from the very center of the city and forced to relocate in metal containers close to a waste water purification facility, in an area with a toxicity level above the legally admitted standard.

⁴⁵ *Adevărul*, October 13, 2001.

⁴⁶ *Evenimentul Zilei*, November 5, 2001.

⁴⁷ This is the case of the Transylvanian towns of Deva or Baia Mare.

⁴⁸ Vasile Dâncu.

⁴⁹ Popescu, 2002, 16.

Besides the living conditions improvement stipulated by the Strategy, we can mention the expected elimination of stereotypes and prejudices of public servants in their treatment of the Roma. Though there were small steps made in that direction, these were rather timid and did not benefit from a consistent message from the authorities at all levels, quite the contrary. In 2002⁵⁰ “fifteen police officers from Buhuși, approximately thirty special troops from Bacău and Neamț Counties and twenty gendarmes raided the Orbic Romani neighborhood in the town of Buhuși [...], fatally shooting two Romani men and injuring four other Roma”, the Police representative claiming that the operation was intended to “locate and arrest three people who had committed robbery”.⁵¹ Notwithstanding the completely disproportionate number of armed forces and the acts of fatal violence the Roma were faced with, after the events the Regional Gendarme Chief declared that he decided to reward the twenty officers of the gendarmerie taking part in the incident for their “courage to enter the [Roma] community”.⁵²

All these policies or actions clearly contradicting any democratic principles were facilitated by the widespread anti-Roma attitudes among the majority population and by the authorities’ unspoken agreement with such acts and failure to penalize them. According to the Ethnic Relations Barometer in 2002, approximately forty percent of Romanians considered that there was a conflict relation between the Romanian majority and the Roma, as compared to fifteen percent of the Roma who held the same view about Romanians. The percentages differ also insofar as the positive relation is concerned, slightly over seventy percent of the Roma

⁵⁰ On December 5, 2002.

⁵¹ *** *Violent Police Raid Leaves Two Roma Dead and Four Injured*, 2003, 1.

⁵² Ibid.

indicating their belief that they have a good collaboration relationship with Romanians as opposed to only around thirty percent of Romanians.⁵³ Half of the Romanian respondents in the country-wide Ethnic Relations Barometer described the Roma as “dirty” and “thieves” and more than a third as “lazy”, the percentages not differing much for the Hungarian respondents, the only considerable registered gap being for the reversed percentages among those who considered that the Roma were “thieves” (over one third of the respondents) and “lazy”, half of the respondents.⁵⁴

Insofar as visibility in political discourse is concerned, the Roma were never even perceived as ‘equal’ citizens, understood as actors in the decision-making process, partly because the existing plethora of political parties representing the Roma caused inadequate representation through vote dispersion and partly because of a lack of consistency in the emergence of a Roma political elite that led more to fierce competition among Roma parties themselves instead of cooperation with the view of gaining a higher representation in the parliament. Additionally, outside the political sphere the establishment of a credible Roma elite failed precisely because of conflicting interests, which even further deepened the gap between the ‘civilized’ majority and the ‘backward’ Roma. For instance, in 1993 Iulian Rădulescu, a Roma man from Sibiu, Transylvania, proclaimed himself to be the “Emperor of Roma everywhere”, while four years later another Roma man from the same city, Florin Cioabă, proclaimed himself to be the “King of Roma everywhere”.

The Roma as producers of public discourse after 1989 were mostly visible in a few instances of political confrontations or dialogues, nonetheless from a significantly lower position (e.g. as op-

⁵³ *** *Barometrul Relațiilor Etnice*, 2002.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

position MP vs. ruling coalition MP, government officials etc.). The presence of the Roma in public discourse was almost non-existent if we define such a presence as discourse delivered by the Roma themselves to a public formed by the non-Roma majority, evidently with some exceptions, notably in academia or the non-governmental sector dealing with minority groups, human rights, etc.

The visibility ratio changes considerably when it comes to the Roma presence in the media, though not as discourse producers but as discourse topics. Although their visibility has varied drastically throughout the period since the break-up of the communist regime,⁵⁵ the Roma continued to be a constant presence in the mainstream Romanian media though mostly negative⁵⁶ focusing on conflicts, individual or organized crimes, lack of education, lack of a decent living standard understood as personal as opposed to systemic failure, with sensational titles in the most widely circulated printed media, e.g. “The clans of the Gypsy mafia - gangrene of the present society”,⁵⁷ “A police officer killed a Roma man in self defense - The Gypsy power is above the law”,⁵⁸ “As always, the Romanian Gypsies are not happy unless they get into trouble”,⁵⁹ “Hens and sheep stolen from the peasants - found by the police in the Gypsies’ outhouses”⁶⁰ or “90% of the Gypsy children are illiter-

⁵⁵ Depending on the events there were ‘highs’ in the Roma’s visibility in the media, e.g. during and after the Hădăreni conflicts and in their aftermath or years later once the trials started.

⁵⁶ For a detailed monitoring of the Roma’s presence in the Romanian mainstream printed media in the 1990s see the section on Romania in the *Balkan Neighbours Reports* (Access, Sofia).

⁵⁷ *România liberă*, May 22, 1997.

⁵⁸ *România liberă*, October 11, 1997.

⁵⁹ *Cronica română*, November 3, 1997.

⁶⁰ *Adevărul*, January 28, 1998.

⁶¹ *Cronica română*, January 29, 1998.

ate”.⁶¹ That the image of the Roma in the media up until the eve of Romania’s EU accession was predominantly negative is best summarized by another news item, “The Roma want their own press office to sweeten the mass-media’s tone”,⁶² whereas the neutral instances are usually about various projects targeting the Roma, conferences, aid for the Roma communities etc. while instances of positive visibility of the Roma in the media were more the exception than the rule.

In the case of positive instances of visibility, we detect a utilitarian approach reflected in the media, however the Roma’s ethnicity is never stressed in contexts where they are ‘included’ in the nation, being exclusively ‘ours’, where ‘ours’ necessarily equals ‘Romanian’. A cogent illustration is the example of a well-known Roma music band, Fanfara “Savale”, in a newspaper item headlined “‘Savale’ Band Participates in Festivals in the United Kingdom”,⁶³ in which the music of the band (which became famous in the West by playing Roma music) is characterized as being “a combination of Romanian traditional folk music [...] with the music of the Balkan region. [Their] Rhythm is described as being fabulous”. Additionally, the reader is informed that the festival in the United Kingdom will host a “mix of styles celebrating the diversity of international culture”, ironically this diversity not being acknowledged by the journalist in relation to ‘our own’ diversity.

In the media we widely encounter references to the individual’s ethnicity, though completely irrelevant background information for denoting the Roma, where ethnicity is the reinforced ‘otherness’ marker in most occurrences. Reinforcements of Roma ethnicity fall under two categories: either by overtly adding after a name the

⁶² *Adevărul*, January 29, 1998.

⁶³ *Telegraf*, June 7, 2007.

phrase “ethnic Roma”, rarely labeled also as “Gypsies”, only in highly undesirable contexts (e.g. “A Gypsy Woman from Grajduri Stole One Third of the Commune’s Budget”),⁶⁴ or by mentioning it in an apparently objective manner as the following title illustrates, “Constanța Roma Party President’s Brother Arrested” (suspected of fraud and forgery unrelated to the Roma Party, as it appears from the article, which does not make any other reference to ethnicity).

Race itself is still very present in the media in connection with the Roma. Either apparently objectively depicted as breaking the law in articles where race is not mentioned, but depicted in photographs accompanying articles, like the item about illegal selling of firecrackers, besides which a medium-sized photograph depicts Roma women wearing traditional dresses⁶⁵ or overtly asserted in the body of the article as in the case of an editorial headlined “Fortune-telling Saves Romania”⁶⁶ about various fortune-tellers that “surprisingly [...] are all extremely brunette”. The Roma’s place in Romanian society on the eve of accession to the EU is best expressed by the following words, part of an editorial about several negative trends observed in the country: “what a national Gypsydom, let me be excused by the honest minorities”.⁶⁷

If immediately before Romania’s EU accession, due to the close monitoring of the minority rights implementation at least at the

⁶⁴ *Ziarul de Iași*, March 28, 2007. (The term “Roma” is the politically correct word used in Romanian, “Gypsy” being considered pejorative. Although not termed as such, it was commonly accepted as a journalistic practice. Starting from the 2012 edition, the Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language issued by the Romanian Academy of Sciences labels the word “Gypsy” as pejorative.)

⁶⁵ *Ziua de Cluj*, December 5, 2006.

⁶⁶ *Ziarul de Iași*, June 21, 2007.

⁶⁷ *Evenimentul Zilei*, December 2, 2006.

level of the state authorities, there was a diminishing of overt xenophobic and racist remarks, the situation changed once Romania was granted full EU membership. On May 19, 2007, less than six months after Romania's joining the EU, Traian Băsescu, the President of Romania at the time, annoyed by the questions addressed to him by a female journalist, called her a "filthy Gypsy". The journalist in question was Romanian. Although large amounts of criticism were formulated against President Băsescu, who was accused of racism and xenophobia due to this incident in 2009, he was re-elected president.

Also in 2007, on November 2, Adrian Cioroianu, the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, in the context of the anti-Roma and anti-Romanian measures in Italy, declared for the TV station Antena 3 that he "was thinking if we could not buy a piece of land of that Egyptian desert and place there those who dishonor us", evidently alluding to the Roma. Cioroianu continued to act as minister of foreign affairs and his replacement had no connection with his anti-racist statement.

In the article I aimed to identify two interconnected processes representing the two faces of the same coin, namely the type of nationalism practiced by the state through its policies on one hand and by the majority population on the other in relation to the Roma minority in Romania. The analysis indicates that at the state level we predominantly encounter instances of (xenophobic) ethnic nationalism against the Roma. Moreover, even in those cases when at least apparently civic nationalism rhetoric was uttered, such civic nationalism was based on the assimilation principle neglecting ethnicity, while de facto contributing to the perpetuation of the Roma's marginalization by not creating the necessary premises to grant the Roma access to social upward mobility, which was available for Romanians. On the other hand, popular nationalism was constantly

ethnic, either directly deriving from stereotyping, but significantly also as a result of the state's failure to secure efficient integration mechanisms that would be founded on multiculturalism, fostering respect for ethnic difference and particularly positively taking into account such ethnic difference in the distribution of resources of any kind.

I will conclude with an account which in my opinion best summarizes the presence of xenophobic ethnic nationalism in the dominant Romanian society and the way in which ethnicity is used as a sole basis of exclusion while reinforcing 'Romanianness' defined in ethnic and not civic terms and the importance of defending the ethnic 'nation' against the 'other', as publicly expressed by the President of Romania in June 2013, when in the context of the alarming demographic decrease, he underlined that this will trigger a "consistent change of the structure of the population for we have the Roma minority, which is extremely productive. [...] How on earth can a Roma woman have five-six children and a Romanian woman cannot? [...] Birth-giving is a mission that women in Romania have to assume, excuse me for saying it so directly".⁶⁸

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⁶⁸ *Mediafax*, June 18, 2013.

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