Roma’s Identities in Southeast Europe: Bulgaria

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Contents

Foreword 7
_Alessandro Silj_

Preface 11
_Andrea Boscoboinik_

Introduction 15
_Christian Giordano, Andrea Boscoboinik_

The Perceptions and Self-Perceptions of Roma in Bulgaria. Individual and Community Crisis 30
_Dobrinka Kostova_

«I am a pure Gypsy…». The Roma Individuality in the Distorted Mirror of Group Stereotypes 57
_Milena Benovska- Sâbkova_

Le rôle des ONG dans la reconnaissance des minorités. Le cas des Roms en Bulgarie 94
_Annabel Chanteraud_

The Authors 125
Foreword

This is the first report produced by Ethnobarometer’s research project on “Perceptions, self-perceptions and social organisation of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe”. The second report, due for publication in late 2003, will be on Macedonia.

The project tackles the issue of identity and social organization from three different angles:

1. The perception (cultural, social and political) which the elites and the other social classes of a country, in other words the “ethnic majority”, have of the Roma. From the point of view of the majority, only in some cases have Roma existed as a minority. For instance, in the various treaties and agreements concerning the “defence of minorities” (Minderheitenschutzverträge) signed between the two world wars, Roma are never or only exceptionally mentioned. Furthermore, some scholars have gone so far as to deny that Roma have a specific social and cultural identity. It is therefore an “omitted” minority, which is not protected and is more easily subject to discrimination.

2. The social organisation of Roma and the construction of a shared identity. There are social reasons on account of which still today it is difficult for Roma to build up a sense of belonging to a community and the awareness of their own identity. Their identity is never monolithic, but encompasses a multiplicity of belongings: sedentariness/nomadism, the language and religion of the Roma themselves and those of the country in which they live permanently or most of the time. In consequence, there are ‘Czech’/Gypsies, ‘Hungarian’/Gypsies, ‘Romanian’/Gypsies, etc., while it is much harder to find the “typical” Gypsy. For example, Gypsies from Transylvania, who are Hungarian and catholic, will communicate more easily with the rest of the Hungarian population than with the Romanian, orthodox Gypsies.

3. Self-perceptions of the Roma and their political strategies connected to assertiveness. It is observed that in the many cases in which a Romani reaches a prominent position and social role, due to his/her fear of prejudice he/she tends to “blend in” and therefore does not highlight and publicly assert his origins. This is due especially to the fact that they fear that being identified or perceived as Romani might jeopardise their social achievements. This can explain,
at least in part, why these professionals rarely become political leaders promoting the identity and rights of Roma. It is not by chance that this element, in addition to the natural reluctance of Roma to engage in political-electoral campaigns, contributes to the fact that political representation of Roma is almost always inversely proportional to the actual size of the minority group. However, in recent years there have been many signs of “assertiveness” and in consequence a greater commitment in political militancy. The research will attempt to determine the actual scope of this change and of the circumstances and motivations that underpin it, and whether it should be considered as a phenomenon that is limited to specific situations or as the beginning of a general reversal of trend.

The aspects of the problem described above help to understand why in the past it has almost always been hard to establish a unitary Romani community, and to mobilise the Roma to stake cultural and political claims. The interaction of these three factors regarding perception, self-perception and the social organisation of Roma has not been studied in great depth to date. Therefore such an approach can lead to a new understanding of the problem and of the possible policies for managing the coexistence of majority populations and Romani minorities. The countries to be included in the Ethnobarometer’s study (assuming that sufficient funding is raised) are Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Macedonia and Romania. Our research methodology is based on: 1) the analysis of documents and results of research and surveys conducted to date, and 2) on empirical field work (interviews, group discussions, workshops, etc.). The main objective of the field work is to produce in depth life stories. The number of life stories in each country is determined on the basis of the total population of the country and of the percentage of Roma population. The estimated total for the six countries is 200. We have established some tentative Guidelines for the interviewers. The aim is not to let the informant talk completely free, but to guide him/her with some questions that the interviewer will propose. It will be also very important that the interviewer writes his/her impressions, observations, atmosphere, etc. shortly after the interview. For instance: how was the contact made? Where and when the interview took place? Who was present? How did the interviewed introduce her/himself? What kind of image did she/he want to give? How was the interaction? It must be kept in mind that we are not searching the ‘truth’ or ‘exactitude’ in what the interviewed (Roma)
says, but instead what matters is the presentation of self, the management of the person's identity in interaction with a 'stranger'. Two days will be needed for each interview. The first day, the interviewer can let the person talk (more or less) freely about his/her life experience. The second day, the interviewer can guide the interviewed to some relevant subjects mentioned the first day. Subjects and distinctions to be kept in mind are: urban and rural; Christian and Muslim; migration from rural to urban; influence of mass-media. The following are some of the guiding questions:

1) Do you identify yourself as Romani? Why?
2) What does it mean to you to be a Roma?
3) Which is the most important event (or holiday) for you on the year? Why?
4) Do you keep Romani traditions? Which ones? Why or why not?
5) What does the stereotypes concerning the Roma mean to you?
6) Why do you think those stereotypes exist?
7) Do you consider important to raise your children as Roma?
8) What do you think about other Roma?
9) Are there differences between Roma people? Which ones?
10) If yes, why? How do they express?
11) What do you think about non-Roma? Why?
12) Do you have contact with non-Roma citizens?
13) How do other (non-Roma) people know that you are of Rom origin?
14) Which is your best remembrance ('souvenir')? (the best thing that has happened to you in your life? Why?
15) Which is the worst one?
16) Which is the fundamental problem that you feel now?
17) Have you experienced racism in your country? What kind of racism?
18) Do you feel that racism against the Roma is different than racism against other minorities? If so, how?
19) What do you know about Roma in other countries?
20) How much and what kind of education have you had?
21) Do you have any political ties?
22) Do you know a Romani organisation? What do you think of it/them?
23) Are you involved with any organisation that supports Romani issues?
24) How would you describe the general situation of Roma in your area? In the world?
25) What do you wish most that the non-Roma could understand about the Roma?

The project is a partnership between Ethnobarometer and the Interfaculty Institute of Central and the East European Studies of the University of Fribourg (Switzerland). The director of the project is Christian Giordano, President of Ethnobarometer and director of the Interfaculty Institute; the co-ordinator is
Andrea Boscoboinik (University of Fribourg). Field work in each country is organised with local associates, who are in charge of recruiting interviewers, overseeing their work, and writing the country report. In Bulgaria, the field work was carried out under the direction of Dobrinka Kostova and Milena Benovska-Sâbkova, and Annabel Chanteraud contributed a paper on the role of NGOs.

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_Alessandro Silj, June 2003_
Preface

Since 1989, the new emerging democracies of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as the surrounding Western Europe, began to be interested in Roma population. Romani issues began to have a growing attention and a great variety of documents in the form of researches, journalist reports, and Internet sites were devoted to them. In addition, ‘Gypsy’ movies and music became ‘trendy’.

Focus on this population was not just the result of an occasional and romantic ‘discovery’ of a colourful group. The lives of Roma in post-communist countries have worsened in many ways. They face violence and discrimination in education, employment, health care, housing, public places, law enforcement, and are ill equipped to compete in the new market economies.

Affirming that the Roma nowadays are the most disadvantaged population in Europe according to all the major indicators - education, opportunity, income, employment – is no overstatement. In addition, they are often scapegoats for society’s ills and object of violent attacks. Victims of this miserable situation and of racist attacks (from skinheads, but also from the police), they seek to migrate to the West and hundreds of Roma have sought asylum in Western countries.

Besides the intention of understanding and divulging its marginal situation in society, the importance of grasping Romani issues is rather practical. As a membership requisite, the European Union has stipulated that applicant countries must improve the situation of Roma. Since this is a priority and a condition, the aspiration to become European Union members prompts politicians to submit models of integration of minorities. This preoccupation also means that Romani minority is no longer an Eastern European particularity but a collective and general European concern because Roma will represent the largest minority in Europe in the not too distant future.

Despite the increasing number of reports and publications, reliable data on the Roma is lacking. There are very few systematic and comparative studies on the situation of Roma in Europe. Besides, except some scholar books and documents from Romani leaders, one overriding factor characterises most of the analysis: none or very few involved consultation with Roma themselves. Very often images, problem definitions, and categorisations are external to Romani ordinary people.

Moreover, the image conveyed by press and media is what is most commonly known
about Roma. Most papers in Central and Eastern Europe have a standard attitude towards Roma: they are all dangerous, criminal, evil, dirty, and dishonest. The media’s approach reinforces the general public stereotypes and exacerbates anti-Roma feelings. Most of the documents reveal what the ‘Others’ think about Roma, but not what Romani people think of themselves. Excepting leaders, Roma are hardly ever given the possibility to express their opinions.

This project, directed by Christian Giordano, is designed to fill most of the above-mentioned gaps. Therefore, one of the main aspects of this project concentrates on ‘self-perceptions’, which appears to be a significant absence. Its main idea is to allow ordinary Roma to narrate their lives and express their ideas. This initial goal will allow us to have first-hand opinions from Romani source by which it is possible to analyse identity processes now developing among Romani communities. Thus, contrary to most scientific work whose approach from a sociological and political point of view to Romani issues is macrosocial, our approach is more ethnological, based on the opinions of Roma themselves. Besides, our interest is not focalised on Romani leaders only, but on the ordinary Romani population as well. We are not stating that ours is the only ethnological approach or that it is the best one; much good work has also been done through one approach or the other. The main problem with some authors dealing with Roma is that they may become ‘Gypsy activists’, as Zoltan Barany says (2002: 18), losing by this ‘conversion’ the necessary emotional distance to accomplish an objective work. In other words, they lose what Lévi Strauss called the regard éloigné.

It is precisely our methodology that constitutes a new and significant approach to Romani issues. Focalising on the inner view of Roma with the necessary scientific distance constitutes a challenge and is in itself a pioneer enterprise. The results of this project may help to better understand the situation of Roma in the different Central and East European countries from their point of view and in a comparative way.

The first country studied in this project is Bulgaria. The following pages are the outcome of this survey. The two reports following the introduction are the result of interviews with people who define themselves as belonging to a Romani group. These interviews cover a wide range of geographical areas and informants’ characteristics (age, gender, occupation, social and cultural levels). They thus include a wide representation of Romani people. The third report is based on interviews with representatives of Romani and minority organisations.
This is a qualitative and not a quantitative research. Consequently, we were not interested in the number of people interviewed but in the quality of the information gathered. The interviews are particularly based on the life-story method combined with a short guide of questions. Our interviewers’ aim was to motivate people to talk about his or her life, to express their opinions, and, occasionally, to place some guiding questions to further understand some topics. Accordingly, the interviewed person should be capable of reflexivity and ability of speech, moreover in Bulgarian. The reflexivity component is crucial in a research about self-perception. Finally, we also wish to mention that we are not searching for the ‘truth’ or ‘exactitude’ in what the interviewed (Roma) says (it is a known fact that not only Roma but every person in a given interaction manipulates information and the image she or he wants to provide). Instead, what matters is the presentation of self, the management of the person’s identity in the interaction with a ‘stranger’.

Dobrinka Kostova introduces the context of minorities in Bulgaria. She describes in particular the historical development of Romani communities in this country. Her text covers several general aspects concerning Roma, such as demographic distribution, settlements, integration and identification strategies, etc. She also deals with the aspects of territorial and social borders.

Milena Benovska deals in detail with the aspects of Roma self-perception, taking into consideration, among other subjects, preferred identity, dual identity, and identity manipulation.

In a well-documented text, Annabel Chanteraud discusses the role of NGOs in the recognition of minorities. She considers the situation, creation, goals, principal activities, and sources of funding of NGOs working with minorities in general and Roma population in particular in Bulgaria.

Andrea Boscoboinik
Scientific Coordinator
Introduction

The question of naming
To name is to make something or somebody exist. A name allows people to know what one is talking about. Naming is especially important when dealing with certain subjects as identity. In this case, naming is essential because it defines our subject, it introduces whom are we talking about. The first obstacle we meet and the first evidence that something must be clarified is the very naming of the population that will occupy the following pages.

In the field of ethnological studies, when dealing with a well-defined population, the appellation chosen by its members is preferred to an external one; i.e. the interest is in how individuals and groups want to be identified. However, in this case, there is no common agreement on a general self-appellation. This lack allows all kind of external appellations, often with negative connotations and associated with negative stereotypes.

Therefore, our first question is how to call this population by a name in which they feel identified and which does not bear a negative connotation. Moreover, in this contemporary world of hypocrite politeness, which name is ‘politically correct’?

Gypsy is an English term denoting ethnic groups considered to have emigrated from India since the tenth century, in different waves and to different regions. The term Gypsy and several European variants as Tsiganes, Zigeuner, Gitanos, are considered pejorative by many. Others, however, find that Gypsy is a cover term that includes all group subdivisions (Marushiakova and Popov 1997), Roma being only one of these: that of communities living in Eastern Europe. Romani is in general used as an adjective. Rom refers to a member of the group and Roma refers to a plurality of members and to the group as a whole. However, some authors prefer to use the plural following English grammar, i.e. Roms (and not Roma), and find it less connotative than Gypsies. Still others write Gypsies/Roms, or even use both terms interchangeably, as if they were synonyms. Needless to say, some scholars emphasise the difference between the various names.

From a terminological point of view, the case of Romania is quite interesting. In everyday language and in the media the term sigan (plural: sigani) is still widespread. However, intellectual circles and the NGOs, besides official documents, are increasingly using the denomination rom (plural: romii). Yet, and this can be noticed espe-
cially in official documents, the spelling modification _rrom_ (plural: _rromii_, with a double letter r) (Tărnovschi, 2002: 122 ff.) has been purposely created to avoid sameness or confusions (considered unpleasant) with terms as _român/români_ which indicate Romanian nationals. Using the double letter r clears up ethno-cultural differences between the Roma and the Romanian population.

The absence of agreement about how to identify this particular population is true not only among scholars or official bodies. Neither does the surrounding population agree on a name. For instance, nearly a decade ago nobody in Bulgaria called the Roma by this name. One of the reasons could be that they were probably considered insignificant and were therefore ignored. Besides, during the socialist period an assimilation policy strove to eradicate all minority groups. Moreover, different names were (and still are) applied when speaking of Roma, generally pejorative, as for instance ‘mangal’ meaning ‘black’ with reference to skin colour1.

This lack of agreement between the authors and the surrounding population mirrors the lack of agreement in the community itself in recognising a general appellation, although the reasons are obviously different.

The members of this population do not always concur under which name they want to be identified. For some people, Roma is denigrating, for others instead Gypsy is depreciatory. Milena Benovska reports that A. does not accept the appellation ‘Roma’, emphasising that she is a Gypsy. Even if she cannot explain it properly, apparently she has been offended by the hypocrisy invested in the word ‘Roma’. For S., the very appellation ‘Gypsy’ is already an adverse evaluation because it means ‘very bad’ and it places all the Roma under one denominator. In his opinion, the appellation ‘zhitani’ reflects a more favourable perception of the Roma in Western Europe. Moreover, it is not only the word that matters, but also its intonation. For D., the word ‘Gypsy’ acquires an offensive meaning depending on how it is pronounced. For still another one, the emphasis itself on the ethnic differences is offensive. For him, the Bulgarian citizenship is more important: “it does not say ‘Gypsy’ in the passport”2.

Therefore, there is no accordance in accepting a category name. However, even more important is that almost all interviewed people do not recognise themselves under such a general appellation. Instead, they identified themselves rather with a restricted group (_Eerli, Koshnichari, Kovachi, Zhorevtsi, Wallachian_, etc.). This clearly shows that the inner group or ‘clan’ is a strong identity element.
Almost every document, book, or report dealing with Romani population indicates that it is not a unified homogeneous community. Instead, what we call ‘Romani community’ is in fact composed by a multiplicity of heterogeneous groups that may have very little in common and whose ties are very flimsy. Romani community is thus not only a minority group, but also a social group consisting of a variety of sub-groups and meta-groups. Moreover, the international distribution of Romani populations intensifies the differences between all the groups gathered under a same name. Actually, there is no social, economic, or cultural cohesion between the Roma living in different countries.

Taking into account this peculiar element, we will call them hereafter (except in quotations) ‘Roma communities’ to indicate their composite character. We have chosen ‘Roma’ because it corresponds to the more accepted name for the groups living in Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, this initial difficulty in naming a group proves that there is something to investigate concerning its very existence, its identity and self-perception.

**Roma identity and self-perception**

In her report, Dobrinka Kostova concludes that “the self-identification is weaker than the identification coming from outside the Roma communities, from the other ethnic groups who perceive Roma as a homogeneous group distinct from them”.

Milena Benovska writes in her report that common Roma affiliation is enforced from ‘outside’ under the pressure of non-Roma. She quotes Ilona Tomova who affirms that “Gypsies are a community for ‘the others’”, and that “Gypsies are only a ‘community’ as far as the ‘others’ are concerned. They figure as a uniform, hardly distinguishable mass in the Bulgarian consciousness.” (Tomova 1995: 21).

Moreover, according to what the informants expressed to ours interviewers, this awareness of a Romani ethnic belonging comes from the outside. This is not weird at all: one element of our identity is composed by the way the others perceive us. It is often mentioned in the interviews that a person became aware of being different only because of the attitudes of the other Bulgarians. Thus, for instance, a woman’s self-perception emerged from the view of other children at school; another one mentions that he began feeling different when he was 13 or 15 years old. They did not know ‘what’ they were until the others showed them.

A Romani woman, with university studies, said in a interview with Milena
Benovska: “We had no self-perception whatever as a group, as a nation, as something… And it has not been built to this day… There is no ethnical identity”. She remembers what her mother told her: “You’d better not call yourself a Gypsy so that you might not destroy both your own self and your children”. Indeed, at a time, she did not make her ethnic affiliation public.

When asked about a specific feature of Romani culture, most of the informants answered ‘early marriages’, which however is a culture’s rather superficial element. They recognised, besides, that this model of behaviour has been changing over the last years. Instead, they can enumerate a long list of characteristics inherent to their sub-group.

Another indicator of the blurry character of a general Roma category is the absence of knowledge, for ordinary people, of other groups living either in or outside Bulgaria, as well as any information on international Romani associations. Either they know nothing about Roma elsewhere in the world, or they consider Roma in other countries to be living much better than in Bulgaria.

Some of the reasons we can provide to explain why individuals considered by others as belonging to Roma communities do not recognise themselves or fully accept the Romani identity are:

- a general category as Roma does not mean much for a heterogeneous reality. As we have already said, Roma communities are divided into different groups based on historical lifestyle (sedentary or nomadic), religion (Christians or Muslims), traditional occupations, language, and others. The different groups or meta-groups are hierarchically organised and do not intermingle. Each group considers itself as being “the purest, the best, the highest ranked” (Marushiakova and Popov 1997: 55). Thus, an individual conceives himself/herself first as a member of his/her group or meta-group and does not appreciate being linked with other persons with whom he/she does not identify at all. In almost all interviews carried out for this survey, the interviewed persons insist on individual evaluation rather than being considered under a general category. Besides, in an interview A. notes that there is mutual scorning among the different Roma groups. Moreover, she adds: “Those who are stealing are ‘the other Roma’”. The negative stereotypes are evidently transferred to the ‘others’.

- due to the group’s low social status, some Roma may feel embarrassed to be
identified with it and prefer to identify with other social groups. However, some individuals will accept belonging to this group if they can have some advantage or profit. On the other hand, if a person has acquired a certain social level, he/she might possibly not want to acknowledge his/her Roma origin, as it could be perceived as degrading and a loss of ‘prestige’. In this case, the person would prefer to hide his/her origin if possible.

- the very general appellation, either Gypsy or Roma, based on ethnic origin, is rejected as highly offensive. The people involved interpret that it holds negative meaning, a reference to someone dirty, impolite, lazy. P. affirms: “to be a Gypsy in our times means to be hungry and miserable”. For M., “to be a Gypsy means to be rejected by society”. Clearly, therefore, nobody would like to be identified with such a negative representation.

- Roma may feel indifferent about identity or cultural questions, as they need to solve more pressing daily problems, especially concerning physical survival. One informant said to our interviewer: “Do you know that 99% of the Gypsies can no longer think because of hunger?” Obviously in such extreme cases who cares about ethnic belonging. Even if you were to ask them, they would answer that they do not have anything to eat, as happened to our interviewers.

- the emergence of Evangelist churches and their strong aspiration to become the first reference for their members. As Milena Benovska mentions in her report, these churches have operated a great impact on Roma communities and almost all her team’s informants affirm their adhesion to one of the numerous new Evangelist churches. Dobrinka Kostova refers also to the religious matter. One of her respondents has chosen religious identification to avoid the grievance of being rejected. She transfers her self-identification to a religious group believing that it could set her among the desired identification group.

For those whose commitment is stronger, the church has become their first identification. That is the case of one informant who ‘has accepted with resignation his fate of a Gypsy’, but whose primary and stronger identity reference is his church. His reality is therefore filtered by religion and beliefs, and is not from a Romani point of view. The fact that Bulgarians have to accept Roma is explained with these words: “We must love each other, because this is a law of the Lord”.

Another consequence of joining these churches is the detachment from Romani rituals or traditions, rejected as pagan.
Nonetheless we can formulate the hypothesis that there is an intention of ‘creating’ a general category ‘Roma’. As Milena Benovska shows in her report, a uniform Roma awareness can only be found among some Roma intellectuals. In fact, the sense of community is a motivation of a group of intellectuals rather than a mass ideology. This trend of reinforcing a common consciousness or creating a shared identity between different groups means that there is a process of ‘ethnicisation’ of Roma communities. In other words, there is an “ethnicisation of problems”.

Marushiakova and Popov, two researchers who have been working on Roma issues for a long time, consider that the macro-society has a decisive impact on the development of a sense of community and belonging. The segregation, isolation, and rejection of the Gypsy citizens forces them “to stick together” (Marushiakova and Popov 1997: 48).

Besides, it is a known fact that conflicts often seem to trigger a kind of ethnogenesis and some authors recognise the role of conflict or adversity in crystallising an ethnic or even national identification.

Moreover, in scholarly documents, when speaking of Roma communities, they are usually considered as an ‘imagined community’; however, their characteristics do not seem to be applicable to this term coined by Benedict Anderson and it is not clear who imagine what. In fact, due to severe internal divisions based essentially upon the above-mentioned socio-cultural differences, the Bulgarian Roma are not very willing to identify with a social configuration resembling what is defined as a nation or to perceive themselves as a united group with an ethnic connotation. As Barany says for Roma in general, the personal and cultural feeling of belonging to a nation is precisely what most Gypsies do not share at this time (Barany 2002: 78).

Nevertheless, there is an undeniable new interest in this population. In fact, the concern on Romani issues has increased over the last ten years as the many researches, publications, presence in the media, and creation of NGOs shows. This new interest is advocated by the Roma intelligentsia, as well as by external scholars. Indeed, Roma élite groups have shown an increased concern in their community’s culture and organisation. Moreover, it must also be noticed that the Roma élite itself in its contemporary expression is of a rather recent origin. It has been encouraged by external intellectuals, among others, to better represent and defend the interests of the Roma communities vis-à-vis the majority.
Unfortunately, there is also a negative aspect of this new interest: the surrounding population discovers a perfect scapegoat. Media persistently stigmatising them has fostered a public awareness of ‘enemy’ Roma communities. In the media, facts are not reported neutrally but tendentiously. Roma are made responsible for almost all of society’s problems and crimes, as the ethnic origin is always referred to.

Summing up, two explanations for this ethnicisation trend may be identified. On the one hand, the social and economic crisis favours the ‘diabolisation’ of Roma population, turned into scapegoats. There are sectors of society that in a serious economic crisis instigate the feelings of fear and hate towards a particular ‘Other’ and victimise this group. In Bulgaria nowadays, there is economic rivalry among the fragmented population. The competition for jobs reinforces negative attitudes towards the Roma communities, which are then gathered in a homogeneous enemy group based on ethnic characteristics.

On the other hand, some intellectual and business elites foster a sense of common belonging to a minority group, seeking to develop a shared consciousness. In this sense, we could say that there is an identity management of Roma communities, culturally and financially administered by the elites.

The first explanation probably needs no further comment, as it is a known attitude found also in other circumstances among other populations in other countries, especially towards immigrants and other foreigners. It is thus not a ‘privilege’ of Roma. However, the second explanation calls for consideration on what this new focalisation on this ancient group means and its consequences.

**Purposes and consequences of the ethnicisation process**

We know that identity may be manipulated for adaptive purposes and to obtain certain benefits. This is a process largely known in the long history of Roma communities. Another goal of encouraging a common identity awareness is to reach a political unification of the Roma, and even to create a ‘transnational non-territorial nation’. For Ilona Tomova, members of the Roma intelligentsia “are trying to establish political unity for the Roma in the country in order to allow them to take part successfully in putting forward and solving the serious socio-economic problems of this section of the population of Bulgaria” (Tomova 1995: 22).

Therefore, it is possible to affirm that the identity management is directed towards pragmatic ends and to obtain practical benefits. However, there is also a symbolic
dimension of this ‘ethnicisation’ process. As Benovska points out, “part of the Roma have an inner need of an identity, which would not place them in the role of a minority”\(^17\). One might think that this ethnic awareness is developed as a reactive answer to a hostile environment.

The segregation in which Roma communities are confined and the negative attitudes they have to endure bolster the idea in Roma intellectual minds that unification is essential to create a common feeling that could better defend general Romani interests. Besides, they are convinced that the separated Roma communities would gain in force and confidence if they should feel they are sharing a common identity. Indeed, for some Romani leaders, if Roma were accepted as a non-territorial nation, this fact would lend greater international legitimacy to the advocacy of their individual and collective human rights: consequently, improving their general living conditions as a people.

Hence, efforts are made on the part of the elites, intellectuals, and political party leaders to bring Roma together in order to show a common interest, ‘a common fight’. However, there is a conspicuous division and a remarkable divergence of standings between this feeble “leadership” and its “rank and file”. To consider the existence of a Roma mass mobilisation in view of the creation of their own nation would thus be over-hasty (Barany, 2002: 202 ff.). Barany aptly speaks about the weakness of an ethno-national feeling of belonging. Based on data regarding the Czech Republic, he stresses that only a few people with a relatively high social status who concurrently aspire to a political career, or a similarly meagre group with a particularly low status with hopes for higher social benefits, show any interest in and express the desire for a Romani identity (Barany, 2002: 203). Despite the specificity of the context, this observation certainly holds true even for Bulgaria, as we have seen in the previous chapters.

From all these processes, it becomes clear that the political conditions and organisation of Roma have improved to some extent, whereas their socio-economic situation has deteriorated in the post-communist countries. However, Barany’s clear analysis shows that Roma attributes for political action are extremely poor by virtually all criteria of successful ethnic mobilisation (Barany 2002: 77 ff.). Some of these are discussed in Benovska’s report, which points out that there is no single unifying element among Roma: no unique religious affiliation, no gathering political party, no common language, etc. Barany also mentions the weak Romani identity, the lack of
past mobilisation experience, the absence of gathering symbols or leaders, and the poor financial resources, among other elements. Thomas Acton points out that the Roma are a “most disunited and ill-defined people, possessing a continuity, rather than a community, of culture. Individuals sharing the ancestry and reputation of ‘the Gypsy’ may have almost nothing in common in their way of life and visible or linguistic culture.” (Acton 1974: 54).

Therefore, as detecting gathering elements that could clearly assemble the heterogeneous Roma sub-groups is not easy, the search is directed into the past: i.e. into a common origin. Tales and myths about the origin of Roma were cited in the interviews with Romani leaders and intellectuals, in which “a glorious past” that can “structure ‘national’ identity” and can promote a perception of Roma as an integrated community is presented. The link with the ancient India homeland explains the current cases of imitation and adoption of Indian cultural practices. The reverse side of the coin is that the Indian origin is also applied by racist slogans that demand “Gypsies, go back to India!” In any case, due to the lack of their own written historical tradition, Romani nationalists may feel forced to develop ‘invented traditions’, linking old and modern practices, easily acceptable and recognised by all groups.

The creation of Romani organisations is one of the most tangible consequences of this attention on ethnic awareness urged by Roma elites. Foundation data, programs, and main objectives differ from one Romani organisation to another, as does their geographical reach. According to their coverage, the local, national, and international associations have different ambitions. For instance, international Roma organisations advocate principally for collective rights as a people and the unification of all Roma transnational groups. Their activism is growing and their avowed intention is to protect Romani cultural, economic, linguistic, and educational rights within the States where the Roma live. Many also strive for the recognition of Roma as a nation. Local Romani organisations in Bulgaria however are more modest. They work primarily at a neighbourhood level by trying to solve some of the problems the community meets.

However, there is a legendary distrust of Roma individuals towards any kind of general associations. This attitude is the logical outcome of the lack of feeling of belonging to a general community. Instead, solidarity and help is restricted to one’s own large family or clan. It can be extended only to their sub-group. Distrust begins outside the sub-group.
The indifference or even scepticism about the good will of new Romani organisations was detected in nearly all of the interviews carried out for this survey, excepting the ones with leaders or participants of these organisations. Thus, in our researchers’ reports we find for instance that a woman is sure that even if she were to look for help from them, they would not be able to give her any. Another one mentions his disappointment with Romani organisations in his town and thinks they are only interested in getting money. Principally, mistrust is conveyed to the leaders, with whom ordinary people do not feel identified nor represented.

An informant explains to Benovska his perception of Romani organisations in the town of Sliven. He says that they began with great enthusiasm and a spirit of revival and the reasons he gives for their dissolution are the following:

- since they did not have the necessary experience and funds, they rapidly lost their adherents,
- most of the several Romani organisations created in Sliven are not functioning nowadays, due to misunderstandings among the leaders,
- these organisations have lost the confidence and hope for changes in the structures,
- funds were not distributed according to the purpose they had been granted and part of them went for the personal enrichment of some leaders, their friends, and relatives.

True or not, his perceptions reveal the suspicions mentioned above and show the lack of experience in managing an organisation. In fact, traditionally, Roma have never been involved in any kind of social or political management beyond the inner group. Moreover, Romani elite is still extremely small and a large proportion of educated Roma chooses not to be involved in Gypsy affairs (Barany 2002: 204). On the other hand, the fact that some leaders are not willing to share power causes the organisation’s disintegration or its separation into split groups.

Certainly, these processes are not a Bulgarian peculiarity. Romani organisations have developed and declined for similar reasons in all Eastern European countries after 1989. In any case, until now Bulgarian Roma organisations have not achieved the exploit of Evangelist churches. The incorporation in a given religious community grants illusions and expectations; principally, they bestow a true sense of belonging when all other references are missing. In our opinion, this is the key to the attractiveness of these new religious movements.
Moreover, the numerous creations (and closings) of Roma and minority organisations might also be an obstacle to cohesion, as they give rise to even more divisions and diversity. Thus, the result could be the opposite of what leaders expected.

**Conclusion**

Stating that this group does not have a common fully accepted name and its members do not recognise themselves as belonging to a general category, i.e. that there is a weak feeling of a uniform Roma self-perception, nevertheless does not mean that the group does not exist.

The Roma have at least a vague sense of group identity and maintain particularly a sense of difference vis-à-vis the surrounding majority population. We have no intention whatsoever of saying that the Roma do not have their own culture, but simply that they do not use it as a political resource. Actually, we are sure they have a very rich one that, however, has too often been denied or omitted. This unspecific feeling of difference has certainly been reinforced by the discrimination they have faced and are still facing ever since their arrival in Europe.

Even when we say that there is an ‘ethnic’ manipulation creating a social category, it is not less true that this group has an undeniable problem of poverty and discrimination. One cannot deny its vulnerability, the prejudice, and the negative stereotypes they endure in everyday life. We are certainly not affirming that they only exist in the intentions of certain elites.

Though we cannot fully trust statistics and censuses in what concerns Roma communities[^21], still they give some idea of trends and proportions. The included maps, based on official statistical data provided by the National Statistical Institute, show that the unemployment rates are larger in regions where the percentage of Roma communities is higher[^22]. The municipalities with the highest proportion of Roma population are those with the lowest economic and human development[^23]. These are also the rural regions. For completeness’ sake, we must take into account that poverty has always accompanied the existence of the Roma, both in pre-socialist times and during socialism. However, in the latter period the predominance of a redistributive and egalitarian logic had somewhat lessened the gap with other less privileged groups (Stewart 2002: 134).

Considering the above socio-economic elements, we might conceivably assess the Roma as an **underclass**, since they definitely have some of its traits (marginal eco-
nomic status together with social isolation). However, they should be defined as a socially excluded minority to point out that poverty and marginality are the outcome of an interactive process involving even the ‘Others’, rather than a state of things ascribable to the Roma distinctive life-style (Stewart 2002: 140 ff.).

This social group, consisting of several sub-groups and meta-groups, exists and needs solutions. However, we doubt that the solutions may come from an ‘ethnicisation’ of the group and its problems. An improvement of the Roma’s socio-economic situation does not necessarily presuppose the creation of their own nation (even without their own State or territory as some look forward to). Actually, this project appears anachronistic since it refers to ‘eighteenth-century’ development models, which, at the time, were certainly successful, though we can justifiably question whether these strategies are still timely and worthwhile, not only in Bulgaria but also in the European context at large.

Moreover, an ‘ethnicisation’ may cause even more problems than it may solve. In fact, in other Balkan countries we have witnessed that stressing an ethnic belonging has led to nationalist conflicts. Accentuating the ethnic character of Roma might also lead to a sort of nationalist claims. Indeed, Roma nationalism is associated with the political ambitions of Roma political party.

In her report, Benovska accurately shows that reinforcing the ethnic component in a racist way may lead to revenge, organised conspiratorial activities, and the final target to the emergence of a Roma administrative autonomy in Bulgaria. Awareness of ethnic distinctions may also accentuate feelings of ethnocentrism and overestimation, resulting from a compensation mechanism. As our researchers have indicated in their preliminary reports, the informants were indignant that the negative aspects of Romani population were generally pointed out, whereas the good features were passed over in silence. In the words of one informant: “In the whole Europe, the greatest Roma intelligentsia is here in the town of Sliven. Moreover, in this neighbourhood. The most intelligent Roma in Europe are here”.

An unfortunate consequence, contrary to the expectations of Roma leaders and intellectuals, is that the process of strengthening an ethnic consciousness, instead of gathering, might finally deepen the differences between the educated and non-educated Roma. In fact, as we have already said, the poverty of the latter hinders any other engagement than that of securing a daily living and they express no interest in any identity question. Barany points out that the “enormous cultural distance
between the tiny Romani intelligentsia and the masses of undereducated and often apathetic ordinary Gypsies (…) contributes to the poor political communication in the Romani community and to the fact that Gypsy politics is, more than anything, elite politics. It is dominated by a handful of Gypsy activists and leaders who desperately (but usually without success) try to prove that they do represent ‘their people’ and that they do have a constituency.” (Barany 2002: 204).

Moreover, this process inner to Roma communities counteracts lessening the ‘fossé de civilisation’ between Roma and non-Roma communities mentioned in Annabel Chanteraud’s report.

The problems that Roma communities are facing are essentially those of many other Bulgarians or other ethnic groups. As Dobrinka Kostova indicates, part of the Bulgarian population lives under hardly better economic conditions that those of the Roma population. Therefore, finding solutions for the social and economic problems not only of Roma communities is crucial and particularly without forcing on ethnical status. This does not mean that we are supporting a movement towards assimilation of Roma communities into the majority. Integration does not mean assimilation. Yet, the need for equal access to economic development must be achieved by means other than stressing belonging to a minority to prevent ethnic conflicts in Bulgaria.

Better conditions for Roma are expected to come from community-based work along with a recognition of the value of human diversity. The key to the problem is not only tolerance from economically and socially stronger communities, but is also, and above all, a genuine identity negotiation, besides intercultural (or interethnic, regardless) communication and cooperation within specific strategies and actions.

References


Marushiakova, Elena *et al.* 2001. *Identity Formation among Minorities in the Balkans:*
the Case of Roms, Egyptians and Ashkali in Kosovo. Sofia: Minority Studies Society Studii Romani.

1 See also Milena Benovska’s report in this volume.
2 Milena Benovska’s preliminary report and interviews. Internal document.
3 Marushiakova and Popov (1997) define them as an “inter-group ethnic community”.
4 Benovska’s interviews. Internal document.
5 As Benovska quotes in her report from an interview: “(There) the state provides to them all kinds of luxury. Whatever they wish, this comes to them”.
6 See also Dobrinka Kostova’s report.
7 For the phenomenon of preferred self-identity, see Milena Benovska’s report in this volume and Marushiakova and Popov 1997.
8 See Dobrinka Kostova’s report in this volume.
9 Benovska’s interviews. Internal document. See also her report and Dobrinka Kostova’s.
10 See also Milena Benovska’s report in this volume.
11 Dobrinka Kostova’s report.
12 Milena Benovska’s interview. Internal document.
13 This term of ‘ethnogenesis’ is also applied by Nicolae Gheorghe (member of the PER Romani Advisory Council and presently Senior Advisor on Roma and Sinti Issues for the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe). According to him, Roma would be passing through a process of building a new Romani group identity as other groups had done in the 19th century.
14 On this last subject, see Annabel Chanteraud’s report in this volume.
15 We are making reference to élite groups composed by intellectuals and political leaders. For further information on élite groups, see Dobrinka Kostova’s report in this volume.
16 In a preliminary report, Benovska writes that “according to P. [a Roma man interviewed] society itself is ‘sick’ and the Roma turn out to be the safety valve for the outlet of the tensions accumulated”. Internal document.
Milena Benovska’s report.

See Milena Benovska’s report in this volume.

For a detailed analysis on Bulgarian organisations, their goals and activities, see Annabel Chanteraud’s report in this volume. For more information on Romani organisations in Eastern Europe, see Zoltan Barany 2002: 205 ff.

For levels of solidarity among Roma, see Dobrinka Kostova’s report in this volume.

In censuses, the ethnic identification of an individual is defined based on his or her own self-identification. Yet many individuals refuse admitting their Roma origin and prefer to present themselves as a member of another group with a higher social status. Thus, statistical data on Roma is often inaccurate and incomplete.

Dobrinka Kostova also mentions in her report that unemployment among Roma is the highest of all minorities.

UNDP, report 2000 for Bulgaria.

See Milena Benovska’s report in this volume.

Milena Benovska’s interviews. Internal document.

See Dobrinka Kostova’s and Milena Benovska’s reports in this volume.
The Perceptions and Self-Perceptions of Roma Individual and Community Crisis

Introduction
The “de-packing” (Fotev, 1994) of all socialist societies in the 1990s is deeply connected with the ethnic issues topping the political and intellectual agenda. These problems are of importance in the long run; they are not issues that appear and disappear according to the temporary present political, social, and economic situation. However, in the long perspective the re-emergence of their significance depends upon society’s general stability.

Today, Bulgaria is a strange mixture of elements from industrial societies (e.g., economic structure, per-capita GDP, social assistance networks) and third world society elements (marginalisation of entire communities, cases of extreme poverty, high incidence of “poverty-related” diseases, etc.). The “third world” segments in Bulgaria are exactly those in which ethnic minorities are predominant, especially the Roma. Bulgarian society is a multiethnic one and the analyses of ethnic differences are a crucial category to understand it. From the perspective of a successful development, the main goal is interethnic tolerance, equality in rights and results. However, official powers as well as society are still far from accepting the idea of creating such an intercultural environment. This can be well illustrated by the Bulgarian realities in the years of transformation and such an analysis, based on Roma population, will be proposed in the next chapter.

Data basis – objectives and description
The very important issue about the ethnic communities in Bulgaria is the degree of their inclusion and exclusion in society. The gap between the majority and the minority groups, which is much more than ethnic and linguistic rhetoric, is constructed historically by a developmental difference that was hard to overcome by the various political regimes, governments and policies over the last more than 100 years. The conclusion that can be drawn from the Bulgarian realities is that a Bulgarian identity calling for unity exists. However, it is very fragile and each significant political, social, or economic change could threaten it. In this space, the ethnic minorities develop different strategies to survive and to increase their strength. These strategies depend on the loyalty of the different ethnic groups towards tradition or moder-
nity. This paper focuses mainly on the Roma community in Bulgaria. Under this aspect, our objective is to present the self-perceptions and perceptions of the Roma considering the following conflicts:

- the crisis in the *access* to employment, education, health system and power as grounds for deepening their social isolation,
- the imaginary and the real territorial and *social borders* between Roma and the others, and their impact on national integrity,
- the perceptions of the *differences and of the similarities* by the majority and the Roma, and their influence on Roma security and satisfaction.

Not accepting the romantic understanding of ethnic communities as naturally emerging entities, contemporary sociology perceives and emphasises on their constructed character. If we use Anderson's expression (1991) of imagined communities, the discussion turns from the issue of what ethnic groups are to the problem of what do people imagine, what they have in mind when defining their identities. In this sense the “self-identification” is no longer understood as a moral pretension, based on the existed realities, but shifts to the deconstructed struggle to conquer symbols that could strengthen the group for further development and mobilisation.

Despite the approach's fruitful possibilities, it does not facilitate the sociological interpretation of the Roma perceptions and self-perceptions at the beginning of the 21st century in a country characterised by deep economic and social transformations. Led by the objective of presenting descriptive and analytical interpretation of the
- persistence and change in Roma self-perceptions at an individual and community level, and of
- individual and community identity transformation over the last more than ten years of significant changes,

Ethnobarometer realised a field investigation, which took place in the spring and summer of 2002. Its unique character concerns the methodology of the research. We will not go into details concerning the objectives and the methodology of the survey, as this is already described in the preface.

This paper’s analyses rely on the in-depth interviews conducted by a team of sociologists and ethnologists with 18 people of Roma origin. These are 7 women and 11 men from the cities of Sofia, Kjustendil, Rakitovo, and Dobric, and the villages of Dobric region (northeast Bulgaria) – Bezvodica and Spasovo. The statistical data in the table below shows the variety of the ethnic groups in the studied places.
Table 1: Statistical data on ethnic groups in Sofia, Kjustendil, Dobric and Rakitovo (in percentage)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Bulgarians</th>
<th>Ethnic Turks</th>
<th>Roma</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sofia</td>
<td>96.0</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dobric</td>
<td>75.9</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kjustendil</td>
<td>94.2</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rakitovo</td>
<td>83.9</td>
<td>7.04</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The choice of Sofia, of typical Bulgarian cities as Kjustendil and Dobric, of a small town as Rakitovo and of several villages, allows us to investigate the influences of various environments on interethnic perceptions and realities. Sofia, being the country’s capital, attracts people from different groups. In the years of transformation starting in 1989, the number of its inhabitants increased by almost 30% and the migration of Roma was a significant contribution. Sofia has the country’s lowest unemployment rate. The choice of the region of Dobric, situated in Northeast Bulgaria, was intentional. Predominantly a plane district, it is known for its ethnic diversity. In this region Bulgarians, Roma, ethnic Turks, Vlachs, etc., live side by side. Our aim is to study how this multiethnic environment influences the mutual perceptions of the various groups and whether it grants more or less space to ethnic communications and acceptance. For comparative reasons, we included Kjustendil and Rakitovo. Kjustendil is close to the Bulgarian-Serbian border on a main road between Bulgaria and Greece, and Rakitovo is a mountain town with a mixed population consisting of Bulgarians, ethnic Turks, Pomaks, Armenians, etc.

The age of the respondents ranges from 18 to 70 and this contributes to the potentiality to analyse the trans-generation perceptions (Talcott Parsons, 1976: 61) of people with different experience and expectations. The interviewed Roma come from various social milieus. These include students, pensioners, employed and unemployed, teachers and cleaners, shopkeepers and entrepreneurs. This choice enables us to compare different life knowledge and to reveal the contrast between the strategies of people from diverse social strata. Moreover, it contributes to expose the influence of the various social roles, their hierarchy, and to define the place of ethnic identification, its strength and contractability within the broader space of social statuses.

Roma communities differ across the country. Our respondents come from diverse Roma groups and belong to various religious traditions. However, all these different
and distinct groups are facing some similar problems. The regional and country focus and analysis intend to shed more light on the common problems different groups are facing and, on that basis, suggest a common framework for approaches.

The investigation of self-identity is our first priority. However, in a multiethnic society, the ethnic distinctiveness could be only “empty talk” (Schneider D., 1972). Likewise, revealing the social space in which the ethnic identity is formed and manifested is considerably significant. This framework requires that some interviews be made with representatives of the other ethnic communities living in the studied places. Comparing their attitudes with the main investigated group of the Roma is also relevant. Following this objective, we have conducted interviews with Bulgarians and ethnic Turks for comparative and clarification reasons.

In the following paragraphs, we present some data and analyses obtained from the research.

**Historic development of the Roma communities in Bulgaria**

The Roma is one of the most diverse communities in Bulgaria, numbering 313,126 according to the 1992 census, 327,882 according to the 2001 census, and 560,000 according to some experts (Relations of Compatibility and Incompatibility between Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria, p. XIII).

Roma groups have been populating Bulgarian lands for centuries. The scientific research data reveals evidence of ethnic groups’ migrations in the Balkan Peninsula already in the 9th to 11th century (Marushiakov E., Popov V., 2000: 7). Despite the more than 1000-year-long co-existence with the other ethnos populating these territories, the Roma have often been the subject of discrimination. Their specific culture and way of life gradually led to the establishment of stereotypes and prejudices, which reflect predominantly negative attitudes towards the Roma community members. The first Roma settlers were nomads, which presupposes ability for rapid adaptation to the new living conditions, to culture, religion, language, and lifestyle of the native inhabitants. Paradoxically, though until now no territorial claims on the accommodating state has been made by the traditionally peaceful Roma population, local populations accept them with hostility and distrust. This is prevalent not only in Bulgaria but also in some other countries. For example, the first Roma settlers came to Europe in the Middle Ages. The mediaeval culture, for its part, is a “culture of place” in which migrants (not only Roma nomads, but also
anyone who has left his “home” and has no “place of his own”) are rejected and even suspected of crimes. On the other hand, the policies of all states towards Roma ethnic groups mostly aims at assimilating them or at ousting them from their own territories. An example of the assimilation policy of Roma groups was the system of measures introduced by the Austro-Hungarian Empire under the reign of Queen Marie Antoinette, which encouraged marriages between different ethnic groups, as well as the forcible removal of Roma children and their upbringing in non-Roma families. Throughout more than three centuries, European history abounds in examples of periodic mass persecutions of the Roma and the introduction of special measures, outlawing this ethnic group or allowing its humiliating treatment by the local populations. The historic drama during fascism did not put an end to the discriminatory practices against the different ethnic groups, which continue to be a problem for many European communities.

The Roma in Bulgaria are not a homogeneous community but are divided into internal subgroups. The main and most general differentiation criteria are:

1) time of settlement in the Bulgarian territories;
2) language;
3) way of life;
4) occupation.

According to the first criterion, the Roma population falls into three major groups. The Erlii were the first to settle down in the 15-16th century. They are divided into two major groups – the Bulgarian Roma who are Christians by religion and the Turkish Roma who are Muslims. As a rule, the Bulgarian Roma mainly live in Western Bulgaria and the Turkish Roma, in Eastern Bulgaria. The second group forming the migration wave to the Bulgarian lands in the 17-18th centuries includes Vlahichki Gypsies, Trakijski Gypsies, Rudari Gypsies. The Kardarashi constitute the third migration wave, which took place in the 19-20th century.

The “time of settlement” criterion is important since the above-mentioned groups have been preserved to a certain extent to date. They speak different Roma dialects, but these do not differ significantly, as the various group members easily understand each other. The Roma Christians use Bulgarian terms when they lack a word in the Roma language for a given notion. Those with Muslim religious orientation use Turkish borrowings. All the groups are more or less endogamous – i.e., they usually start families within their own groups and thus preserve their ethnic and cultural characteristics.
According to the “way of life” criterion, the Roma can be classified as “sedentary” and “nomadic”. Sedentary Roma presently make up the major group in Bulgaria. The data from a representative research on Roma (Sociological and Beneficiary Assessment of Potential Low-Income Housing Micro-Projects, 2000) carried out in 2000 reveals that today more than 90% of the Roma are sedentary. They have settled in nearly all of the country’s large towns. The reason for the concentration of the Roma population in the large cities is mostly economic, as they have no way of making a living in the smaller communities. Since at earlier stages the entire Roma group used to be nomadic, its members are more inclined to settle down in the larger towns where they can keep up certain traditional activities (for example, the production and sale of household objects, which by now have become rather exotic and for that reason can find a certain market in the larger towns). There are likewise more opportunities to find jobs shunned by the Bulgarian population. Staying in the smaller communities dooms the Roma to greater deprivation and settling in the rural regions is quite unpopular, since they have to take up atypical activities (agriculture, cattle breeding), which are basically incompatible with the ethnic and cultural characteristics and traditions of this population. It is precisely a very few Roma from the smaller towns and the villages that still have a semi-nomadic lifestyle. They spend the winter at home and in the summer they travel around the country selling various goods they have made themselves – mostly wooden and metal household objects.

Demographic behaviour of the Roma – differences that separate
The demographic picture is a focus of the consequences of the severe economic difficulties that the Roma population faces under the transition. To be more specific we will present some basic characteristics.

Because of the modernisation processes delay among Roma population compared to the majority group, the demographic trend has developed traditionally until the 1980s. Its transformation began very late, in the early 1990s. The Roma group is characterised by a high fertility rate. The number of children in the group is the highest among all other ethnic groups. Under socialism, the health care system produced a significant decrease of infants’ mortality. In research carried out in the Roma community in 1978-1980, about 55% of the respondents expressed the opinion that they would like to have more than two children in the family. By comparison, the majority of the Bulgarians answered that one child is their preferred model for
the family (Minev D. and M. Zelyazkova, 2000: 15). Immediately after the changes, a comparable investigation has shown similar results. It had been conducted very close to the beginning of the transition and the time lapse has been too brief to reveal its influence on demographic preferences. However, our data from 2002 reveals that the many children model is no longer congenial to the Roma people. The economic crisis and the impossibility of the families to take care of the children leads to perceiving a model of the family with one or no children at all.

The statistical data reveal that birth rate among Roma has decreased but not to the point expressed in people’s preferences. One explanation could be the very low level of birth control. The interviews we conducted (Interview No. 6, J.P.G., Dobric) reveal a very low level of consciousness among the young Roma women about the negative effects of abortions, no knowledge about contraceptives, and low financial possibilities to buy them, even when the women are aware of their existence and effects. An opinion is expressed that only 10% of the women use contraceptives. Another reason is the traditionally very young age of the brides in the Roma marriages. These are girls of 13-14 years of age and their knowledge about birth control is very unsatisfactory. Moreover, with the expansion of the economic crisis in the country and the increase of the rates of unemployment, the Roma women have begun to control the birth rate predominantly through abortions. The latter are very expensive and in many interviews the respondents express their recommendation to the authorities to provide abortions free of charges, as this is a very heavy financial burden on the Roma families. Illegal abortions could likely begin to increase and this would further worsen the health status of the Roma women.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age/Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Bulgarian</th>
<th>Ethnic Turks</th>
<th>Roma</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-29</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>66.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-59</td>
<td>40.5</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>28.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 60</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Population Census 1992: 107

The data from the table above very clearly reveals the significant differences of the age structures between the Roma and the other groups in the country. It illustrates
the similarity of the Roma model with that of the “Third World” countries. It shows that although there is a birth rate decrease among the Roma, the deaths among the older generation groups is considerable and this leads rather to keeping the group significantly young.

Table 3: Housing units by ethnic origin of household head and number of children under 16 in a family according to the 1992 National Census (in %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Bulgarian</th>
<th>Turkish</th>
<th>Roma</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Without children</td>
<td>58.7</td>
<td>41.8</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>54.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With 1 child</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With 2 children</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With 3 children</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With 4 and more children</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

100.0 100.0 100.0 100.0


The data in the table register clearly marked differences concerning Roma families with many children. For instance, the percentage of Roma families with three, four or more children differs considerably from that of the other ethnic groups. One in three Roma families has three or more children without any marked differences between urban and rural families. In the other ethnic groups, the percentage of homes inhabited by families with more than three children is far lower and accounts for 3.4% of all other ethnic groups in the country.

The demographic mosaic of the Roma population reveals several important trends:

1. There is a sharp decrease of life expectancy for Roma people
2. The demographic trends among Roma are distinct from those of the other major ethnic groups in the country
3. The Roma family is characterised by a significantly higher number of children than the average family in the country.

The differences have important social and political consequences. They include the strong fears of the Bulgarian population that in some years the Roma people will constitute the majority of the country’s population. This creates an additional source of neglect and hostility among the Bulgarians towards the Roma.
The perception of borders - territorial and social peripheries

Territorial borders

"The gypsy political leaders are important for the society. They aren't elected arbitrary, but because people have trust in them. Some are elected because they are rich; others because they are smart, and third because they are in favour of justice, but after they are elected everybody listens to them. They take the decisions asking the people."

“What is the last thing, you remember, they were asking the people for?”

“About the wall around the quarter. It was built earlier, but they wanted to renew it.”

“You mean that the local government decided to put a wall that surrounds the whole Roma quarter? Who took this decision?”

“The local authorities.” (Obshtinska uprawa)

“Why?”

“Because the quarter is near one of the main international routes, and there is probably something they don't like about it. The houses are really simple, made of concrete. So they decided to build this wall all around the quarter, leaving it with almost no exits.”

“So they don't just build a wall at the road's side, but make a citadel wall.”

“Yes, they don't want any exits.”

“You mean they want an exit just for a car to pass?”

“No, they want to eliminate that as well.”

“How will you then enter and exit the Roma quarter?”

“We won't enter from the main road.”

(Interview No. 10 with A. from Kjustendil, conducted in May 2002)

As a rule the Roma communities live in separate localities within each place they inhabit. In larger settlements as Sofia, Dobric, Kjustendil, as well as in the other cities and towns of the country as Plovdiv, Bourgas, Shoumen, Stara Zagora, Sliven, the Roma neighbourhoods are usually located on the outskirts of the city. In most cases, the outside representatives of the macro-social environment lack a “natural” access to Roma neighbourhoods. The reasons for this are complex. An important one is the limited transport and communication. To make the investigation we always had to take a taxi with a special taxi driver, a Roma, who could bring us to the Roma quarter. The other taxi drivers neither know nor are very happy to drive to these parts of the cities. The next reason is the remoteness of Roma quarters from the central city zones. Not least important is their infrastructure characterised by
poor road conditions. A very significant factor is the existing prejudices and fears of being robbed or wounded by the Roma. Thus, the domicile of compact groups of the urban and village Roma groups may be defined as “happened self-isolation”. The data from the interviews reveals that the Roma living in the neighbourhoods prefer their own microenvironment (that of the neighbourhood, where everybody knows each other). At the same time, the choice of these people to live separated, indirectly gives them the chance to leave the “ghetto” to travel, work, study, etc. among representatives of the majority.

The emergence of this type of neighbourhoods and the attitude of the state institutions towards this process has a long history and contradictory experiences. The emergence of the Fakulteta Roma neighbourhood in Sofia, where we have conducted our interviews, is a typical example. A group of well-to-do Roma tradesmen and craftsmen started buying plots from landowners in the region. One of the first settlers in the Fakulteta locality possessing a title “deed” is Pane who lived in a dug-out because he had no money to build a house of his own. It may be said with certainty that until 1945 the then state institution responsible for the regulation of settlements did not take any concrete measures to clarify the status of this neighbourhood. There were no streets, no water mains, sewerage, or electricity. The first development plan of Fakulteta neighbourhood was approved in 1947 and envisaged the construction of a sports complex. The plan did not specify what would happen to the Roma population living there at the time. However, the idea was not brought about. Instead, during the same year, at the initiative of Georgi Dimitrov (leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party at the end of the 1940s) the communist government started the construction of a school in the neighbourhood in order to win the electoral support of the Roma. General Vladimir Stoichev turned the first sod and the first Roma children put foot inside the school on 15.09.1948. It was the first gesture of the symbolic recognition of Fakulteta by the then ruling authorities. In 1956, a group of Roma with carts, organised by their leaders who had influential friends among the government, went to the Nadezhda tram depot to pick up the water pipes they had been given, loaded them into their carts and transported them to Fakulteta where they installed the pipes with their volunteer labour. The fountains were placed in the streets since the thus constructed water supply system did not conform to standard. Every household could connect to the water supply system. Instead of sewerage, the people dug ditches into which rain and wastewater flow to this day.
This process of unregulated and spontaneous growth of the Roma neighbourhoods, of which Fakulteta is an example, illustrates the model of the practically illegal building of homes, typical of the Roma neighbourhoods in Plovdiv (Stolipinovo neighborhood), Pazardjik (Tokaito neighbourhood), Sliven (Nadezhda neighbourhood), etc. For over 70 years the Roma in Bulgaria’s big cities have been settling and planning their homes and neighbourhoods through their own efforts, i.e. without the purposeful, planned and technically supported participation of the state. This reflected both on the Roma and on the state – low quality communal living conditions in the community and the state’s growing inability to solve the “Gypsy neighbourhoods” problem effectively and permanently. The two processes which could help solve the problem of the Roma neighbourhoods – that of internal communal civic self-organisation and the parallel process of a long-term and comprehensive state policy - have practically never taken place concurrently to this day. At the same time, there have been attempts by different representatives of the Roma community to gain legal status for their property (land, buildings, etc.) and single measures by mayors and municipal authorities for the partial solution of concrete development problems in the Roma neighbourhoods.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the then socialist countries in Eastern Europe adopted a common package of laws and subordinate legislation, decreeing the forcible settlement of the Roma. Following the example of Czechoslovakia, between 1958 and 1960 Bulgaria adopted a decree affecting almost 6,000 nomad Wallachians and aimed at prohibiting nomadic life (Decree on the solution of the problem of the Gypsy minority in Bulgaria of 08.10.1958, the promulgated version of the decree being accompanied by the following remark: “A settlement program was launched already in 1954. At that time these groups were settled mainly in the Danube plane.”). Large groups of Roma, as shown in the stories of our interviewers in the North-East part of the country (Interview No. 4, Z.S., Dobric), were deliberately settled in places that suffered from a shortage of manpower. They included mainly two types of settlements: agricultural regions (the people were forced to work in the existing co-operative farms) and large industrial cities where they were “proletarianised”. To implement this policy successfully, the state extended funds for the building of “cheap and sanitary homes” for the newcomers (Interview No. 6, J.P.G., Dobric). At that time, the municipal administrations improved the small Roma groups’ neighbourhoods in their territories or gave municipal land to them where
they could build their homes. To be eligible to receive land the representatives of the minorities were obliged to have a permanent job.

The state also granted special 20-year credits (the money was not given to the Roma families, but to the respective municipal authorities and mayoralties instead). In the 1960s, the Bulgarian State embarked on a widespread public campaign, presenting the Roma communities as social groups voluntarily taking part in the solution of the problems. For example, the construction and planning of the growing neighbourhoods was publicised as a voluntary initiative of the Roma communities, regardless of the fact that the construction was actually illegal, unregulated by the respective technical services, and only formally legitimised by the state institutions. Already at that time, the state’s policy for the urbanisation of Roma neighbourhoods, and the relative improvement of their socio-economic status in Bulgaria, also played the role of a hidden mechanism to “discipline” the communities. Oddly enough, this catalysed the process of the solution of the individual housing needs of Roma families - a process begun in the 1930s and fuelled by the adaptability and enterprise characteristic of the Roma minority.

For example, after the liberation from Ottoman rule, the Roma in Sofia inhabited the area around Vassil Levski monument and the region around central station, i.e. the then outskirts of the town (now a central city zone). With the growth of the capital and due to not owning the land, the Roma were resettled in the shifting outskirts of town, i.e. in Konyovitsa locality (today’s central city boulevard Konstantin Velichkov), Hristo Botev neighbourhood (close to Sofia Airport) and Tula maala (the present-day fashionable suburb of Boyana). The practical outcome of the policy for the solution of the Roma’s housing problems conducted in the 1960s is still visible today – one-storey buildings (of the villa type) with two-room flats, without bathrooms, toilets, and sewerage still exist in Sofia’s Fakulteta neighbourhood.

In conformity with the communist party and state directives of the 1970s and 1980s, an attempt was made to resettle the Roma population and to integrate it into the Bulgarian majority. This is how Roma families came to be accommodated in prefabricated buildings in the big city districts, usually on the first and last floors. Nevertheless, this policy did not correspond to the cultural specifics of the Roma population. On the one hand, the limited space of a prefabricated flat prevents the Roma from exercising their typical professions. The Roma gradually lost their means of livelihood and in today’s conditions of stagnation and high unemployment they
are no longer able to find alternative means of livelihood. On the other hand, the expenses of such a living are much greater than those of a family living in a Roma neighbourhood (water, electricity and, in most cases, rent). Furthermore, the research data suggests that the majority of the Roma have always preferred communal life to isolation and security – the life among their own ethnos is socially and culturally more acceptable than outside it.

The internal hierarchy among the Roma determines the structure of the community in the Roma neighbourhood. Our interviews reveal the fact that the Roma’s belonging to the different families (arranged according to traditional value hierarchy) of craftsmen (blacksmiths, tinsmiths, basket-makers, musicians, tradesmen, etc.) is still of decisive importance among the Roma in the big city neighbourhoods. The size and influence of the families and traditions, regulating relations between and within them, are just as important as the economic and social division characteristic of the macro-society. The reason for stressing the significance of these factors is the peculiarity of the specific social forces, which determine the structure of the Roma neighbourhood. For example, if the small household of a respected family in the centre of the Roma neighbourhood grows (even through the economic prosperity of its members), this presupposes the expansion of the basic family home (rather than, for example, the purchase of a new larger house or moving to a better place as is the practice of the Bulgarian families).

The family principle of communal living and sharing of the family home (it is enlarged, but not divided among different parts of the same Roma neighbourhood) is a guarantee of the unity of the family. For this reason, Roma homes are enlarged through lean-tos rather than being divided by the generally accepted “fence”, presupposing the enclosure of new land. In other words, the Roma home “grows” as lived-in space, but not as an actually acquired new housing plot. Metaphorically speaking, whereas the inviolability of the Bulgarian’s home starts with the fence around the yard, for the Roma it is limited to the outside walls of the growing home. This also determines the specific interior architecture of the Roma home (regardless of the number of rooms). The important thing for the Roma family is that the home satisfies its daily needs – food, hygiene, sleep, welcoming guests, etc. The rooms are furnished to satisfy these everyday needs, regardless of the home’s square surface. In this sense, Roma culture traditionally contains the option of the multi-functionality of a small living space (one or two rooms).
The data from a nationally representative survey (Sociological and Beneficiary Assessment of Potential Low-Income Housing Micro-Projects, 2000) indicates that the majority of the Roma (95%) would rather live in houses than in apartment blocks. Moreover, only about 15% of the Roma think that the Roma communities should not be isolated from the other ethnic groups in separate neighbourhoods. Regardless of their relatively small share, the attitudes and opinions of this group are important because for the most part these are more educated and younger members of the community, with approximately an equal representation of men and women. Their preferences are characterised by a definite aspiration for social integration, likely to improve the social prospects and the competitiveness of the Roma, and to activate their involvement in economic and cultural life. It can be interpreted also as evidence that these people don’t trust the community’s capacity to deliver solutions, which indirectly suggests the willingness even to be assimilated but to have their problems solved.

Social borders

The discussion in the previous part illustrates the long-lasting formation of the physical isolation of the Roma communities in the country. However, as all our respondents have many times repeated during the interviews, this type of borders could be overcome under socialism through the everyday contacts in employment, schools, and shops when the Roma were full employed.

In the transition, all these channels of possible mutual interchange of information and knowledge are extremely limited due to the collapse of the economy. This leads to a deep crisis in social relations between Roma and the other ethnic groups in the country. The Roma community in the last decade has not succeeded in the task of overcoming the “social walls”. In this sense, we can speak about a strong process of peripherisation of the Roma community. Based on our field research and some statistical data we will illustrate that in the following paragraphs.

*When they had a job they would go to work, and no one would ask them if they are gypsies or Turks, or Bulgarians. They loved their job, and respected their colleagues, but now they don’t have these jobs anymore. People will get a job sooner or later, but until then, the gypsies will probably die. Currently the gypsies are isolated from the Bulgarians, and they are disappearing. The current politics for the ethnus is worse than Hitler.* (Interview No. 15, S., June 2002, Sofia)
The crisis hit the Roma equally in the towns and in the villages. Half of the country’s Roma population lives in villages. The data for 1992 shows that 48% of Roma are rural and 52% - urban Roma population; the corresponding ratio for the Bulgarian population is 28:72, and for the Bulgarian Turks 68:32. Traditionally, Roma population has been classified as non-agrarian. For centuries, they have been in a complementary relationship with their external environment. Such population was usually not involved in subsistence farming, but rather obtained their livelihood by entering into commercial relationships with agrarian cultures. The relationship of Roma to land has always been rather tepid; they did not (and did not need to) establish mechanisms and institutions related to the agrarian type of private ownership relationships. Thus, the Roma before socialism never belonged to a territory and never attributed importance to the acquisition of property. Under socialism, in correspondence with the idea of the unification of society, the Roma have adopted or have been forced to accept the models of economic, and to some extent social, behaviour of the majority. Unfortunately, the current social and economic conditions of deep economic crisis in the period of transformation are causing the Roma from the villages to see no hope for normal life.

*His youth will pass in this village and his whole life. What wife can he find here? I want to change things. I want him to live in a good environment, with Bulgarians; to have a good job, to marry. What can he do here? He doesn't have any opportunities, no future. He will get like me.* (Interview No. 7, June 2002, village of Bezvodica)

The Roma cannot expect to reap any benefits from the agrarian reform conducted in the 1990s, since they usually do not own farmland (Giordano C., Kostova D., 2000: 166-173). Their unemployment rate in the rural areas is 82 % (Gallie D., 1996: 63-78). Some families try to make a living by gathering mushrooms, herbs, wild fruit, and snails. However, this can be no more than a very temporary solution of the problem. This reinforces the process of temporary migration to the towns for short-term employment (Kostova D., 2001: 37-38). The main reason for this migration is the conviction that the social security system functions better in the cities and that they stand a greater chance of finding a job there (for example, under temporary employment programs). This is a finding illustrated by our field research for all studied regions. But in the cities the Roma are beginning to be seen as unable to cope with the problems of change, useless to society and parasitic, relying on personal charity and social benefits. The Roma are becoming isolated and are gradual-
ly being left behind in all social areas. The consequence is a gradual process of social closure of Roma community, further contributing to their social exclusion. The basic condition for this development is the economic crisis resulting in unemployment. Unemployment among Roma is the highest of all minorities, between 60 and 65% (Gallie D., 1996: 63-78). This tendency is confirmed by recent research as well. The empirical data from a survey on a representative sample of 2,066 people in March 2000 shows that 55% of the Roma and 48% of the Turks are not employed (Kolyo Kolev, 2000: 10). Our interviews show that according to the Roma themselves, unemployment is the basic economic problem for their community. The analysis of the longitudinal data reveals that the very high rates of unemployment for the Roma are a long running trend. The Roma justify the high rate of unemployment with their low education.

Even for cleaning, or washing the dishes in a restaurant they want high school education. When I don't have high school education how can I get a job? I went to some construction companies to look for a job, but they don't want me because I am not qualified. (Interview No. 10, V.M., June 2002, Sofia)

A significant number of Roma tends to think that unemployment is due to ethnic discrimination in the labour market.

I am convinced that if I were competing with others on an equal basis, I would not be preferred. (Interview No. 3, February 2002)

The deep employment crisis applies to all the parameters of the Roma individual and group existence. The end result is a tendency towards increasing disintegration of the group and in the long term to a status at the bottom of the social scale.

Years ago people were at the same level because they were equally poor. They weren't differentiating as much as now. There wasn't so much denying. If they once accept you, and you them, there were no more problems. But now people often don't accept you and the reason isn't so much the ethnical part, but the social. Poor people aren't accepted anywhere. (Interview No. 4, J.N., June 2002, Sofia)

A reform of the health system is due since 2000. Every citizen has to register with a doctor and pay for his/her health insurance. Our empirical data reveals that many representatives of the Roma group have no access to health care. This is because many of them have been unemployed for a long time and are not registered at the Labour Offices for benefits (the maximum period for getting benefits is for nine months of unemployment). In a situation of extreme poverty they cannot and will
not insure themselves individually based on two minimum wages per month as required by the Insurance Law. Many Roma people working as part-time workers refuse to ensure themselves, as their income is much below the minimum wage. This serious social problem could create conditions for severe conflicts. Another problem that reveals the marginalisation of Roma is education. For example, the proportion of Roma children who leave school has been increasing every year since 1989. In some of the regions with significant Roma population, more than half of the children no longer go to school.

Now in Bulgaria, according to data of the Ministry of Education, there are 70 thousand children not attending school, of which about 40 thousand are Gypsies. Is this how we intend to accede to Europe, with illiterates? It’s awful. (Interview No. 2, February 2002) There are many factors underlying these realities. The most important among them are the isolation and the increasing poverty of the Roma communities, the decreasing role of the education as a value, and the school environment that is uninformed and often hostile to the Roma culture. The situation is even worse in Roma neighbourhoods. The country has 34 all-Roma schools, and according to an investigation, in 1999 only half of the students in these schools attended classes regularly and about 10% graduated successfully (State Department Report on Bulgaria, 2000: 20). The quality of education there is lower than in the other schools, the level of anarchy is higher. All this leads to the deterioration of an already very low educational level for the Roma, and in turn to their progressive marginalisation. Consequently, it will become impossible for the vast majority of the Roma to integrate successfully into the country’s economic and social life, even after the crisis is overcome. Many Romani children turn to begging, prostitution, and petty crime on the streets. Thus, economic and social factors combine to deprive increasing numbers of Romani youths of a better future. There are significant grounds to consider Roma not only as an ethnic or cultural group but also as a social minority with some “underclass” characteristics (for instance low education, poor health, long-term unemployment, reliance on welfare, general resignation, low respect for authorities) (Kostova 2001, paper in Timisoara).

The self-perception of belonging to an excluded social minority is clearly expressed in this quotation:

*I think that currently there is genocide against the gypsies in all ex-socialist countries. From one side, they are limiting them… This is a scenario, a theatre, I’m not afraid to*
say it. Maybe one person will die, but it is important for people to know the truth. The truth is that the last 12 years were like genocide for the gypsies. If we take a girl that was 12 years by then, she is 24 now. What does she have? I take a girl, not a boy. It is clear that the boy is unemployed. He steals, breaks in, and robs. Everybody should come to this conclusion because there aren't any other possibilities for this person. (Interview No. 15, S.P., June 2002, Sofia)

This real and psychological distancing of Roma children from the social systems will have long-term consequences for the community, as people with no knowledge or skills will not be competitive on the labour market. Consequently, the social inequality between Roma and the other communities will broaden and the negative attitudes toward them will further increase.

The conclusion that can be drawn is that the Roma are aware of the threat for the future, related to the unequal education of their children. Some respondents even seem to be ready to sacrifice some of the newly gained rights such as studying Roma language in the name of the integration processes and the more successful future of their children. However, this readiness comes only when the parents themselves are convinced that education matters. In Bulgarian reality, language duality can be both an asset and a segregating factor. Usually the ethnic group language usage is not the problem; it is the lack of sufficient additional access to the majority's language education opportunities. Moreover, too strong a focus on ethnic groups’ language as a teaching language could contribute to exclusion patterns among the majority.

The Gypsy language, by the way, is one of the ancient languages. It is related to Hindi. They study it in schools now, there is a regulation dating from 1996 that makes it an optional subject in schools. In the first year about 5 to 6 thousand children studied it. The second year the number fell to 3-4 thousand, and now hardly anyone studies it. (Interview No. 2, February 2002, Sofia)

As the situation with the Roma children dropping out of school has tremendously increased, in the fall of 2002 the government adopted new regulations by which the parents will obtain the social benefits for the poor only if their children attend school. At present, our research reveals that this measure has had a very strong effect on the school participation. In one classroom, children 6, 7, but even 15, 16 years old study together; they are all in the same class as they have never been to school before.
Self-identity and solidarity among Roma – modernisation in progress

Under socialism, minorities gradually accustomed themselves to state paternalism, which replaced the traditional family solidarity. This process led to the establishment of a new culture of dependence on state institutions (Towards Diversity with a Human Face, 2002: 15f.). Even under the transition, as the data from our survey shows, when asked what the best way to solve their problems is, a significant share of respondents chose the option that the state should solve their problems as they cannot do much. The results from a survey realised in the summer of 2002 on a representative sample of the whole Bulgarian population reveals that predominantly the minorities rely on the state institutions (Gandeva Teodora, 2002). However, the resources of the state in a time of transition are very limited. Bearing in mind also the severe economic crisis described in the previous part, the transformation can be characterised as a move towards individual rather than collective awareness. The examples that will be presented clearly reveal that ethnic groups may (and usually do) have different levels of ethnic awareness. The lowest level of this awareness is “blood ties”, on the basis of which others are added: cultural and linguistic distinctiveness, feeling of common cultural heritage, common name, a myth of common ancestry, shared memories, a measure of common solidarity, and common destiny for the future. The variety of the social statuses represented in our survey allows an investigation and analysis of the different types of strategies based on people’s social and economic experiences. The data permits to differentiate some models. One dimension for their formation can be defined as individualistic versus collectivistic models. Their different character classifies several types of strategies and integration with the majority.

The individual approach relies mainly on the personal economic reasoning while the collective types have the community interests and needs as a basic concern. Quite often, the individual and the collective approaches rely on different institutions. In the first case, this is essentially the family and in the second the group at the different levels of its institutionalisation. The individual understanding perceives the better chances of the Roma people through an economic involvement, through permanent jobs, and even direct individual inclusion in the majority group. Not surprisingly, people following this behaviour model forgo the study of the Roma language, as it could prevent their integration in the majority group. In these cases, traditions
are neglected as well with the expectation of being better accepted by the others. Very often, such representatives of the community prefer to go away from the territorial borders of the Roma and set up in the majority’s environment. These people rarely recognise their Roma belonging. One of our respondents is a typical representative of this group; she even refuses to tell us her real name so we called her ‘Maria’. She relies primarily on her own family. She is a representative of the group of people with a certain amount of property and small capital that could help her set up a private business. Our interviews reveal that the wealthier respondents are less willing to identify themselves as being Roma. The reason is related to the Roma concern of possible discrimination among ethnic lines on the labour markets. Maria’s strategy for coping with the difficulties in the transformation period is predominantly an individualistic one. Her family unites to help each other, but they are rarely interested in the needs and interests of their community. Our respondent prefers to be silent about her ethnic identity. The paragraph cited below comes from the interview with this woman.

*The gypsies that live here are typical. They think from day to day. When they earn some money, they go somewhere to eat and drink the money out. I have been looking at them for many years. There’s nothing in common between me and them. And they fight, and argue, and say bad words. I go in the house because I don’t want to listen to them. This never happened in my home.* (Interview No. 12, M., June 2002, Sofia)

This woman also explains that nobody in the quarter thinks of her as a Roma but as a Bulgarian, and she is proud that her children do not speak Roma language. The truth however is somewhat different, since Bulgarians thought of our respondent as a Roma. In her case, there is a strong desire to abandon the Roma group, but the majority can hardly recognise her as one of them. For her the Bulgarian identity exists rather as a dream. To avoid the grievance of being rejected, our respondent has chosen religious identification. She emphasises on her religiosity since she believes that people are equal in front of God. She transfers her aspiration and self-identification to a religious group believing that it could set her among the desired identification group.

The model of another respondent is individualistic yet dissimilar, representing a kind of a hybrid model. He works in a Bulgarian environment following its rules, and lives in the Roma space sharing all its cultural and social experiences. He self-identifies himself as Roma. He is an entrepreneur who, in his words, hires people
according to their qualities and not according to the colour of their skin. Economically he is quite integrated in the society; socially he is facing the restrictions of the territorial borders. He is economically independent and is not facing Maria’s identification problems. However, his strategy model relies on the philosophy of individualism and is a transfer from the integration model existing under socialism. He does not acknowledge the necessity of any collective efforts for community recognition. He has limited resources for enterprises that go beyond his own family. In his case, as in Maria’s case, socialist traditions have strongly influenced the Roma community’s individualisation.

The strategies of Roma in the transition are significantly diversified. The officially desired model corresponds to the accepted ideas for recognition of cultural and ethnic communities’ rights, under the influence of the Europeanisation processes. In that case, could the community be the core actor for the acknowledgement of its identity? In one way, significant trends of social differentiation are taking place in the period of transformation and are absorbing the energy of the people involved. In spite of this, some processes of community awareness creation are developing at local, national, and international levels. The underlying interests are different. In the clan group, the members unite for definite objectives following only their people interests. At a local level, the community tries to integrate around social institutions as church, school, and Roma leaders, and, through them, to present itself as a group in the society.

Many Bulgarians say that we, the gypsies, are a “soundless letter”. So I said: ’Really?’ And we merged with the karderashi. And now they have a politician in the government. Toma Tomov is an incredible gypsy. His men are like one. And they are very brave, and stupid and poor like mine. (Interview No. 14, S.P., June 2002, Sofia)

In the collective approach, social mediators are used to promote the community at a local level. The self-identification of these people is formed as a perception of a being different from the majority. The followers of such ideas insist on the parallel study of the languages of Roma and majority, and on an emancipation of Roma language and culture in society. This approach is further developed by the intellectual and power Roma elite managers and expands at national and international levels. The Roma elite is divided into two main groups. The first one constitutes the community of the intellectuals who are rather interested in the cultural heritage and education needs of the Roma community. The second one is more practically oriented
and includes the managers of the ethnic relations who have connections with the
country’s power elite, have access to substantial national and international financial
resources, and are more interested in profiting from their position as leaders than in
fostering the community’s development.

The part of the gypsy community that currently is leading started dividing from its com-
munity and transforming into a kind of leaders’ elite. Elite that wants power, not so much
money and almost no science. They often become the subject of social questionnaires, or
interviews, and through them people get a wrong idea of our community. We usually
speak not the way things are, but the way we want them to be.” (Interview No. 4, J.N.,
Sofia June 2002)

The lack of consensus between these two groups in the last decade has tremendous-
ly impaired the community’s progress. However, the quality of living of the Roma
community has changed enormously in the transformation and this is a basis for a
move toward Roma identity formation. The empirical research also indicates a sig-
nificant isolation between the Roma and the majority group at the level of the
neighbourhood and at national level. The friendly relations between the minority
and the majority are a nice memory. In a time of deep economic crisis and lack of
significant state resources for social programs the poor Roma, who are the majority
of the group, feel neglected and forgotten. This furthers the expansion of its segre-
gation in society. Significant processes of national identity formation have developed
in the last decade.

At a definite level of ethnic self-awareness, the ethnic groups may evolve towards
separating into an ethno-national group (with the perspective to evolve into a sepa-
arate nation) or remain ethnically distinct groups within a broader national body. The
main criterion distinguishing an “ethnic group” from a “nation” is the existence (in
reality or as an objective) of a nation-state based on the principle of territoriality.
Roma is a specific case. In this respect, we consider Roma as being close to the con-
cept of “ethnic” or “cultural group” and therefore lacking a clear “nation-building
project” –mainly due to the lack of a “national ownership over certain territory”.

From this point of view, the idea of a “nation without territorial identity and terri-
torial claims” that became popular among Roma élites in the last decade is some-
what vague. It may also be perceived with some suspicion as a possible source of ter-
ritorial claims – a hypersensitive issue across the whole post-socialist region, torn by
secessionist self-determination acts in the 1990s as our research shows.
Conclusions
The ethnic self-identification of the Roma depends on a number of factors. The paper discusses the problems of territorial and social borders and the level of modernisation as significant ones.
Via the examples of the interviewed people coming from various regional and social statuses, an analysis is proposed based on the complexity of the perceptions of the borders and the stage of development. The conducted research confirms that the Roma community has some ideas about its cultural self-identification, but the system of symbols used to distinguish itself from the others is not solid enough and could be easily broken. Several models of self-identification are proposed that reflect the awareness, needs, and interests for integration within the own group, with the other group/s, and within society. Our respondents present different strategies for coping with their otherness - from staying totally isolated to a full recognition of the other group as their own.
What is clearly confirmed by the survey is that self-identification is weaker than the identification coming from outside the Roma community, from the other ethnic groups who perceive the Roma as a homogeneous group distinct from them, and often isolated deeply by them. The comparative data for the perceptions of the majority group toward the Roma, expressed by the Roma, reveals a feeling of low level of tolerance existing in society. The Roma present various attitudes toward them, ranging from rejection to tolerance. As the data from the empirical survey shows, tolerance is greater toward the own Roma neighbours and is characterised by more intercommunication and mutual understanding. The relations based on the own knowledge of the Roma community are the ones of tolerance. The lack of knowledge for the Roma group is a barrier toward mutual existence and intercultural relations.
In addition, the distance between the Roma and the majority is enlarged in the transition in socio-economic terms and this has consequently cut off the integration processes that were taking place under socialism. The transformation has also brought a model of development that emphasises individualism rather than collective actions and it is difficult for the Roma group to adapt to its requirements. Therefore, the Roma could adjust to the transition at a slower pace. The Roma’s low level of social integration results in their high level of unemployment, poverty, non-satisfaction with the state and its institutions. This further increases the mistrust not
only in all these institutions but also in society as a whole. Therefore, the group closes further onto itself or chooses illegal strategies for survival.

In this way, the data reveal that in the period of transition there is a process of deep peripherisation of the Roma community. Roma population is virtually excluded from the government of the settlement, can no longer rely on the employment and social security system that functioned until 1989, and is deprived of the chance of full civic participation in the management and distribution of economic resources in the respective settlement. Our data reveal that the Roma community is twice isolated – from the majority, and from its own élite. The distance between the very few rich Roma families and the majority of the poor Roma people is very wide. The rich families have no contacts with the rest of the community; they constitute a very close elite group.

Our analysis shows that in the perception of Roma people the transition has not finished yet. They are still expecting something to happen and still live in a status of hopes. The data indicates that Roma do not perceive the change as a success. For the majority of them, they have changed their social status to a worse one. This will continue to have a strong effect on their identification and integration strategies. This is grounds for the conclusion that inclusion and equal representativity of ethnic groups in the society is not achieved through separation of distinct identities’ political representations, but through interaction with the majority. The open question is to what extent is this message understood and internalised both by ethnic groups and the majority.

**Recommendations**

The data from our field research indicate that in the years of transition there is no policy especially oriented to Roma integration. In 1998, the Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of National Minorities became effective, and in September of the same year, the government announced its intention to include representatives of national minorities in the policy-making process. These and some other little steps have been made but they do not change the status of Roma people significantly.

An important condition that hinders the creation of a strategic policy for Roma is the overall difficult situation in the country. There are so many important tasks to be solved that the Roma issue does not have the mark of a first priority. In this
regard, a significant issue is how to formulate the policy toward Roma in such a way that in this difficult crisis the other ethnic groups feel no isolation and neglect. In some of the interviews we conducted with the Bulgarian community representatives, the opinion was expressed that if the Roma continue to get special privileges, as not paying their electricity for example, the Bulgarians would rather identify themselves as Roma to have this privilege as well. Not least significant is the fact that the Roma community is less consolidated in comparison with the other ethnic groups in the country. Its leadership, despite some positive attempts, is still fragmented, weak, and obsessed by the little disputes between themselves. The outcome is the inability to formulate significant objectives and to unify the elite and the rest of the community in an effort for their effective fulfilment. The political representation of the Roma community at local and national levels is negligible. In this sense, the institutional resources of the Roma are very limited.

In this space, the best solution most probably is short strategy tasks that ease tension in the most conflicting situations. However, several important requirements should be taken into account. The first one is to restrict the conflicts between the Roma and the Bulgarians. This means, on one side, curbing the aggressive behaviour of some skinheads and applying the law firmly, forbidding the development of ethnic conflicts. On the other side, the interviews with the Bulgarians in the villages reveal people’s fear of thefts of the agricultural production by the Roma. The Bulgarians are aware of the fact that many Roma have nothing to eat, but they cannot accept the stealing as a means of existence. Many Bulgarians rely predominantly on this production and they will never welcome such a behaviour. In this sense, we could argue that a policy towards Roma well-being is a policy for the well-being of Bulgarians as well.

The second significant point is to bring the Roma children back to school. To some extent this is under implementation by the government as, starting from September 15, 2002, the Roma families will not get social benefits if they do not send their children to school. Education has significant merit for the Roma children; it prevents further marginalisation of the community, and the creation not only of boundaries but also of virtual social walls between the Roma and the rest of the population. The state should cover the health benefits not only of the unemployed people but also of those on social benefits, among whom Roma are the majority. This will enormously curtail social tensions that could easily burst into real conflicts, especially when the children's health is threatened.
The economic situation of the Roma population is very harsh and should be under constant monitoring for prevention reasons. The Roma communities’ growing need of radical measures for the solution of their social and economic problems was noticed in all studied regions. In contrast to the Turkish community, the lack of significant political representation and access of the Roma community to the local self-government bodies, on which the implementation, financial and statutory support of the solutions depend, are cited as one of the main obstacles toward effective solutions. On the other hand, a still widely held opinion is that Bulgarians regard the Roma problems as “inherent to the community”, i.e. unimportant to society as a whole. At the same time, the solutions are usually seen “outside the possibilities of the community” – state institutions, international organisations and NGOs. Regardless of what solutions are offered, however, they must be based on an excellent knowledge of the state of Roma neighbourhoods, the specific needs and preferences of the Roma population and the different social actors within it as:

- The “ghettoised” Roma population;
- The local Roma leaders. Their position is controversial. On the one hand, they perceive themselves as active participants in the decision-making process. On the other, they have to rely only on informal power.
- The Bulgarian population. The opinion was expressed in some of the conducted interviews that part of the Bulgarian population lives under economic conditions that are hardly better. It was further suggested that to avoid negative reactions on the part of the Bulgarian population the programs developed for the ethnic groups should have a broader scope, and not be targeted exclusively at minorities. One of the interviewed municipal chiefs voiced the opinion that the ethnic and especially the Roma communities are tolerated at the expense of the other ethnic communities.

The approach to the Roma should be very carefully thought out since in the past there have been attempts to provide them with housing for example, which they sold under the transition and then moved back to their old neighbourhood. Taking into account the traditions and specific social and cultural preferences of the ethnic groups is essential when proposing definite programs for them.
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«I am a pure Gypsy...». The Roma Individuality in the Distorted Mirror of Group Stereotypes

Introduction
The heterogeneity and significance of the group distinctions are a characteristic feature of the Roma not only in Bulgaria (Liégeois 1999: 59). Consequently, some researchers consider that the «Gypsies» are a community for «the others» (Tomova 1995: 21; Tomova 1998: 335). However, it is precisely because of the attitude of «the others» towards the Roma, together with the consciousness of a common origin and similar historical fate, that «an awareness of community and commitment has been established in the Gypsy groups along with some rules of mutual assistance and solidarity» (Marushiakova, Popov 1993: 60).

The differentiation between the Roma groups is interpreted and finds expression in the first place by and through the great number of group names. Not claiming to be exhaustive, Ilona Tomova’s extensive sociological investigation defines twenty-one group names among the «Bulgarian Gypsies» and eighteen names among the «Turkish Gypsies» (Tomova 1995: 22-23). Within this context, the present study, which has a small quantitative coverage, does not nor can have the ambition to fully outline the group differences in the Roma’s self-perception.

My observations rest on 18 interviews with 22 persons who define themselves as Roma. Two interviews were group ones, which explains the difference in the number of interviews and the number of those interviewed. The interviews combine the life history method with a short questionnaire. Besides these formal interviews, this analysis also includes a few cases of refusal to give an interview due to the absence of a Roma identity (or the existence of a preferred «Bulgarian» or «Turkish» identity). I also take into consideration other three interviews, with leaders of Roma non-governmental organisations (NGOs) from Pernik, aimed at the establishment of the object and character of the organisations’ activities.

Despite the small quantitative coverage, the investigation’s goal is to provide an optimum presentation of the Roma in their social and cultural diversity. The 18 interviews are with an equal number of men and women. Although the differentiation by religion is rather irrelevant (this will be discussed further on), an equal number of Christian and Muslim Roma (current or former) have been selected. The ages and the educational status of the interviewed differ as well. The oldest female informant...
was born in 1936, the youngest male informant in 1982; three are illiterate, four have university education, two have college education, the rest have primary or secondary education, and two have completed the seventh grade. Ten of the 22 persons interviewed are unemployed.

Some of the interviewed belong to the Roma elite and/or the Roma intelligentsia. The elite representatives do not always coincide with the intelligentsia. For instance, an informant with a primary education is a local coordinator of the Tsar Kiro Roma party with national representatives. The same applies to a leader of a Roma women’s NGO from Pernik, interviewed with another method. Moreover, educated Roma do not necessarily belong to the Roma intelligentsia (two of the educated Roma have only family contacts with the Roma community and do not state their Roma origin). The endeavour to present the Roma in different social and demographic environments has been invested in the methods of the study as well. Seven interviews were taken in Sofia in the large Roma districts of Fakulteta and Hristo Botev; one in the village of Pancharevo’s Roma neighbourhood, associated to Sofia; five in Pernik; three in Sliven’s large long-established Roma community; two in the village of Draganovo, Velingrad region (with a predominance of Bulgarian Muslim population).

The informants’ social status is likewise most varied. Among them are representatives of the intelligentsia (mostly teachers), one Protestant priest, one state administration representative, a professional activist of an international NGO, one woman in retirement, one mechanic, unskilled workers (two cleaning women and two construction hands). The rest are unemployed, including a philologist – a leader of a Roma organisation, and a street person. The diversity of the Roma groups and subgroups has been relatively well represented: a few of the interviewed are representatives of the erlii, zhorevtsi («djorevtsi»), kalaidjii [tinsmiths], wallachians (concerning this group, cf. Marushiakova, Popov 1993: 96-127; Tomova 1995: 22-23). Some have not specified their group affiliation, while others define themselves by their parents’ or even their forefathers’ group affiliation. All the informants speak Bulgarian. For some of them, it is also their native language (zhorevtsi). However, the Roma language is the mother tongue for most of them. A Romanian dialect is the native tongue of the only Wallachian (vlahichka) informant.

The conclusions that we will formulate are most likely associated with two other factors. The first factor is the context of field research work. In both periods of time, when the interviews were taken (March–April 2002 and July-August 2002), conflict
situations and cases of violence associated with the Roma community were at the centre of public attention in Bulgaria. The media's exaggeration regarding the critical situations created tensions in the country, adding further distrust and a sense of insecurity among the interviewed. The second factor is the state of social precariousness in which the overwhelming part of the country’s Roma population has been. I can only add to the known statistics that half of the interviewed have one meal a day. In view of this situation, it is no surprise that the life horizon of these people is greatly narrowed and practically their whole energy and effort focuses on their personal and their family’s physical survival. The latter is likewise reflected in the interviews’ contents.

This report’s main objective has been to formulate observations and hypotheses regarding the Roma perception and self-perception. References to other issues associated with the main range of the report’s problems have, however, been inevitable. The group differences, and - to a greater extent – even the individual differences of the interviewed, bring forward the great diversity, the plurality of the self-perceptions about «their own» and «the others’» Roma groups, the personal behavioural strategy of self-presentation. The hierarchical structure of the Roma ethnic self-perception is significant: a) perception of the group or metagroup affiliation; b) perception of belonging to the Roma intergroup community as a whole; c) perception of affiliation to the macro-society or to its individual parts (Marushiakova, Popov 1993: 102).

**Group affiliations and distinctions**

In the first place, the observation about a priority of the metagroup affiliation, at the expense of the group affiliation, in the conditions of the large city should be formulated. This refers mainly to the so-called erlii – a metagroup term denoting the idea of «settlement». This is mostly the population of the large Fakulteta and Hristo Botev districts of Sofia. The trend has also been noted in literature studying the Gypsies. It should be added, however, that all the informants, with no exception, define themselves first by more general terms such as: «Bulgarian Gypsies», «erlii», «zhorevt-si», etc. Reference to a specific group is made after additional questions; the specification of the group usually refers to parents or forefathers («kovachi» - black smiths, «koshnichari» - basket-weaver, «vlachchi» - Wallachians). Some informants did not formulate a specific group affiliation at all. It may be considered that in the condi-
tions of the large city there is a clear tendency to substitute the group affiliation with the metagroup one. Researchers of the Gypsies point out the unstable nature and even the absence of a uniform Roma self-perception, owing to the group’s great importance as an economic and social unit. The common Roma affiliation, however, is also enforced «from outside», under the pressure of non-Roma (cf. Tomova 1995; Tomova 1998). The group, which frequently defines itself according to its livelihood/craft characteristic (now most often left in the past) – «basket-weavers», «blacksmiths» «sieve-makers», «stove-makers», «ironsmiths», «lattice-makers», «butchers», «tinsmiths», «woodsmen», «knife-makers» and the like, has lost some of its practical distinctiveness. Not forgetting the old group divisions, new differentiations are increasingly gaining importance and functionality today. The following trends can be identified in this case:

a) emergence of new differentiations based on territorial affiliation, alongside the existence of the confirmed intergroup differentiations;
b) opposition of the positively marked «we» vs. «they» (the other Roma);
c) the opposition «we» vs. «kardarashi»;
d) individual differentiation through the emphasis on personal and/or family qualities.

a) Emergence of new differentiations among the Roma based on their territorial affiliation.

Both in scholarly books6 and in all the interviews, the finding that negative attitudes about the Roma have intensified in Bulgaria in the post-socialist period has been unconditionally present. These unifying, strongly negative group stereotypes (not only among the Bulgarian, but also among the Turkish, Muslim, etc. population) have been stimulating the traditional differentiation mechanisms among the different Roma. Besides the old intergroup divisions and oppositions, new ones emerge, i.e. territorial differentiation. This is particularly evident, for instance, in Sliven, where «our» neighbourhood, even referred to as «elite» (Nikola Gochev District) is opposed to the despicable neighbourhood of «golite» - the naked (e.g. the poorest – cf. Marushiakova, Popov 1993: 98) Gypsies in Sliven. Moreover, broad generalisations are made along the same lines. One of the interviewed women opposes the «Sofiote» Roma to the Roma from the country. Obviously, the Roma have accepted the Bulgarian opposition between «Sofia» and «the province».
b) The opposition of the positively marked «we» vs. the indefinite and amorphous conception about «they» (the other Roma).

This strategy is frequently a reaction to the group stereotypes as well. Outlining a positive image of «us» – the group with whom the speaker directly identifies himself - is much more convincing than the identification with «all the Roma», which is doomed to failure against the background of the group stereotypes. For instance, Mr. S.F.K. from the village of Draginovo, Velingrad region, paints a positive image of «his» (meta) group erlii, setting it apart not from the rest of the Roma, but from the negative image of the Roma in Bulgarian society. The members of his group – the erlii – are Muslims and are characterised by honesty; they keep their word. Besides, according to S., among «the other» Roma groups there are quite a few who are «artistic» – meaning that they do not keep their word.

In other cases the differentiation between the positively connotated «us» and the amorphous conception about «the other Roma» proceeds according to the dialectal differences in the Roma language. The naïve conception that it is precisely «we» – the group that speaks the Roma language better and is, therefore, more talented than the rest of the Roma - is a fine illustration of the spontaneous reproduction of the archaic («ethnocentric») models of thinking, well known in ethnology. For instance, Mr. V.M., from the Pancharevo District in Sofia, interprets the differences among the Roma dialects as follows: «Some Gypsies speak [in such a way] that I cannot understand them. [Although] we are Roma I do not understand them, they twist their tongue and I cannot understand them. And they can very well understand us. Because we are more able than they are, we know the language better.» In this case, the «talented» «we» are the «koshnichari» - basket weaver Roma, in the quotation opposed to the Roma from Northwestern Bulgaria, who have recently adopted nomadism in the post-socialist period and are living in tents near Pancharevo.

Mrs. M.N. from the Fakulteta District in Sofia emphasises a similar differentiation between (the positively assessed) «we» and (the negatively assessed) «other» Roma as well. According to her, she herself and the «we» group speak «the pure» Roma language, whereas the other Roma allegedly «twist their tongue in two parts».

c) The «we» vs. «the kardarashi» opposition.

To some extent the «we» – «they» differentiation follows well-known and established group models. The statement (resting to a considerable extent on reality –
c.f. Tomova 1995: 23,76; Mutafchieva 1995: 51) that the representatives of the so-called «kardarashi» (also referred to by other names) are those for whom theft and fraud are hereditary crafts is repeated several times in the interviews. There is mutual rejection and even resentment between them and the rest of the Roma. The «kardarashi» consider themselves «the true» representatives of the Roma culture and have claims on leadership; to some extent, this is how the rest of the Roma perceive them as well. At the same time, the «kardarashi» despise the other Roma. They call them «dust» or «garbage», while the latter, for their part, respond with resentment.

d) Individual differentiation through emphasis on personal and/or family qualities.

This strategy of differentiation could be called modern because it rests on individualism. It is a direct reaction to the negative implications and group stereotypes concerning the Roma, very often enforced by the periodical press and the mass media (Mitev 1995: 184-185; Liégeois 1999: 175; Tomova 1995: 77). Naturally, all the interviewed, without exception, strive to be perceived as personalities, rather than by way of generalising and uniform (negative) stereotypes. This idea is most often fixed and is clothed in speech clichés. It is usually emphasised that in every community there are «good» and «bad» (i.e. the stigma of the «bad» should not be transferred to all the rest); there is an appeal at judging the individual qualities of each Roma, rather than placing all the Roma «under a common denominator».

Some of the statements have an element of an extramural dispute with the negative stereotype image of the Roma. For instance, Mr. S.F.K. from the village of Draginovo, points out that he respects the Bulgarian laws and has brought up his children accordingly (obviously in opposition to the stereotype perception by which all the Roma are criminals a priori). The strategy of discourse of Mrs. A.I. from the Fakulteta district in Sofia is similar. She proudly stresses that despite their poverty, no one in her family has ever had anything to do with the police. Mrs. K.T., also from the Fakulteta District, emphasises that her children are «well brought up Roma» (an obvious reaction to the perception of the Roma as «primitive» and crude people). Furthermore, she opposes them to the no less stereotyped view about «the Bulgarian children» as «impolite», because in her view they answer back to their parents and argue with them.
«Preferred identity»

The «preferred identity» or «preferred self-perception» phenomenon is associated with the three-stage model of the Roma identity (according to Marushiakova, Popov 1993: 102). It is also an expression of the Roma’s adaptability, repeatedly commented on in literature.

The «preferred identity» phenomenon can be found at different levels of identification. This means a choice and preference for some cultural features and their emphasis as emblematic at the expense of others. In its purest form, this implies self-presentation and self-perception of the Roma as non-Roma: most often as Bulgarians or Turks, more rarely as «Wallachians». Determining precisely whether «the preferred identity» is the fruit of manipulative behaviour, or whether it has been completely accepted internally, is nearly impossible. As noted in literature, what is important in determining the ethnic belonging is not only the self-perception of the personality or the group, but also the way in which they are perceived by «the others» (Tomova 1995; Marushiakova, Popov 1993).

The available material consents to outline the following mechanisms (or diversities) of the phenomenon discussed:

a) «preferred identity» on (meta) group level;

b) «preferred identity», which finds expression in rejecting Roma affiliation and identification (successful, i.e. accepted by «the others», or unsuccessful) with other ethnic groups;

c) dual identity;

d) changing identity within the frameworks of the life cycle;

e) marginal identity («zhorevtsi»).

a) «Preferred identity» at a group or metagroup level.

In the case of this «preferred identity» type it is not a matter of rejecting the Roma affiliation, but of changes in the consciousness of the group or the metagroup. So, some of the informants presented themselves as «Bulgarian Gypsies» or «pure Gypsies», bearing in mind that they are presently Muslims or were Muslims. It should be remembered that the ethnonyms «Bulgarian Gypsies» and «Turkish Gypsies» have been «the result of the mix-up of the confessional and the ethnic» and that «Bulgarian Gypsies» means «Christians», while «Turkish Gypsies» – respectively – Muslims (Marushiakova, Popov 1993: 96). In this sense, the presentation of the
Muslim Roma as «Bulgarian Gypsies» is also a manifestation of «preferred identity», though only on the level of the (meta) group. It is likewise clear that in such cases there is another common widespread phenomenon among the Roma – emphatically syncretic forms of religiousness (Marushiakova, Popov 1993: 165), which often forestalls the answer to the seemingly simple question regarding the person’s religion. This trend is present in half of the interviews. Four of the interviewed, representing themselves as «Bulgarian Gypsies» (i.e. Christians), have Muslim names by birth, while the Bulgarian names in their passports have been «acquired» during the Muslim Roma change of names carried out under socialism (about this cf., for instance, Liégeois 1999: 80). In these four cases, the Muslim name is used in the family and privately, whereas the Christian (Bulgarian) one is used mostly in official contacts with non-Roma. The ambivalent character of this strategy is obvious. I shall illustrate this with a quotation. Asked which of his two names (Asan or Vasko) his wife uses at home, Mr. V.M. answers: «She calls me Vasko, and Asan – the quick way. For, you see now, there, in Pancharevo they know me as Assen, almost all of them call me Asan. But when they, some Bulgarian boys, look for me for some work, they look for me using just the name – Vasko.»

The massive conversion (including that of the Muslim Roma) to the Protestant religion further complicates the picture (I dwell on this matter further on).

Five of the interviewed were born after the change of names and have Christian names, not only formally and by passport but by birth. Their parents’ names, however, are (or were) Muslim, which means that the five of them come from Muslim families. Anyway, the definitions of «pure» or «Bulgarian» Gypsy imply chiefly that their native language is Roma. In the specific cases, however, they also have another connotation: they reveal the intention of being set apart from «the Turkish Gypsies», probably because of the perception that the latter are less favourably received by the Bulgarian majority. It is not at all accidental that this phenomenon cannot be found among the Roma in the village of Draganovo, whose native language is the Roma, and are living in an environment of Bulgarian Muslims. Among those we interviewed (E. Mincheva and M. Benovska), only here the Roma defined themselves as erlii Muslims. The situation in this case is reversed. The common Muslim religion for the Bulgarian Muslims and for the Roma is an integrating rather than a disintegrating factor; therefore, the Roma make no attempts to change their religious and (meta) group identity.
b) «Preferred identity» which finds expression in the rejection of the affiliation to the Roma and identification with other ethnic groups.

This phenomenon is observed both in the interviews and in the cases of refusal to give an interview because of identification with the Bulgarians or with the Turks. The two cases of such a refusal call for a comment. In both cases, this is a matter of non-coincidence of the self-perception with the way «the others» perceive them. In other words, the neighbouring people (both Bulgarians and Roma) considered the two men who refused to be interviewed as being Roma, despite the fact that neither spoke the Roma language.

Gypsy scholars Marushiakova and Popov (1993: 105-106) note that whereas «pretending to be Turks» is a group strategy, pretending to be Bulgarians is most often an individual one, usually accompanied by breaking relations (family relations included) with the Roma community. Other authors as well, besides the above-mentioned ones, emphasise though that the preferred Bulgarian or Turkish identity of the Roma is usually rejected by the neighbouring Bulgarians and Turks (cf. Tomova 1995: 19-20). However, there is an interesting peculiarity. In the 18 interviews, the Roma whose mother tongue is Roma refer to the Turkish-speaking Roma as «Turks»; moreover, they mention the name «Turks», when listing the different Roma groups. It is hard to find a clear answer to the question whether this case is a matter of a partial success of the Turkish-speaking Roma in their efforts to present themselves as non-Roma.

A clear, even «classical» case of preferred identity is that of one woman who not only agreed to be interviewed, but also calmly answered the questions about the Roma, while stressing the whole time that she was «vlachichka» (Wallachian) and not Roma.

No doubt, the «vlachichki» are one of the Romanian-speaking Roma groups. In Pernik, however, where the interview was taken, this group is not well-known, while the informant herself had moved to Pernik from her native Varna region. This is why her strategy is successful to some extent. Yet, in quite a few cases, those around her received her as a Roma. At the time of the interview, she was working as assistant teacher in a school with a predominance of Roma pupils. The hesitation, however, is not only in the way «the others» perceive Mrs. R.S. To direct questions about her self-perception, she answers that she is «vlachichka». When speaking on a personal scale about discrimination cases, however, it becomes obvious that she identifies her-
self with «the minority». This last word is used in the singular form and with a definite report only in respect to the Roma, more often by the Roma themselves.

c) Dual identity

The interviews contain data about two cases of successful, seemingly complete changed identity. This is the case of an educated Roma married couple with a good professional self-realisation, living «dispersed» in Sofia, in a completely Bulgarian environment. Even in the preliminary telephone conversation preceding the interview, the woman openly revealed that no one – either in the residential district or at their places of work – knew that she and her husband were Roma. During the interview at their home, she specified: «I have not concealed this, I do not conceal it either, but neither do I say it. For instance, I am not one to come out and say – I am a Gypsy.»

Obviously, those around them unambiguously accept both as Bulgarians. Another interesting aspect in this case is that one of them was born in a mixed family of a Turkish woman and a Roma man. The everyday life, the material environment, and the ritual practices characterising this family are completely Bulgarian. In all situations, they speak only Bulgarian; they have a passive, rather small knowledge of the Roma language. Their two children are attending the best school in one of the most densely populated districts of Sofia. The children themselves learned belatedly about their Roma origin from their parents, at school age. The husband is related through his father with the Roma intelligentsia and/or elite. The trust they have in me (I have long known the wife) was the reason why the two of them shared that they had dual identity: they felt both Bulgarian and Roma. Directly after this, however, they added that the next generation – that of their children – would have an undoubted Bulgarian self-perception.

The dual identity finds different forms of expression. Their library features scholarly works on the Gypsies; they are well informed about the Roma problems, they regularly watch the «Roma World» TV programme. The fact that both have opted for a spouse of Roma origin is evidence in itself. Unlike other similar cases, the two of them maintain active contacts with their parents. At the time of the interview, their children were staying with the wife’s parents in the country. They celebrate holidays jointly with the husband’s parents and relatives living in Sofia. They do not approve the strategy of the husband’s brother, who is married to a Bulgarian. The partners of
that mixed marriage conceal the husband’s Roma origin, from their children as well, and avoid contacts with his Roma parents and relatives. This is particularly painful for the latter.

The difference in the strategies of the two married couples is obvious. The strategy of the second family (whom I do not know personally) is more radical, but probably more traumatic on a personal scale. It is hard to say whether the line of conduct they adopted is also enhanced by the fact that the wife is a Bulgarian. The informants’ behaviour is largely the result of their successful integration in the macro society as well. The preferred Bulgarian identity, according to them, is a guarantee of their children’s successful socialisation. At the same time, their sense of dignity and personal loyalty relates them to their second (in importance) identity – the Roma. Their emotional balance is directly dependent on their decision to keep up that identity too, in the first place through their relationship with the family kin of both.

An episode in that family’s life is quite indicative of the «dual identity» phenomenon. Around 1990, the husband (related to the Roma elite and/or intelligentsia) competed for the post of coordinator on the Human Rights Project (HRP), related to international organisations for human rights and the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee. The coordinator’s work is associated with uncovering cases of violation of the Roma’s human rights. After being confirmed and having worked for a very short time on the project, the informant resigned. He explains his decision by claiming that that occupation was insecure and very risky. The consideration of personal and family security proved stronger than the solidarity with the Roma community. This decision reveals a rational and purely individualistic strategy of managing one’s own life – something characteristic more of the Bulgarians than of the Roma. In other words, the identity’s Bulgarian component was decisive in selecting the behaviour.

d) Changing identity within the frameworks of the individual life cycle.

Among the 18 interviews, a type of dual identity in which one of the two dominating elements has changed at a certain period of life and under specific circumstances can be found in three of them. In all three cases, this happened to representatives of the Roma intelligentsia – two men and one woman with university education. All three of them had preferred Bulgarian self-perception, but their commitment to the Roma community problems brought their Roma origin in the foreground amidst the Bulgarian community. From that point on, the preferred Bulgarian identity was
replaced by a contradictory dual identity. They are perceived as «others» by both Bulgarians and Roma. The Bulgarians start treating them as Roma, whereas the Roma treat them as «gadjo» ('foreign', i.e. Bulgarian).

This duality is most clearly shown in the interview with the young Mr. P.R.M. from Sliven, current regional coordinator of the HRC. It began in his childhood, spent in a Bulgarian environment: the family lived in the Bulgarian residential districts of Sliven. However, he would spend his holidays with his grandparents in the Roma district and the attitude towards him was as to a «foreigner» or «gadjo», as to a Bulgarian. Interviewer Elka Mincheva notes that throughout the interview one could sense that P. has felt insulted by both communities (the Bulgarian and the Roma) who do not accept him completely.

While there is some similarity in the life histories, in the case of Mr. M.S.G. from Pernik the internal conflict between the Roma and the Bulgarian identity elements proceeds in a more dramatic form reaching a different outcome. Over a long period of his life he had declared to be and had been accepted as a Bulgarian. Due to his human rights activities, the Bulgarian community knew about his Roma origin. Certain episodes of his life, especially his dismissal from work in 1997 and subsequent lasting unemployment, have completely changed his views: «The Bulgarian racists have taken me to the point where I am proud of being a Gypsy. Otherwise, I have accepted this as nonsense. I am proud to be a Bulgarian».

In another part of the interview, this contradiction is even more acute. M. perceives himself as a Bulgarian, though stating that «he is thirsting» to take revenge of «the Bulgarian racists», who made him feel «100% Gypsy». Moreover, M. not only plans revenge, but also organised conspiratorial activities, which would lead to the emergence of a Roma administrative autonomy in Bulgaria.

The change of preferred identity could also be found in the interview with Mrs. N.A.G. from Sliven. Her life history has another interesting detail; i.e. that her grandfather – her mother’s father – was a Russian from the White Guards. N. speaks Russian perfectly, yet Bulgarian and Roma elements are foremost in her self-perception. Like M.S.G., however, N.’s active involvement in the Roma community problems (joint work with the Belgian Red Cross) has led her to state her Roma origin in front of the Bulgarian community. This has changed the attitude of her colleagues to herself for the worse. «Now I have understood that it is not very agreeable to be a Gypsy.»
The three life histories indicate the unstable nature of the «preferred identity» phenomenon. The strategy of identification with the Bulgarians, painstakingly maintained, can easily collapse, even when that identification is not only external, but matches the inner conviction in one's self-perception as a Bulgarian. In some cases, this traumatic personal experience causes the emergence of a reciprocal Roma racism, thus reflecting the negative Bulgarian stereotypes towards the Roma as in a distorted mirror.

e) Marginal identity («the zhorevtsi»).

Researchers Marushiakova and Popov (1993: 98, 100) define the «djorevtsi» (zhorevtsi) as a group that has taken shape as the result of mixed marriages, mostly between Roma and Bulgarians. The word itself means «mule» and belongs to the pejorative ethnonyms given by some Roma groups to others and reflects the internal hierarchy in the Roma community. The idea of a mix-up and the marginality it implies need no further comment. The present situation substantiates this characterisation only to a certain extent, but it also reveals other different features of this group.

The youngest informant, twenty-year old T.A.Sh. from the Hristo Botev District in Sofia, identifies himself as «zhorevets». He was born in a mixed family of a Bulgarian woman and a Roma man, and unambiguously perceives himself as a Roma. He communicates equally well with Roma and with Bulgarians, but has obviously been received by «the others» as a Roma and has personally experienced acts of discrimination. T. doesn’t speak the Roma language.

The initial definition of the zhorevtsi as people born of mixed marriages, no longer fully corresponds to the changing reality. It is not accidental that this is recognised and clearly explained by some of the interviewed. All the five Roma interviewed from Pernik define themselves as zhorevtsi and emphasise that this is the overall characteristic of almost all the Roma in Pernik. Of the five Roma residential districts of the town, four are inhabited by zhorevtsi and one by «Turkish Gypsies», who, however, prefer to present themselves as «Bulgarian Gypsies». According to preliminary data of the latest 2001 census, the Roma in Pernik number about 15,000 denoting the mass nature of the zhorevets' self-determination. Quite a large group of zhorevtsi lives in the Hristo Botev district in Sofia and the erlii Roma perceive them as something halfway «Bulgarian and Gypsy». Moreover, the original pejorative meaning of the word has been forgotten and the rest of the Roma now consider them «good people».
Two of the zhorevtsi interviewed made attempts to characterise their own group. According to young Mrs. P.P.A. (a university graduate from Pernik), the zhorevtsi are «assimilated Roma». They speak no other language but Bulgarian. Among them, there is recognition of the fact that some Roma traditions (for instance the early marriages at the age of 13-14 or the indifference towards education) cause the unequal social situation of large masses of Roma.

Mr. M.S.G. analyses the character and origin of the zhorevtsi, and at the same time lends them a mythological tinge. He rejects their Roma origin, voicing the supposition that there is a «West-European» element and cites (arbitrarily and even incorrectly) the work by well-known French scholar Liégeois. The multiple and shifting nature of this identification strategy needs no comment. The same hesitation, however, can be detected in the interviews with zhorevtsi less tempted by philology. Mr. A.S.A. defines the zhorevtsi, to whom he belongs, as «Bulgarian-speaking Roma» and states: «I come from a Roma family, I am a Roma, and I am fully proud and openly say that I am a Roma. Because, nevertheless, this is a good nation, ours.» This does not stop him from noting a little later: «I just feel a Bulgarian. That means I have become integrated into the way the rest of Bulgarians live in Bulgaria, I live in the same way.» His statement regarding the Roma traditions is symptomatic as well: «Any Roma traditions. I don’t even know which are the Roma traditions.»

The following conclusion may be drawn from what has been said by and about the zhorevtsi so far. They increasingly perceive themselves as a group with specific features of its own (and, respectively, turn into such group), the most distinctive one being the acceptance of Bulgarian as their mother tongue along with the partial loss of the Roma cultural identity. The mixed marriage origin has ceased to be their distinctive feature. The hesitations in the self-perception of the zhorevtsi have actually been enforced from outside. They painfully undergo and deeply feel the refusal of «the others» to recognise them as Bulgarians and this is the main source of their confusion. Under better economic and social conditions, the zhorevtsi would probably fully convert their Roma identity into a Bulgarian one, one generation from now. Such a precedent has already been noted in literature – this is the group of the agupti, who not only changed their identity, but also the perception of the «others» around them (cf. Tomova 1995: 20-21).
Roma self-perceptions

It is noted in literature that owing to the Roma culture’s heterogeneity, a uniform Roma awareness can however be found among «part of the representatives of the Roma intellectuals» who have been striving (unsuccessfully so far) for the Roma’s political unification (Tomova 1995: 21; Marushiakova, Popov: 103).

The interviews confirm this observation to some extent. Expressions like [Roma] «nation», «national self-perception», «national dance», can be found only in the conversations with representatives of the Roma leaders and/or the intellectuals, moreover not with all of them.

This finding does not imply a complete lack of a common Roma identity. Besides some situations (Marushiakova, Popov 1993: 103), the Roma self-perception is disputed also:

a) when a direct request to appraise the Roma distinctive characteristics is addressed to the informants, and

b) finds expression in folk narratives, interpreting the Roma origin and characteristics.

a) Characterisation and appraisal of the Roma about their own selves.

Personal frustrations

The interviewed are almost unanimous in some of their self-appraisals: the Roma are skilful craftsmen; merry-making and music is «in their blood»; among them there are a great number of talented musicians. However, the claim that they only make merry and do not work (Mitev 1995: 181) is not truthful. Most of the interviewed reject the Bulgarians’ stereotype conception that the Roma are lazy (Mitev 1995: 181) and do not want to work as being untrue. Some of the interviewed reject the idea of the irresponsibility of the Roma by setting apart «their» group (in this case the erili), whose representatives «keep their word». The stereotype that the Roma tend to commit crimes (Mitev 1995: 181) and are dirty is rejected as well. According to two of the interviewed, the Roma are noisier than the Bulgarians or quarrel among themselves more often. Concerning the Roma’s ability to manage their funds, opinions diverge. Some of the interviewed believe that Bulgarians know how to manage their funds, whereas the Roma spend what they earned during the day and remain penniless again; however, most reject this idea. Moreover, challenging precisely this stereotype, the two Muslim Roma from the village of Draginovo note
that during the summer the Roma families set some money aside and make food preserves for the winter\textsuperscript{18}.

About one-third of the interviewed comment on the fact that they have no «state of their own» in two opposite ways: it is a source of low self-confidence, and, conversely, a motivation for loyalty to Bulgaria, which is their homeland.

An inseparable part of the Roma's self-perception is the assessment of their own economic status. There is an almost unanimous view that being a Roma means being «poor and miserable». Some of the interviewed acknowledged this perception's simplistic character.

The «Roma traditions» are part of the self-perception. They point out some specificities of the family and kinship relations as a Roma feature. These are the early marriages and the requirement that the bride be a virgin at marriage, the «patriarchal spirit» of the Roma – respect and subordination of the young to the elder (regarding the latter cf., for instance, Nunev 1998: 32-33). It is noted that these specificities are changing under the impact of modernisation and economic hardships.

Obviously, a considerable part of the self-appraisals of the Roma reflect the stereotypes of «the others» (mainly of the Bulgarians) regarding them. The strategy of the interviewed is also obvious in their effort to reject the uniform negative stereotypes. Even the fully positive perceptions of their own community contain elements of a concealed dialogue with the negative stereotypes of «the others» («honest», «talented and beautiful», «a good people») revealing solidarity and more empathy than the Bulgarians.

The one romantic formulation about the Roma as free people looks at the past and ends with the sceptic hesitation: «A man, a Roma, how must he feel?… The Roma, as a definition from olden times should have been a free man, doing whatever he wanted, wherever he wanted, according to his discretion about himself and about his family. A free and broad soul. His table should be overladen, his house should be full, his children fed, clothed, and shod. This is the Roma. The Roma of one time, from once upon a time. In our time no matter whether the Roma person feels a Roma, he wants to feel a Roma, but I do not know whether he can.» (A.D.I., Sofia).

What surfaces is a clear perception that the very ethnonym Gypsy is a pejorative byword, a synonym for a dishonest and unworthy person (moreover, not only in Bulgarian, cf. on this matter Liégeois 1999: 173; Marushiakova, Popov 1993: 212-213).

A smaller part of the interviewed – representatives of the Roma intellectuals – tries to present a neutral analysis of the Roma culture, voicing concern over some of its
features. Conversely, the uneducated Roma and those with a low education almost fail to formulate any perceptions about the Roma community.

The Roma’s self-perception has a clear-cut psychological projection as well. It is often associated with the adoption and acceptance of «the external» assessments that «the others» make about the Roma and hence the depression and the negative self-perception on the level of the individual. In other words, the individual often transfers the negative expectations onto himself and this reflects on his or her behaviour: «Sometimes I lose the confidence that I could be successful somewhere, because I have the prejudice of being a Roma and would not be able to complete some set job. And my prejudice is in the fact that I know that I am a Roma, and I know that we are not respected and loved.» – A.S.A., Pernik. A similar statement is in the interview with M.S.G. from Pernik.

Obviously, stating that the self-perception as a Roma implies traumatic experience would not be an exaggeration. About the extremely offensive epithet to the Roma men as «mangal», the same A.S.A. from Pernik says that when he is addressed this way, «I have the feeling that I have been lowered down to the earth and I cannot raise my head.» The negative self-perception is confirmed every day by the attitude of those around them. Therefore, two of the interviewed shared their confusion about the fact that while travelling on the city transport in Sofia, passengers draw away from them or pull their bags closer (in other words, express a fear of theft in body language).

The question is indeed complicated, as far as this is a defensive reaction and not a discriminating practice on the part of the non-Roma. Criminality among the Roma is the main element of the stereotype conception of them in the mass consciousness, but it is not just a stereotype or a myth (cf. Tomova 1995: 77). Two of the interviewed Roma women have also been victims of thefts, performed by other Roma. What has been stated does not, naturally, refer to cases of unmotivated and brutal violence on the part of the skinheads. In three of the interviews, there is reference to two such cases (in Sofia and in Sliven).

b) Perceptions, myths, and narratives about the origins of the Roma.

According to the older, traditional Roma perception, the original homeland of the Roma is Egypt, from where they set off into the world (cf. Sheitanov 1941; Statelova 1998; Marushiakova, Popov 1993: 202). Now the scholarly thesis about their Indian origin is becoming popular among the Roma as well. Some of the interviewed (with-
out or with low education) have no idea about their ethnic group’s origin. Two others, related to the Roma intellectuals and/or elite, mention the Indian origin of the Roma. One of them is the local coordinator (in the village of Draginovo) of the Tsar Kiro Roma Party. According to him, 20 or 30 million Roma are living in India. Mr. A.D.I. from Sofia, who has travelled abroad and has had personal contacts with Indians, thinks that the Roma descend from the Sikhs. According to him, the latter are at the top of the hierarchy in Indian society’s groups.

Cases of imitation and adoption of Indian cultural practices (the so-called «Indian weddings» – cf. Marushiakova, Popov 1993: 202) are indicative of the trend towards identification with India. Moreover, a videotape, documenting the First Summer School of Roma Language and Culture held in Varna in 2001 (to train Roma university students and young intellectuals), shows the well-known Roma intellectual Hristo Kyuchukov, organiser of the school, clothed in an Indian costume. Taking part in the training are also lecturers from India, which means that the interest of the Roma for India is not unilateral. Obviously, some Roma have an inner need for an identity that would not place them in the role of a minority. The idea of an original ancient homeland, no matter how remote the link should be, proves an attractive alternative.

The Roma's Indian origin is discussed in one of the narratives recorded during field research. This is a recorded text narrated by S.F.K. from the village of Draginovo, Velingrad region. The Indian origin of the Roma is associated in this case with Alexander the Great. S.F.K. experiences all his stories as real history. According to him, when Alexander the Great came to the lands of India (there is no reference to their conquest), there was a powerful Roma state. A great number of young Roma, coveting money and power, joined the army of the great commander as hired soldiers and thus reached Europe.

This legend in the shape of history is not the storyteller’s chance flight of fancy and this is obvious from the interview’s context. An unrelated Roma from the same village had told me the same story three years before.

The narrative’s contents are associated with the informant’s political commitment as a local coordinator of the Tsar Kiro [King Kiro] Roma Party – a party that competed (unsuccessfully) in the 2001 parliamentary elections. The party’s leader with the same name – Tsar Kiro [King Kiro] (Mr. Kiril Rashkov) can obviously be compared to the familiar phenomenon of «Gypsy kings» (cf. Marushiakova, Popov 1993: 51).
The informant’s political ambitions have certainly been a catalyst of the narrative creation, which aims at structuring the Roma identity, ascribing a glorious history to the Roma. The latter is explicitly stated as a clear strategy of the storyteller. The subject of the origin and culture of the Roma has been constantly on S.F.K.’s mind and some of his other stories are dedicated to it as well. There is a narrative strategy of establishing a logical and chronological relationship among them (their actual performance during the interview is analogous). Another peculiarity of these stories is the endeavour to combine the «Indian» and the «Egyptian» version about the origin of the Roma. The association of the Roma with Egypt, as well as their expulsion from Egypt, is explained in a fairy-tale style.

The later historical periods are also interpreted (the crusades, the Genghis Khan period, the Ottoman rule in the Balkans). The text about the arrival of the Roma in Europe as hired soldiers in the army of Genghis Khan deserves greater attention. S.F.K. deduces the etymology of the ethnonyms Gypsies from the name of Genghis Khan. The comparison between the two texts – the one about Alexander the Great and the one about Genghis Khan – clearly shows an endeavour to construct «a glorious past» as a tested means of structuring «national» identities.

Moreover, S.F.K.’s «narratives» favourably interpret some features of the Roma culture: nomadism, the fortune-telling skills of the Roma women.

Whether and to what extent these texts have become folkloric (i.e. how far they have been assimilated within a definite social environment) cannot be assessed. Most probably, they are not just the fruit of individual imagination, since some of them have published variants. The overall impression is of a sort of «mythology of power» among the Roma. This is also a strategy to make up for the absence of a state of their own, which is traumatic for the Roma. This becomes increasingly clear if a comparison is drawn with other (published) Roma legends, which discuss the poverty among the Roma, their hardships, the unwritten nature of their culture, etc. (cf. for instance Nunev 1994: 49-62).

Within the context of what has been stated it is not surprising that in informal conversation after the interview, the informant gave free rein to a sort of «Roma nationalism» (ideas about a future Roma administration of Bulgaria, for instance). Obviously, the latter has been associated with the political ambitions of the Tsar Kiro Roma Party. Mrs. P.P.A. from Pernik recounted narratives about the origin and the character of the Roma as well. P. learned about two of the four texts (three legends and a fairy
tale) during the special course for assistant teachers in Roma schools (about this, see further on). The other two she knows from her grandmother.

Two legends interpret the salvation of the Roma from destruction in a religious-cum-mythological and quasi-historical way. The heroes are the legendary Roma «saint» Bango Vasilii and the Bulgarian Tsar Boris III. These legends reveal the self-perception of the Roma as an endangered community, which is the object of persecutions. The Roma are shown in another way in the fairy tale about their slyness, finding their way out of any situation. In this case, the Roma are presented in a positive light (poor and noble, but also smart and sly). Through the fairy tale and its comment, the storyteller lays stress on the Roma’s slyness. The positive perception of the Roma is obvious; it discusses adaptability, a quality noted in scholarly literature too.

The two storytellers share the existence of a perception of the Roma as a community, notwithstanding this community’s heterogeneous nature. Moreover, both informants have been or are involved in the Roma political structures to a different extent (S.F.K. – in the Tsar Kiro Party, and P.P.A. in EuroRoma). This puts the next paragraph’s question to the fore.

The Roma elite and cultural management among the Roma

Of the 22 persons interviewed, six are current or former activists of various Roma NGO and/or political parties. Of course, this is not the actual quantitative proportion of the Roma elite and the rest of the Roma population. The greatest presence of the Roma activists among the interviewed was intentional in view of studying their activities and their impact. What is at hand is a clear contrast between the informants who are committed with Roma organisations and those who are not. The non-committed informants, particularly those with no or low education, know nothing or almost nothing about the Roma organisations and substantiate their lack of interest towards them by an a priori distrust. Noted in literature as well, the latter can also be one of the explanations of the Roma’s inability to organise.

Most generally speaking, the Roma NGO deal with judicial, educational, and social activities. Fairly often, however, they carry out cultural management and/or cultural engineering. This extensive subject requires independent investigation. I shall mention only the most important elements. The worries and efforts of the Roma intellectuals for the preservation of the Roma cultural identity are predictably connected with the projects, which are generally financed by international organisations
and institutions. I have already mentioned the summer school to train young Roma intellectuals and Roma language and culture students in Varna (2001), reflected in the interviews. The drafts for the school familiarisation of Roma children with Roma culture have similar orientations, mentioned in the interviews with two of the schoolmistresses attending that training.

However, whether or not the cultural knowledge popularised via these projects is original Roma culture knowledge remains an open question. Couldn’t this be an integral Roma culture, structured «from the top», which has actually never existed? The same question regards the training in the Roma language (there are textbooks to study it). Though I am not sufficiently competent in this sphere, even the unified Roma language seems a sort of «invented tradition»22. Following this line of thinking, I also wonder about the role of the academic community (or rather its individual representatives) in these processes. Only impartial experts in linguistics, however, can provide a reliable answer to these questions.

The formation of «invented traditions» can also be found in the activities of a small Roma NGO in Pernik (O Romano drom ‘Roma path’), carried out by the young S. family of Roma intellectuals. Combining social and cultural activities, they have set up a youth amateur dance ensemble, recruited among the young people of endangered groups. The preferences of these young people are more for the Latin American dances. At the same time, however, they dance in costumes, revealing the idea of a «national» Roma costume (long and bright coloured skirts for the girls)23. It is not difficult to determine that the costumes’ original cannot be found in Roma traditional culture. In this case, one cannot claim that the S. family are structuring some sort of «Roma nationalism» (this is obvious in the very combination between the Latin American dances and the idea of «national» Roma costumes). Nevertheless, the «invented tradition» is here.

What has been stated should not have the ring of suspicion to the Roma intellectuals. For some of these people, the cultural activities financed by foreign organisations and institutions are a sort of labour employment, i.e. a way of survival.

Regarding the question of the uniform Roma self-perception, the trend of the deepening of the differences between the Roma intellectuals and/or elite and the rest of the Roma should be noted. The care to preserve the Roma culture and the search for a positive self-perception are increasingly gaining momentum among the Roma intellectuals. This process has become more tangible since 1997, when Bulgaria signed
the Convention of Minority Rights. According to data of the Roma programme of Open Society, Sofia, there were about 300 Roma NGO in 2001. The rest of the Roma display a negligible interest in these aspirations because they are busy securing their families’ the daily living. For instance, the behaviour of Mrs. A.I. from the Fakulteta District is indicative. She lives with other eleven members of her family in one single room. When I asked her about the legend of the Roma patron saint Bango Vasilii, she answered almost aggressively that she would send me (i.e. drive me out of her home) to Sali Ibrahim, a well-known Roma poetess and a relative of the informant. Her gesture was more than eloquent.

One-third of the interviewed did not answer the questions associated with the Roma identity, or did not understand them, revealing an indifference towards this range of problems against the backdrop of physical survival problems.

I have to briefly outline another question associated with the Roma NGO. Some have inherited the traditional forms of the Roma community life. For instance, the «Good Mother» women’s organisation is an offshoot of the earlier «londja» (cf. Kmetova 1992: 68-73), a kind of quasi-traditional mutual assistance fund, which collects membership fees and grants loans to its members. This example indicates that the Roma organisations are most diverse in character and are not always headed by representatives of the Roma intellectuals. Undoubtedly, it is an interesting research topic.

**Political orientation**

Four out of the 22 persons interviewed are members of political parties. Among them there is one member of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) while three are members of various Roma political formations («EvroRoma» – a Roma party of left-wing orientation; «Tsar Kiro», and «Kupate» – a right-wing Roma formation in the city of Pernik). The rest of the informants have no party affiliations and take no interest in the political parties. With the exception of one interviewed person, the others express their nostalgia for socialism. The opinions are remarkably unanimous; there was employment under socialism, including social benefits for all. The reprisal measures used by the socialist state against the Roma remain in the background. Only one of the interviewed (a Roma party activist) mentioned that the Roma had been «oppressed» under socialism, immediately adding, however, that at that time there was employment and bread for all.
Obviously, present-day problems are projected onto the assessment of socialism. The extremely negative evaluation of the current period (proportionate to the hard problems of the Roma in the post-socialist period – cf. Tomova 1995) enhances, by contrast, the positive view of socialism. This does not mean, however, that the Roma are steadfast and staunch supporters of the present-day BCP. Like the rest of the population in Bulgaria, the interviewed voice distrust and scepticism concerning parties and politicians as a whole.

It is hard to say how far one specificity of the Roma mentality – *assistencialism* – has any relation to socialism and its endorsement. Assistencialism can be found in almost all the interviews as a specific type of rhetoric. Discussing the social problems of the Roma, the informants spontaneously mention what is not «given» or what should be «given» to the Roma. This verbal «topos» can be found within various contexts. In the conversations with women about childbirth benefits, it becomes clear that the informants’ attention is directed most of all towards getting the benefits, and less to labour and the place of work that entitle to these benefits. One of the informants is illiterate, as are her three teenage children. She plans to send her youngest daughter to school because she «needs these 15 leva», i. e. the childcare benefits, which are not granted if the child does not attend school. Another woman complains that one of her daughters, who had a baby, does not receive maternity benefits. The woman is not concerned that employers pay these benefits and then only when the mother has worked before childbirth. According to my informant’s implicit logic, a person in need is entitled to expect social benefits (regardless of «by whom», «on what grounds» and «where from» these benefits are expected to be paid).

A phrase frequently used in the interviews was «no one pays any attention» [to the Roma and to their problems – M.B.]. The trait of relying on intervention and assistance, most of all on the part of the state, is obvious. In this respect, the interview with Mr. S.F.K is significant. Asked about the situation of the Roma in the world, he answers that in the other countries «the state secures all kind of luxury to them. Whatever they wish, this comes to them.»

Regardless of how assistencialism has been cultivated, it is a serious obstacle to the lasting settlement of the Roma problems and is one of the reasons why the Roma are frequently deceived by political manipulators employing populist rhetoric.

The Roma community in Bulgaria is the target of the most intensive political manipulations on the part of all major political parties and formations. This well-
known information, which is not, however, documented, is borne out by the inter-
views taken in the Fakulteta District in Sofia. The informants voice their indigna-
tion at the generous political promises, mixed with free grilled oblong pieces of
minced meat and beer, but forgotten on the very next day after the elections.
As I have already mentioned, the researchers note the Roma inability for political uni-
ification. The latest parliamentary elections held on June 17, 2001, confirmed this
observation's significance. Several Roma political formations took part in these elec-
tions. Added to the «EvroRoma» Coalition, known from the earlier elections (1997),
was the intriguing formation «TSAR KIRO» National Unification Coalition. I'll over-
look the obvious analogy with the name of the formation that won the elections
«National Movement Simeon II», whose leader is the former Bulgarian monarch and
present Prime Minister. More meaningful is that the «Tsar Kiro» party obtained very
few votes – a total of 0.5%, obviously much less that the electoral potential of the
Roma. Assessing the potential of the more familiar party – «EvroRoma», is difficult
since it did not participate in the elections on its own, but in a coalition. What causes
the Roma's lack of political unification? One of the possible causes is the frequently
discussed heterogeneity of the Roma identity and culture. Mrs. P. P. A. from Pernik, for
instance, who is related to the structures of «EvroRoma», considers that
«EvroRoma are kardarashi», i.e. dominated by kardarashi. Considering the tensions between the
kardarashi and the rest of the Roma, it is no wonder that the Roma's support is not very
extensive. Most probably, the explanation for the electoral failure of the Tsar Kiro Party
is similar. Just before elections – June 17, 2001 – the leader Kiril Rashkov (Tsar Kiro),
on the TV show with the largest audience in Bulgaria (Slavi's Show – BTV), explained
that he himself belonged to the «Serbian Gypsies», i.e. one of the kardarashi sub-groups.
Another interpretation can also be quite plausible. The Roma likewise have their
own individual preferences, strategies, and motivation for their actions. Unlike the
DPS, a party of the ethnic Turks, which enjoys the confidence and mass electoral
support from its electorate, not one single Roma party has won such confidence,
because it has not managed to prove it is upholding the interests of all the Roma.
Like the rest of Bulgarian citizens, even the Roma vote for different political parties.

Religious affiliation
The problem of the religious affiliation of the Roma is probably the most compli-
cated one and justifies to the highest degree the observation of the adaptability, flex-
ibility and multi-faceted, composite character of the Roma culture (cf. Liégeois 1999: 59). The Roma’s most characteristic strategies regarding religion are interconnected: a) syncretism of the religious practices, and b) dynamism and swift changes. The syncretism of the religious practices finds expression in the first place in the blending of Muslim and Christian religious practices. This peculiar feature was discussed earlier in respect to the «preferred identity» phenomenon. I mentioned that the Roma born in Muslim families (and with Muslim names) present themselves as Christian Roma. In line with this strategy are the practices, documented in the interviews, whereby families with a Muslim lineage and personal names celebrate Christian holidays or rituals. Scholars dealing with the Roma (not only in Bulgaria) note that some Roma groups have repeatedly changed their religious affiliation; quite often, determining the religion of a specific man, family, or group is problematic (Marushiakova, Popov 1993: 164-165; Radenkovic 2002: 188; Todorovic 2002: 175-186).

Owing to its intricacy and the incredibly motley empirical picture, this question needs independent investigation, which is impossible to accomplish here. Therefore, I shall dwell just on one specific aspect, which seems the most important and is apparently emblematic of the Roma’s religious life in the current historical period. This is the problem of the conversion to various branches of Protestantism.

Experts on Roma problems register «the great influence of the Protestant churches – Adventists, Pentecost churches, the Bulgarian Church of the Lord, Evangelists, etc.» (Tomova 1995: 22-23) among the Roma in Bulgaria as early as in the early 1990s. As Marushiakova and Popov rightfully note, this phenomenon is neither new nor Bulgarian alone. It came to the fore first during the inter-war period in Bulgaria. However, new branches of the protestant churches long operating in Bulgaria have been added nowadays (Marushiakova, Popov 1993: 165-167). It becomes clear from the interview with Z.I., priest of the Church of the Pentecost in Pernik, that this church has been in existence in this city since 1929 and his family has been part of it since. The interviews point to some changes in comparison with the earlier observations to which I have just referred. The devotion for the Protestant churches has gained even greater momentum and has become impressively widespread among the Roma. According to sociological surveys of 1994, the share of the Roma affected by the activities of the protestant churches ranged between 12% and 15% (Tomova 1998: 341). While the interviews were being taken in the Fakulteta district in Sofia, six Protestant churches were functioning there, whereas in the Hristo Botev District
there were two (according to data provided by the informants). The fact that of 22 persons interviewed, only three have not been affected by the conversion testifies that in 2002 it has been much more sweeping that in 1992-1994. Two of those three are a married couple, living outside the Roma community in Bulgarian environment. The third exception is Mr. D.D., a Muslim Roma from the village of Draganovo. However, his strategy is individual and is not common to all the Roma in Draganovo. Even in that village, with a compact population of Bulgarian Muslims and Roma Muslims, a part of the Roma community has converted to the Protestant religion and this has caused tensions between the two groups in the village.

Among the 19 attending the Protestant church, two no longer take an active part in the church service. Mr. V.M.D., a street person from the Pancharevo District of Sofia, confesses with simple-minded sincerity and regret that he has already «lost» the Evangelical church, because «he drinks». His wife, however, attends these churches regularly. The other case of withdrawal is quite different – this is young Mrs. P.P.A. from Pernik. She misses the ritualism characteristic of the Eastern Orthodox Church. She notes that she has not altogether given up the Church of the Pentecost, but she feels better in an Eastern Orthodox Church where she can light a candle and sense the fragrance of incense.

In other words, the attitude of these two towards the Protestant churches has been shaken, but they do not declare a complete withdrawal yet. All the other informants, however, are active, even inveterate churchgoers. It would have been simplistic and untrue if we had presented the massive attendance at Protestant churches as a sort of «fad». Religious values have seriously been accepted as innermost by about half of those converted to Protestantism, besides the too specific case of pastor Z.I. from Pernik. The vocabulary of these people has changed as well: even while discussing everyday problems they often pronounce the name of the Lord and emphasise that they rely on Him.

Particularly noteworthy are those who have gone from Islam to the Protestant branch of Christianity. Their adherence to the churches is no smaller: in the village of Draganovo, they have launched the initiative for the construction of a Protestant church in the village, which not very long ago had been homogeneously Muslim. The conflict cropping up with the rest of the village’s population has made them drop this idea (for the time being), but essentially the situation is unchanged. The case of the mother (E.I.S.) and her daughter (A.I.) from the Fakulteta District
(Sofia) who were born Muslims, is similar. E.I.S. born in 1936 is particularly assiduous and pays daily visits to one of the Protestant churches in the Fakulteta. Besides the attachment to the Evangelical churches, there is a lack of interest and of cognitive orientation regarding the differences among them. Besides pastor Z.I. from Pernik and his cousin A.S.A., only one other female informant clearly pronounced the name of the church she attended. Others called the local priest and his wife by name, yet they could not recall the name of the Protestant church they were attending. No precipitate conclusions should be drawn from what has been stated however. Neither this nor the syncretic coexistence of Christian and Islamic practices in the Roma environment, which is rather the norm, means that religion is not a value for the Roma. The exact opposite is true: among some of the interviewed there is a powerful personal faith that is rather a feeling, a sense, an experience of the numinous (according to the terminology of C.-G. Jung). However, this is not «formatted» by a strict adherence to the means of expression of religion.

What are the causes for the massive conversion of the Roma to Protestantism and what will its after-effects be?

A connection has been made in literature between the spreading of ghettos, social marginalisation, and anomie on the one hand, and the process of conversion on the other. It is likewise noted that this is an essential instrument for the social reorganisation of the endangered communities, as well as a mechanism for the preservation of the psychological balance (Marushiakova, Popov 1993: 166-167; Tomova 1998: 343). However, some «prosaic» explanations can be heard among the surrounding non-Roma population, regarding the «aid» in kind that the Roma receive from the churches.

On the one hand, the interviews confirm the psychotherapeutic effect of the collective experiencing of religious feelings in church, accompanied by forms close to the Roma culture (music, songs in the Roma language). On the other hand, the information about aids received from the Protestant churches is scarcely confirmed. The priests collect funds – «a tithe» in the words of one of the informants: sometimes merely symbolic sums, contributed even by the poorest. Aid is redistributed from the funds collected (purchase of medicines for someone ill among the poorest families). It should not be forgotten though that conversion is a process with two social actors: the Roma and the representatives of the Protestant churches. The interest of some of them (the Church of the Pentecost) in the Roma all over the world has been noted
in literature from the early 20th century to date (Liégeois 1999: 87). The liberalisation of religious life in Bulgaria after 1990 has provided suitable conditions for the free practice of various religions, both «traditional» and «new». The concomitance of these two factors, along with the alarming social processes occurring among the Roma, have been a good prerequisite to allure the Roma en masse into the Protestant churches. This is confirmed by a comparison with neighbouring Serbia where similar processes are likewise occurring, but are far less advanced (Todorovic 2003: 175-186).

No matter how difficult making appraisals without systematic ethnographic «live» observations would be, some data uncover that at times there are also manipulative actions on the part of the «brothers» and «sisters». There is information in literature about «wondrous healings» (Marushiakova, Popov 1993: 166); one of the interviews disclosed that the lyrics of the religious songs had been «dreamt» by Brother X. and Sister Y. These «methods» to reinforce faith require no comment, in my view.

What consequences could conversion generate? Two suppositions can be made. First, for some of the Roma who have adopted Protestantism, the conversion is not final; the mass sweep of this process cannot be characterised as a fad, but an element of allurement can nevertheless be detected. It is hard to assess how far the conversion will prove an enduring confessional change in the end.

Secondly, marginalisation is one of the causes for the massive sweep of the conversion; the latter, however, deepens marginalisation. In other words, the already predominantly Roma image of the Protestant churches, the localisation of churches (makeshift or specially built) in the large Roma districts once again closes up the Roma within their own community.

**Conclusion and suggestions**

Besides being heterogeneous, the Roma self-perception is also quite dynamic. Some traditional differentiations, as on the principle of confession between the Christian Roma («Bulgarian Gypsies») and Muslim Roma («Turkish Gypsies»), are beginning to lose their relevance. The strategy of some of the Muslim Roma (present or former) is to declare themselves Christians. This trend is also enhanced by the massive conversion to Protestantism, which involves some of the Muslim Roma as well.

The «preferred identity», which finds expression in the rejection of the Roma and the stating of some other ethnic affiliation (Bulgarian, Turkish, «Wallachian», etc.), may be successful (i.e. accepted by «the others») or unsuccessful. The attempts of the
Roma to present themselves as «others» are usually received with non-acceptance by those «others». Nevertheless, the Turkish-speaking Roma tend to achieve a partial success in their efforts to present themselves as non-Roma.

Regardless of the success or failure of the strategy for self-presentation, the preferred identity is characterised by its instability. This phenomenon has different variants, such as the dual identity, identity changing within the frameworks of the life cycle, and marginal identity (the case of the «zhorevtsi»). The dual identity is characterised by significant internalisation of the non-Roma component. The identity changing within the framework of the life cycle is an individual strategy, which, however, has usually been associated with traumatic past experience. Most significant are the changes in the perception and self-perception of the «zhorevtsi». Their initial perception as people of mixed marriages self-determining themselves as Roma has not disappeared. However, the name «zhorevtsi» refers increasingly to a whole group of Roma whose native language is Bulgarian and whose self-perception is contradictory. The other Roma’s initially inconsiderate attitude towards them is nearing being substituted by a neutral attitude. Under more favourable economic and social conditions, this group would have changed its Roma identity completely.

The heterogeneity of the Roma culture though does not imply the total absence of a Roma’s shared idea about themselves. Both positively and negatively coloured, the Roma’s self-perception reflects «the others’» perceptions about them. The language strategy of voicing these perceptions follows the logic of contrast and is aimed at rejecting the negative group stereotypes about the Roma. The positive views are associated with perceptions of the Roma as skilled artisans, talented musicians, and people fond of merry-making.

Quite often, however, the Roma transfer onto themselves and keep deep inside the «others’» negative stereotypes about themselves. This is associated with personal frustrations – depression and a feeling of inferiority.

Self-perception is also expressed in the legends about the origin of the Roma. These perceptions are associated with the figures of outstanding rulers and commanders such as Alexander the Great and Genghis Khan. The compensatory mechanisms are obvious: the endeavour is to overcome the Roma’s own underestimation. The construction of «a glorious past» is a tested means for the formation of the national identities.

The Roma’s strivings for unification, however, concern mostly the Roma intellectuals and/or elite. The differences between the Roma intellectuals and the rest of the Roma
on this question tend to increase. The concern for the preservation of the Roma cultural identity in some cases leads to the generation of «invented traditions» – the work of Roma NGO, but also of Bulgarian and international organisations related to them. These trends find realisation mostly in the educational and cultural projects.
The political orientations of the Roma are dominated by *nostalgia for socialism* as a period of social security and guaranteed labour employment. The adverse processes in the post-socialist period have wiped out the negative memories and have thus considerably changed the image of the socialist past. It is not clear whether the socialist nostalgia causes *assistencialism* as a psychological make-up and behavioural strategy of the Roma. Probably assistencialism itself is one of the reasons why the Roma are most often the target of political manipulators.
The political pluralism and Bulgaria’s adherence to the Convention for Protection of the Rights of the Minorities (1997) have enabled the existence of Roma political formations. Coming to the forefront in their rhetoric are the social problems of the Roma. Nevertheless, they have not achieved electoral success so far because of two possible reasons: the intergroup tensions among the Roma, and the preference for an individual rather than a group choice. This has been due to the Roma’s distrust towards parties and politicians.
The Roma’s religious affiliation is characterised by syncretism. The most significant trend in the religious life of the Roma is the conversion *en masse* to the Protestant churches, involving also the Muslim Roma. Despite its massive character, this is still a process rather than a *fait accompli*. Though filling a spiritual vacuum in the life of the Roma, the allurement of Protestantism also involves some risks. It is precisely because of its massive character that the conversion contributes to the Roma’s closing themselves up within their own community.
Given the situation of acute deterioration of the Roma community’s economic and social conditions of living in Bulgaria, the contradictory and often negative self-perception of the Roma is an additional factor, considerably hampering their initiative in coping with their problems. Obviously, the Roma community cannot solve these problems on its own. The multitude of projects – applied, academic, or practical – achieve but a partial success. The Bulgarian society has not yet become aware of the fact that the Roma community problems are actually problems of society as a whole. Therefore, there is a pressing urgency to give form to a comprehensive and long-range strategy aimed at the Roma community; something that has not yet been done.
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Издателство "Клуб'90. София.


Митев, П.-Е. 6.г.[1995]: Връзки на съвместимост и несъвместимост във всекидневието у християни и мюсюлмани (социологическо исследване).


Стателова, Р. 1995: "Страстите на една музика". – Български фолклор, 21,


Шейтанов, Н. 1941: Происход и история на циганите. – Български народ, Г. 1. София, 1. [Sheytanov, N. 1941: The Origin and History of Roma. – In: Balgarski narod 1, N 1. In Bulgarian].
According to experts in the study of the Gypsies, the Roma belong to the stage of community called «intergroup ethnic community». «At this stage of development, perceptions and awareness of a certain commitment emerge in individual large ethnic communities or group conglomerates, although they may not become united in a common organisation, may not establish common organs of protest, and may not obligatorily use a uniform, standard language» (Marushiakova, Popov 1993: 59-60).

Twelve interviews have been taken by myself personally and six — by Elka Mincheva, an expert in Gypsy studies.


I prefer the term «informant» to the term «respondent» because of the nature of the field research methods, aimed less at «formatting» the information obtained through the questions, and the freer presentation of the interviewed person’s individuality.

In 1994, I. Tomova noted the shortest life expectancy precisely among the Roma community, the low and deteriorating educational level (less than 1% of the Roma have university education, and only 7.8% - secondary education), 76% unemployment, which in most cases is a matter of long-term unemployment. — Cf. Tomova 1995: 59-61; Mitev 1995.


In this part of the interview, informant Mr. M.G.S. quotes I. Tomova’s study, but one cannot judge whether these are his own views, of which he finds support in the book, or simply what he says is just a retelling of this literary source. Cf. the pertinent passage in Tomova 1995: 22-23.

Elena Marushiakova and Veselin Popov introduce the term «preferred perception». I prefer here, however, the synonymous term «preferred identity», which is clearer and points to the intentionality of the individual personal choice.

Regarding the attempts to introduce intercultural education in some Bulgarian schools, cf. Grebenarova 2001.


In any case, this mixed marriage deserves attention since it differs from the predominating mixed marriages between Bulgarians and Roma. The Gypsy study experts Marushiakova and Popov point out (1993: 125) that the children in such families usually accept the Roma identity; such is also the case of the youngest person interviewed by me, Mr. T.A.Sh., whose mother is a Bulgarian, yet he has adopted his father’s identity and defines himself as a Roma.


Interview of M. Benovska taken from A.S. from the Hristo Botev District in Sofia, 20.01.2001.

Despite this statement’s obvious exaggeration, it should certainly be noted that researchers of the Gypsies define the «educated Roma» phenomenon as characteristic mostly of Eastern Europe, compared to the fear, widespread among Gypsies throughout the world (Liégeois 1999: 82-83), of the school as a «foreign» institution.

The Roma musicality and the Roma music deserve a separate discussion. On the one hand, it is a fact that the professional or semi-professional occupation with music is more common among the Roma than among the rest of the population in Bulgaria. A great number of well-known musicians from the sphere of folklore and pop music have Roma origin (cf. Peicheva 1999; Silverman 1995). On the other hand, individual stands have also been put forward in ethnic musicology that there is an element of exaggeration and myth in the conception about the Roma musicality. (On these matters, cf. Statelova 1995: 93-105; Georgiev 2000: 11-27).
A considerable part of the conversations and interviews are devoted to labour; clearly, it is an intrinsic value for the informants.

According to the assessment of Yosif Nunev, a Roma intellectual and leader, «the lack of responsibility» among the Roma is associated with the adverse processes accompanying life in the Roma ghettos (Nunev 1998: 60-61).

Making food preserves for the winter is a widespread strategy among Bulgarians. (cf. Benovska-Sabkova 1997: 113-123.)

The socially significant nature of the negative self-perception can also be seen in the analysis of Y. Nunev, the Roma intellectual, who refers to «shame or discomfort resulting from the difference in the origin; a sense of inferiority and oppression» among the Roma. (cf. Nunev 1998: 60).

The etymological interpretation of the ethnonym «Gypsies» as deriving from the name Genghis Khan has been documented in other previously published narratives. Regarding the variants, cf. Sheitanov 1955 [1994]: 19; Georgiev 1995: 52.

The term «mythology of power» was suggested by Elka Mincheva.

The bibliography of «Tsiganite/Roma v Balgaria» [The Gypsies/Roma in Bulgaria], included by experts Marushiakova and Popov to in the second Bulgarian edition of Liégeois's book 1999: 301-319, gives a fairly good idea of the textbooks and school aids in the Roma language, as well as the linguistic investigations of the Roma language.

Documented by E. Mincheva and I. Filipova on 30.05.2002 at a concert on the eve of the Child Holiday in Pernik, Moshino District.

I quote the names of the election bulletins from the 2001 electoral campaign.

DPS - Movement for Rights and Liberties, a party headed by Mr. Ahmed Dogan.
The Municipal Mosaic. www.undp.bg
Le rôle des ONG dans la reconnaissance des minorités
Le cas des Roms en Bulgarie

Depuis le démembrement de l’empire soviétique, les nouvelles démocraties d’Europe de l’Est se trouvent confrontées de plein fouet à leur diversité et complexité ethnique d’avant guerre. Dans un contexte de catarrhe économique, les différences culturelles internes sont exacerbées. Alors que les individus montrés du doigt, louvoient sur le spectre de leur identité individuelle la mieux recevable par la majorité culturelle, c’est leur étiquette ethnique, celle de minorité qui est brandie par les organisations internationales et les puissances occidentales pour lesquelles l’Europe de l’Est, espace d’enjeux stratégiques et de convoitise économique apparaît avant tout comme un espace démocratique de proximité à consolider et à sécuriser.

Dans le cadre du projet “Perceptions, Self-Perceptions and Social Organisation of Roma in Central and East European Countries”, relatif à la perception que la société globale et les minorités elles-mêmes ont de leur identité, il est intéressant d’ouvrir la discussion sur un acteur apparu depuis une dizaine d’années et situé à l’interface des populations et des pouvoirs traditionnels : les Organisations non-gouvernementales indigènes et indigénistes pour qui la gestion du problème des minorités est devenue un champ d’investigation prioritaire.

Cette étude partielle n’a pas pour ambition d’évaluer les activités des ONG concernées, mais plutôt de réfléchir sur les raisons de leur apparition et de découvrir la place qu’elles occupent dans le processus de reconnaissance de la minorité Rom et de construction de l’identité nationale en confrontant leurs orientations de travail et leur logique d’intervention.

I. Concepts et contexte

Questions de méthode

Répertorier les ONG Roms

A en croire nos différents interlocuteurs, il existerait entre 200 (Kovatcheva) et 350 (Maruchiakova) ONG roms en Bulgarie en 2002, mais il est impossible de les répertorier de manière exhaustive et définitive à une date donnée. On a d’abord pensé consulter les registres d’inscription, toutefois, il aurait fallu démarcher toutes les
cours locales sans avoir la certitude de trouver des bases de données à date, notamment en ce qui concerne les cessations d’activités.

Nos premières sources fiables ont été les deux des trois premiers répertoires des Non-Profit Organisations du Bureau local de l’Open Society Foundation, organisation créée par G. Soros qui s’emploie depuis deux décennies à créer un réseau d’associations partageant sa vision d’ouverture des sociétés. Les annuaires de 1995 et de 1998 (l’édition intermédiaire n’étant plus disponible et celle de 2001 en cours de finition) nous offrent uniquement la liste des organisations locales s’occupant des minorités et partenaires de l’OSF-Sofia, ce qui constitue malgré tout un panel suffisamment représentatif pour nous permettre de lancer notre recherche.

Un échantillon d’ONG pour nos investigations


Notre premier échantillon de 3 ONG étant insuffisant pour une approche qualitative, nous avons donc décidé d’intégrer des ONG travaillant sur les minorités en général et ayant des programmes en relation avec les Roms. Toujours en consultant le répertoire des partenaires de l’OSF-Sofia, nous avons, dans un premier temps, élargi notre liste de contacts au Bulgarian Helsinki Commitee (BHC) et au Centre international des problèmes des minorités et les réciprocités culturelles (IMIR) puis, dans un second temps, à des ONG indiquées par nos interlocuteurs, portant à neuf le nombre des ONG rencontrées. Les quatre supplémentaires étant : Human Rights Project (HRP), KXAM (Soleil en romani / KX), Zdrave i sotsialno razbitie (Santé et développement en langue rom / ZSR) et Creating Effective Grassroots Alternatives (CEGA).
Les ONG-R et les ONG-M

Puisque toutes les ONG rencontrées travaillent sur la question des Rom, nous nous sommes posés la question de l’existence d’ONG Roms et d’ONG non-Roms. Pour cette première classification, l’origine ethnique du personnel n’a pas pu être retenue, la plupart des ONG étant en effet composées d’un effectif mixte. C’est donc la spécificité de leur vision première, le fait que la population Rom constitue le fondement de leur intervention qui objectivera leur appartenance à l’une ou l’autre de ces deux classes (tableau 1). Ainsi, nous appellerons ONG-R, les ONG travaillant uniquement pour la minorité rom et ONG-M, les ONG qui historiquement travaillent pour la cause des minorités en général, mais qui ont, pour des raisons que nous verrons, ciblé toutes ou partie de leurs activités sur les Roms ces dernières années. Parmi les neuf ONG rencontrées, six travaillent essentiellement à la reconnaissance identitaire ou à l’amélioration de la condition des Roms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appellation</th>
<th>ONG-M</th>
<th>ONG-R</th>
<th>Date de création</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Studii Romani</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMIR</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BHC</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HRP</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity Balkan</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romani Bach</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEGA</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZSR</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KXAM</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Les concepts en jeu et leur articulation

Naissance et importance du concept de minorité pour les pays d’Europe de l’Est

Si les groupes minoritaires de culture, de langue ou de religion différentes ont toujours existé, il fallut attendre le début du XXe siècle pour qu’apparaisse le concept moderne de minorité, celui qui, derrière la notion d’infériorité ou de vulnérabilité d’un peuple ou d’une communauté au sein d’une population majoritaire, sous-
LE RÔLE DES ONG DANS LA RECONNAISSANCE DES MINORITÉS

entend la notion de protection. Cependant, après Guerre, l’ONU, qui venait de remplacer la Société des Nations préféra s’occuper du problème des minorités dans l’optique individualiste de la “Déclaration des Droits de l’Homme”1 qui resta la référence en matière d’action humanitaire jusqu’en 1976, date d’entrée en vigueur du “Pacte international des droits civils et collectifs”2 (ICCPR), et attendre encore décembre 1992 pour que la “Déclaration du droit des personnes appartenant à une minorité nationale ou ethnique, religieuse ou linguistique” soit adoptée par l’Assemblée Générale des Nations Unies ouvrant ainsi la voie aux initiatives régionales en matière de droit des minorités...

Depuis la fin de la guerre froide, ce droit des minorités a pris une importance considérable sur la scène internationale. D’autres organisations intergouvernementales dont le Conseil de l’Europe et l’OSCE (Organisation pour la Sécurité et la Coopération en Europe) ont entrepris l’élaboration de conventions et de traités dans ce sens (tableau 2). Aujourd’hui, les Droits humains sont devenus un point essentiel permettant d’évaluer le caractère démocratique des sociétés. Ce glissement du droit humain sur le champ de la politique internationale est particulièrement perceptible à travers les relations entre les anciens pays du bloc de l’Est et ceux de l’Ouest pour qui le traitement réservé aux minorités ethniques, culturelles et religieuses est devenu un critère d’adhésion à l’Europe.

L’internationalisme prolétaire n’a pas eu raison des vieux nationalismes. Des nations plus ou moins artificielles bâties par l’empire soviétique, émergent, aujourd’hui, les anciennes. Après 45 ans de politique d’intégration du régime marxiste-léniniste caractérisée par une tendance à l’assimilation des minorités, les nouvelles démocraties d’Europe de l’Est sont confrontées à un désordre politico-culturel et une crise économique qui les plongent dans un marasme dont elles semblent impuissantes à se sortir seules.

En Bulgarie, une véritable névrose du “sauve qui peut” s’est emparée de la société. De nouvelles frontières, internes, artificielles, basées sur les différences ethniques, culturelles et sociales s’érigent chaque jour entre les citoyens de ce pays d’autant plus que la précarité grandit, rendant difficile la consolidation du sentiment national et menant la vie dure au caractère démocratique de la société. Parmi les victimes de la crise, les Roms. Si la ‘bulgarisation’ et la sédentarisation de ce peuple a permis de les préservé de la pauvreté et de l’intolérance pendant trois décennies, la société traditionnelle tsigane a été profondément déstructurée. A l’effondrement du mur de
Berlin, privés de leurs repères, les Roms sont re-devenus les cibles privilégiées de violences à caractère raciste.

**Actualité de la reconnaissance juridique des minorités en Bulgarie**

Au-delà de l’élaboration de Conventions et de traités visant à protéger les minorités culturelles, ethniques et religieuses, et dans la foulée du Premier Congrès de l’Union Romani Internationale (Londres, 1971), la plupart des instances mondiales (ONU, Conseil de l’Europe et OSCE) ont élaboré des textes pour la défense plus spécifique de la minorité Rom et offert un statut consultatif à plusieurs de leurs organisations, encourageant ainsi les pays d’Europe orientale à revoir leur Constitution. Les Constitutions slovène, tchèque et slovaque mentionnent le statut et les droits spécifiques des communautés tsiganes vivant sur leur territoire, tandis que la Hongrie leur offre une protection juridique exemplaire sur le papier, à travers sa loi sur le *Droit des minorités nationales et ethniques* garantissant aux citoyens appartenant à l’une des treize minorités nationales, parmi lesquelles la minorité Rom, à la fois leurs droits individuels et collectifs et leur octroyant la possibilité d’être représentés au niveau local et national.

La loi bulgare quant à elle, reste ambivalente sur la question des minorités et se retranche souvent derrière l’report 5 de sa Constitution selon lequel : “*any international instrument which have been ratified by the constitutionally established procedure, promulgated and having come into force with respect to the Republic of Bulgaria, shall be considered part of domestic legislation of the country*”. La Bulgarie a ratifié les grands textes internationaux (ICESCR ; CRC ; CEDAW ; ICERD) mais on notera notamment son refus de signer le protocole complémentaire de la Convention européenne pour la protection des Droits humains et des libertés fondamentales (ECHR) garantissant la liberté d’association.

D’un autre côté, si la Bulgarie reconnaît l’existence de groupes ethniques en mentionnant notamment “*the right for everyone to develop his/her own culture in accordance with his/her ethnic belonging*” (Report 54 p. 104), elle ne mentionne nulle part le terme *minorité* et encore moins celui de *minorité nationale* parlant de : “*citizens whose mother tongue is not bulgarian*” (report 36) et ce, malgré la ratification de la Convention Cadre européenne pour la protection des minorités nationales (FCNM : 1994/98, ratifié en 1999 par la Bulgarie), dont l’report 3 stipule que “*Every person belonging to a national minority shall have the right freely to choose to be treated or not*
as such and no disadvantage shall result from this choice or from the exercise of the rights which are connected to that choice”.

Tableau 2 : Principales normes juridiques internationales et européennes en matière de droit humain:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Institutions</th>
<th>Principales normes juridiques concernant les droits de l’Homme et les minorités</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>ONU</td>
<td>UDHR : Déclaration universelle des Droits de l’Homme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>ONU</td>
<td>IDMCR : Déclaration des Droits des personnes appartenant à une minorité nationale ou ethnique, religieuse ou linguistique.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

En juin 1994, le Conseil des Ministres bulgare a adopté une résolution concernant la création d’un Conseil consultatif chargé de représenter les minorités ethniques, sans grands résultats jusqu’à aujourd’hui, du fait de la valse des gouvernements successifs. En 1994, on assiste à la création de the Interdependental Council on Ethnic Affairs qui est remplacé un an plus tard par le National Council on Social and Demographic Issues (1995), dont la publication du “programme for resolution of the problems of Roma in Bulgaria as an integral part of the National Programme for Social Development” n’a pu aboutir suite au nouveau changement de gouvernement. En décembre 1997, le nouveau parti au pouvoir (United Democratic Forces) crée à son tour son Conseil, the National Council on Ethnic and Demographic Issues (NCEDI),
et met en place un programme qui, pour la première fois, considère le problème Rom sous un angle autre que social.

L’apparition des ONG travaillant sur la question Rom

En Europe de l’Est, les ONG travaillant pour la reconnaissance des minorités, entre autres Rom, ont commencé à poindre aussitôt le changement politique, en réaction à l’apparition de la pauvreté et au retour de la discrimination: “Avant le changement politique, il était impossible de créer des organisations comme la notre, seules les administrations et la municipalité prenaient des décisions. Mais à partir de 1990, la priorité a été donnée au développement de la société civile et les ONG sont apparues ; il fallait vraiment faire quelque chose pour protéger les minorités, défendre leurs droits” (un avocat de Romani Bach).

Modélisation de l’inflation des ONG-MR

Si l’on consulte les deux répertoires des ONG partenaires de l’OSF-Sofia, on constate que le pourcentage des ONG-R, en comparaison à la totalité des ONG travaillant pour le développement de la société civile est passé de 1,5 % en 1995 à 10,5 % en 1998. Aussi, avant de nous arrêter avec plus de précisions sur ce qui a provoqué un tel essor, nous avons tenté de modéliser l’inflation des ONG-R passant de zéro à un chiffre résumé supérieur à 300 en 2002.


Sur la courbe, on remarque trois pics correspondant à une augmentation des ONG-MR en 1992, 1995 et 1997. A partir de cette constatation, nous avons divisé notre cycle de neuf ans en trois périodes :
- avant 1994 : 7 ONG-MR
- après 1997 : 18 ONG-MR

Le nombre de créations d’ONG - qui ne présume en rien de leur pérennité tout au long des neuf années - a plus que doublé à l’orée de la deuxième période. On peut en effet comptabiliser 7 créations d’ONG-MR à la fin de la première période et 17
créations au cours de la deuxième qui va jusqu’à la veille de l’année 1997. Le fait que, dans notre micro-étude, le nombre d’ONG créées pendant la troisième période (18) soit proche de celui de la deuxième (17), ne doit pas plaider dans le sens d’une stagnation du processus évolutif comme le prouve les 11 créations intervenues en 1997 et la probable existence de plus de 300 ONG-R en 2002 (plus de 25 % des ONG de l’échantillon ont été créées cette année là), mais plutôt nous faire penser à une étape dans la progression en nombre de cet acteur social local, ce qui serait plus facile à montrer si nous pouvions ajouter à notre échantillon de 42 ONG-MR, les partenaires de l’OSF-Sofia créés ces quatre dernières années.

Que s’est-il donc passé entre 1990 et 2000 qui provoque un tel intérêt des ONG pour les Roms de Bulgarie ?

Première période : 1990 - 1993


Si l’on considère notre échantillon, on constate que 1992 correspond à l’année de création de trois ONG, deux ONG-M : IMIR et BHC et une ONG-R : HRR dont les objectifs initiaux s’inscrivent clairement dans la vision de la société civile. La plupart des créateurs du BHC étaient engagés dans des actions pour la défense des droits de l’Homme avant même la fin de la période communiste et “sa vocation est moins de s’intéresser aux problèmes économiques et sociaux que la défense juridique des droits du citoyen” (V. Kanev, sociologue). IMIR quant à elle, a succédé à une première organisation fondée aussitôt après le changement à l’initiative d’un groupe de journalistes d’origines différentes et réunissant une centaine d’intellectuels pour aider les Turcs, et autres populations de religion musulmane victimes de la politique d’assimilation du gouvernement Jivkov à retrouver leur identité. Sa présidente est actuellement A. Zheliazkova, historienne. Alors que BHC et IMIR orientent leur action vers les minorités en général, HRP affiche dès le départ sa vocation à défendre spécifiquement les droits de la minorité rom en Bulgarie.
Avant 1992, il existait deux autres ONG-R : Movement for cultural, educational and social development of the Bulgarian Roma et Studii Romani. La première, basée à Sliven a été créée en 1990, année de l’avènement de la reconnaissance des Roms au niveau international, c’est à dire de la conférence de la OSCE sur la dimension humaine qui a abouti à un document final reconnaissant “l’existence de problèmes roms spécifiques” (Copenhague : 5-29 juin 1990). La seconde Studii Romani a été créée un an plus tard par deux intellectuels bulgares, Marushiakova et Popov, ethnologues, travaillant sur les Roms des Balkans et des pays de l’ancien Bloc soviétique. A l’origine, leur but était moins de contribuer à une reconnaissance juridique des Roms que de promouvoir leur culture à travers leurs recherches.

Deuxième période : 1994-1997

1994 est l’année où la Convention cadre pour la protection des minorités nationales a été adoptée à Strasbourg. Si cette FCNM n’est entrée en vigueur qu’en 1998, son adoption a encouragé les ONG pionnières à poursuivre leur travail pour les minorités et a déclenché de nouvelles initiatives d’autant que les Institutions intergouvernementales européennes allaient les soutenir plus concrètement dans leur action. Cette convention ne sera ratifiée par la Bulgarie qu’en 1999, mais c’est en 1994 que le gouvernement bulgare adopte une résolution concernant la création d’un premier organe consultatif censé représenter les minorités ethniques vivant en Bulgarie : the Interdependental Council on Ethnic Affairs.

Comme durant la première période, des ONG dirigées par des intellectuels continuent à apparaître : Diversity Balkan Foundation est une ONG-R fondée en 1994 sur l’initiative de H. Kyutchoukov, romologue, professeur en sciences de l’éducation à l’Université de Varna et linguiste. CEGA, ONG-M présidée par M. Milotcheva, historienne et dirigée par V. Georgiev, économiste, spécialiste en commerce international, a pour objectif le développement de la démocratie, travaille essentiellement dans la consultation et est actuellement orientée vers les projets en relation avec les Roms. Mais parallèlement, apparaissent des ONG basées dans les quartiers à proximité des populations en difficulté. La plus réputée de ces ONG intervenant sur le terrain, celle la plus couramment citée par nos interlocuteurs au cours de nos entretiens, est Romani Bach. Elle est présidée par G. Geogiev, juriste, et a pour premier objectif d’apporter une aide juridique et administrative gratuite aux plus démunis.
Troisième période: Après 1997


En 1999, la Bulgarie ratifie la FCNM et, le 22 avril, le Conseil des Ministres approuve un programme cadre pour une égale intégration des Roms dans la Société bulgare (Framework Programme for Equal Integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society : FPEIR). Ce document politique préparé par des organisations Roms en coopération avec le NCEDI et dont le but est de combattre les inégalités envers les Roms dans la société bulgare, stipule: “Roma in Bulgaria are the group which occupies the lowest level in social hierarchy. They are not adequately represented in the political life and in the government of the country. In the social economic aspect as a whole, the status of Roma is dramatically lower than the Bulgarian average, marked by high unemployment rates, deplorable living condition, bad health, high illiteracy rates, etc”.

En premier lieu, il prévoit d’amender bon nombre de lois existantes et en particulier d’inclure des clauses anti-discrimination dans le Code Pénal. Une loi anti-discrimination fait actuellement l’objet d’une étude par un groupe de travail constitué de membres des institutions d’Etat, des ministères, des ONG.

Malgré ses imperfections, ce programme cadre fut un premier succès pour les mouvements des droits de l’homme et les ONG qui s’attelaient à faire reconnaître le problème de la discrimination comme une des causes majeures des problèmes économiques et sociaux du peuple rom. Car bien que la Constitution bulgare renvoie au principe d’égalité: “There shall be no privileges or restriction of rights on the ground of race, nationality, ethnic self-identity, sex, origin, religion, education, opinion, political affiliation, personal or social status or property status” (art. 6 p. 83), ses termes ne protégeaient en rien les citoyens victimes de la discrimination.
Sur le terrain, il a des répercussions immédiates avec la création de nombreuses ONG-R dans les quartiers où en deçà de la loi, la discrimination se gère au coup par coup. De nombreuses associations ciblant leurs actions vers des groupes de population particuliers (Latshi Romani Roma Women Foundation ; Roma Youth Association, Roma Youth Independant Organisation, etc) mais aussi des organisations roms du même groupe politique que le gouvernement bénéficient de son soutien notamment financier. On citera Koupate Roma Public Council, qu’il nous a été impossible de rencontrer car il a quasiment disparu depuis le dernier changement politique. Parmi les ONG rencontrées, on citera Zdrave i sotsialno razbitie (Santé et développement), ONG-R fondée en 1998 par E. Antonova, médecin pédiatre. Ils interviennent dans la prévention des maladies et la promotion de la santé en particulier des femmes et des enfants roms. Actuellement, elle est présente sur le terrain, dans le quartier rom de Fakulteta et aussi dans les quartiers où travaillent les populations à risque (prostituées). KXAM, autre petite ONG-R (trois personnes à temps plein) créée en 1999 par L. Kovatcheva, travaille plus spécifiquement dans le domaine culturel notamment sur des projets concernant les femmes et les enfants.


II. Activités et réseaux

Les activités des ONG

Dans le sillon de leurs grandes sœurs internationales comme Amnesty ou Human Right Watch qui dénoncent régulièrement la violation du droit des Rom en Bulgarie depuis les années 90, les ONG locales se sont engouffrées dans la brèche constituée par le vide juridique, mais leur intervention n’est pas toujours facile à circonscrire.
**Typologie des secteurs d’intervention**
Nos ONG-MR ont pour la plupart un large éventail d’activités. Aussi, nous n’avons pas retenu la classification en 23 secteurs qui apparaît dans le répertoire des ONG partenaires de l’OSF-Sofia 1998, mais les 7 axes prioritaires énoncés dans le programme cadre du NCEDI, eux-mêmes regroupés en 5 domaines d’intervention comme suit :

- La loi : protection contre la discrimination
- L’éducation : lutte contre la discrimination notamment par la déségrégation / L’emploi
- La santé : salubrité des logements et éducation sanitaire / La régularisation du problème de squat
- La protection de la Culture Rom
- La participation des Roms aux médias

Si l’on considère nos neuf ONG, on s’aperçoit que leurs priorités tournent autour de trois pôles principaux : la reconnaissance juridique des Roms, les domaines éducatifs et les domaines culturels. Les ONG ayant vocation à défendre les droits de l’homme sont présentes à deux niveaux :

– celui de consultant participant à l’élaboration de lois anti-discrimination dans le cadre du NCEDI
– celui des affaires proprement dites, en tant que défenseur des droits bafoués d’un individu en particulier.

Ces organisations sont en général dotées d’un personnel formé dans ce sens et leurs actions se situent à la jonction des différents domaines. Elles interviennent aussi bien pour défendre un individu malmené par la Police, un élève qui se voit refuser l’accès dans une école bulgare ou une femme qui perd son emploi à cause de ses origines culturelles…

Ce qui nous importe plus particulièrement est de découvrir à quel niveau se situent les actions de l’acteur ONG-MR par rapport à la réalité du problème rom. Leurs projets sont-ils en accord avec la réalité sociale (l’urgence humanitaire principalement) ou les priorités politiques?
Tableau 3- Principaux projets et activités des ONG en relation avec les axes du FPEIR

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<th>Axes ONG-MR</th>
<th>Loi</th>
<th>Emploi</th>
<th>Éducation</th>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Média</th>
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L’éducation et l’emploi

Actuellement, plus de 15 % des enfants roms ne sont pas scolarisés en Bulgarie, 78 % n’ont pas dépassé le cycle primaire, 6 % ont le niveau secondaire et 1 % ont la chance d’accéder à l’université. Les raisons de cet abandon prématuré de la scolarité sont à la fois structurelles : il n’y a pas d’école secondaire dans les quartiers roms et rarement dans les villages, et conjoncturelles : elles tiennent à la pauvreté soit que les familles n’ont pas les moyens d’envoyer leurs enfants à l’école (payer les transports, la cantine, les fournitures, des vêtements décents, etc.) soit que les enfants sont considérés comme de la main d’œuvre indispensable à la survie de la famille et donc préposés à des petits boulots voire à du chapardage.

A l’heure actuelle il existe environ 300 écoles ou plus de 70 % des enfants sont d’origine tzigane (IMIR, Diversity Balkan). Elles sont en général situées dans les quartiers roms ce qui pose de nombreux problèmes tant au niveau de l’enseignement dispensé que de la socialisation des enfants et de leur intégration dans la société bulgare. Le niveau scolaire est reconnu comme étant très inférieur à celui des écoles bulgares, les enseignants sont bulgares, ils ne parlent pas le romani et ne sont pas formés pour dispenser un enseignement aux enfants des quartiers qui ne pratiquent au quotidien que leur langue maternelle.

“Faire en sorte que les enfants roms aillent à l’école” est la première priorité des ONG travaillant dans le domaine de l’éducation. Certaines travaillent sur la mise en œuvre de projets et d’autres les relaient sur le terrain. Une des manières de réduire ce problème est d’inciter les parents à envoyer leurs enfants à l’école et de les convaincre en
leur apportant une prise en charge financière et logistique mais aussi de développer des activités attrayantes et socialisantes dans ces écoles, telles que le sport, la danse, la musique pour retenir les enfants. Mais parallèlement, depuis 2000-2001, les ONG-MR du secteur travaillent sur le concept de déségrégation alimenté de projets à court et moyen terme. CEGA, IMIR et DBF sont engagés dans de tels projets et assurent par exemple le suivi et l’évaluation des enfants, la formation des professeurs, mais s’emploient aussi, comme DBFet IMIR à élaborer une méthode d’apprentissage de la lecture et de l’écriture appropriée pour les enfants bilingues. D’autres initiatives sont à noter : IMIR offre des bourses universitaires à des étudiants roms ou offre des cours à de jeunes roms incarcérés pour les alphabétiser ; CEGA fait intervenir des instituteurs de la communauté rom pour soutenir les enfants dans leur scolarité et faciliter la communication avec leurs enseignants bulgares. Elle trouve aussi des accompagnants pour emmener les plus petits à l’école ou envoie des médiateurs pour responsabiliser les parents.

L’intervention dans le domaine de l’éducation est donc surtout en relation avec la logistique et l’enseignement, mais elle peut aussi se situer au niveau de la défense des droits des enfants rom. Romani Bach, par exemple, fait intervenir ses avocats quand une école bulgare interdit l’inscription d’un enfant rom pour cause de manque de place ou de niveau insuffisant.

L’emploi est une autre préoccupation des ONG-MR. Le taux moyen de chômage est de 17 % en Bulgarie et il dépasse 80 % dans certaines régions. Là encore, les Roms sont les premiers à subir la conjoncture. Dans certains quartiers comme celui de Fakulteta à Sofia, où vivraient 30 à 35,000 Tsiganes, moins de 1,000 personnes auraient un emploi fixe, dans des sociétés de nettoiement généralement et seulement 2,000 à 2,500 toucheraient des aides sociales.

Dans ce domaine, A. Yvanova, directrice exécutive de DBF souhaiterait développer un projet de formation pour les jeunes Roms “à risque de délinquance, au profil psychologique fragile ou des enfants des familles pauvres souvent rejetés par les leurs” qui ont été placés dans des internats. Selon l’Agence bulgare pour l’emploi, les besoins existeraient dans l’hôtellerie, la restauration et les transports, mais le mieux, selon A. Yvanova serait de pouvoir offrir une qualification professionnelle à ces jeunes qui leur permette de s’installer à leur compte et d’éviter ainsi la discrimination à l’embauche (travail du bois, du métal, mécanique, plomberie). KXAM travaille aussi dans ce sens mais pour les jeunes filles et les domaines porteurs seraient la couture, la coiffure et l’esthétique.
Si l’on considère les cinq ONG-MR rencontrées intervenant dans le domaine de l’éducation et de la formation (*IMIR, DBF, CEGA, Romani Bach, KXAM*), tous leurs projets participent à la validation à un niveau ou à un autre, d’au moins un des six objectifs du programme d’intégration des Roms dans le domaine de l’éducation (tableau 4).

1 - La déségrégation des écoles roms  
2 - L’élimination de la pratique qui consiste à envoyer les enfants Roms dans des écoles pour handicapés  
3 - Combattre les manifestations à caractère raciste dans les classes  
4 - Offrir l’opportunité d’étudier le romani à l’école  
5 - Permettre l’accès des Roms à l’université  
6 - Mettre en place des programmes pour l’alphabétisation et la formation des adultes roms

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<th>Axes ONG-MR</th>
<th>Déségrégation</th>
<th>internats pour enfants roms</th>
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<th>Romani à l’école</th>
<th>Roms à l’université</th>
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**Tableau 4 - Principaux projets et activités des ONG en relation avec l’axe éducatif du FPEIR :**

*Le domaine culturel*

Le deuxième domaine important dans lequel interviennent les ONG-MR rencontrées est celui de la culture. Le programme pour l’intégration des Roms s’est fixé les objectifs suivants :

1- L’apprentissage de l’histoire et de la culture Rom à l’école
2- L’ouverture d’un centre d’éducation civique pour les Roms
3- Développement du folklore (festivals de musique, publication et vente de matériel audio, médiatisation)
4- La restauration et la réouverture du théâtre rom
5- Aide aux publications roms

On a vu que Studii Romani effectue des recherches et publie sur le folklore et la culture rom. L. Kovatcheva, a publié pour KXAM une biographie des personnalités ou intellectuels en romani, en bulgare et en anglais. KXAM a aussi effectué la traduction d’une anthologie de la poésie romani. Un de leurs projets est de diffuser une méthode d’apprentissage de la langue rom sous forme de un pack audio. KXAM souhaiterait aussi trouver un financement pour une compilation de musique rom traditionnelle, ce qui semble-t-il n’existe pas en Bulgarie et travaille sur un projet qui place le théâtre comme un moyen de préserver la langue rom. Six villes sont déjà pressenties pour cette tournée d’artistes rom interprétant des pièces d’auteurs roms. ZSR se sert aussi du théâtre comme vecteur de message pour lutter contre le SIDA…

Enfin, toutes nos ONG participent à la fête internationale des Roms qui a lieu chaque 8 avril, chacune à leur niveau, les juridiques organisent les rencontres avec les politiques et gèrent les relations avec les média. Cette année, pour la première fois, une messe a été donnée à l’Eglise Alexander Nevski pour honorer la mémoire des vétérans Roms et un défilé avec des banderoles pour sensibiliser les gens à leurs problèmes plus que pour exposer leur culture à eu lieu dans les rues de Sofia. Cependant, c’est dans les quartiers qu’ont lieu les festivités, matches de football, grands pique-niques, chants et danses, à l’initiative d’ONG qui apparaissent spécialement à cette occasion. On peut noter toutefois le concours de poésie romani organisé par KXAM.

Dans un autre registre, DBF forme des étudiants roms :
- à travers des séminaires en relation avec l’histoire de leur peuple : pourquoi ils ont été chassés, comment ils sont venus en ville, pourquoi il existe différents dialectes, les traditions importantes,
- leur offre la possibilité de participer à la collecte de la culture rom à travers des recherches en sciences humaines. Ils sont envoyés sur le terrain puis travaillent sur les matériaux accumulés qu’à leur tour, ils diffuseront à travers des conférences ou des écrits.
La participation des Roms aux média

Un autre point clé du programme d’intégration est la participation des Roms aux média. Beaucoup de média xénophobes existent en Bulgarie “des journaux manipulent l’information, ils font mention de crimes commis par les Tsiganes en gros titre et en première page du style : un voleur a attaqué un bulgare” (Romani Bach) ou encore “Nous voudrions créer une équipe qui travaillerait avec les média pour donner une image plus positive de la communauté rom, mais les média cherchent plus le scandale” (ZDS). Récemment une employée d’origine rom a été licenciée pour manque de compétences, injustifié lors d’un changement de directeur, nous a encore rapporté le chargé de relations publiques d’IMIR, etc.

Cependant, d’un autre côté, il existe des média des minorités que les ONG utilisent pour tenter de faire le contraire au niveau de l’opinion publique, pour dénoncer des actes de discrimination, assurer le lancement ou la propagande de certaines de leurs actions : “nous travaillons avec les radio, certaines chaînes de TV, nous avons par exemple diffusé un film sur l’histoire des assistants qui suppléent les maîtres d’école bulgares dans les quartiers” (CEGA). En relation avec le premier des deux objectifs fixés par le NCEDI “la diffusion de programmes sur les Roms”, les ONG participent à l’élaboration et à la diffusion d’émissions sur la question rom ou se plient volontiers au jeu des interviews. Plutôt que de subir les média, les ONG apprennent à s’en servir. De plus, certaines comme IMIR, ont un chargé de relations publiques, le journalis-
te Samir Polikar qui nous a reçu. BHC publie la revue “Obekiv” et emploie des personnes chargés du contact avec les média. Dans cette stratégie de diffusion de l’information _ certaines ONG ont un site internet (BHC, IMIR, HRP, etc.) _ la plupart de celles que nous avons rencontrées ont leur propre centre de documentation (CEGA, IMIR, BHC...) _ elles publient les travaux de leurs scientifiques et des étudiants qu’elles emploient _ et bien entendu, elles organisent ou participent à des conférences et séminaires de manière régulière…

Le NCEDI préconise aussi “la participation des Roms aux média”. DBF s’illustre dans ce domaine à travers son programme de création d’émissons radio et de petits journaux par les enfants des écoles mixtes, un exercice qui, au-delà de la découverte du monde médiatique et l’éveil d’éventuelles vocations, a le double intérêt de faire découvrir l’histoire des roms aux enfants et d’aider les enfants de langue maternelle romani à acquérir une certaine aisance d’expression.

**Le secteur sanitaire et social**

Malgré la forte orientation des activités des ONG-MR rencontrées dans les domaines de l’éducation et de la culture, il faut reconnaître que la misère de la communauté rom ne vient pas uniquement de la discrimination. Le secteur de la santé est le plus à même de nous éclaircir à ce sujet.

Parmi les ONG rencontrées une seule intervient dans le domaine socio-sanitaire. Deux aimerait participer au développement d’infrastructures dans les quartiers roms (Romani Bach et ZSR), mais cela implique des actions lourdes, à suivre sur le long terme et semblent en contradiction avec la politique d’intervention à court terme de type “coup ponctuel” des ONG, et par conséquent relèverait plus de grands projets gouvernementaux.

Selon le dernier recensement, 44 % des ménages roms auraient un membre de leur famille malade et 20 % en auraient deux ou plus. L’espérance de vie de cette minorité serait à peine supérieure à 50 ans et la mortalité infantile particulièrement élevée. Les principaux facteurs sont les mauvaises conditions de vie, une alimentation insuffisante et déséquilibrée et une absence d’environnement sanitaire. On trouve dans les communautés rom des pathologies comme la diphtérie, la tuberculose ou encore la poliomyélite et de nombreux handicaps physiques dérivés ou non de ces maladies, sans oublier le cortège des M.S.T.

Il y a quatre ghettos bien connus à Sofia et aucun ne dispose de structures de soins
appropriées. A titre d’exemple, le quartier Fakulteta, le plus grand des quartiers rom de la capitale, est à plus de 4 km de l’hôpital le plus proche. Au milieu des années 90, un centre de soin y a été monté sur des fonds privés, mais l’expérience s’est soldée par le départ des médecins bulgares au bout de quelques semaines “après qu’ils aient utilisé cette opportunité pour se faire connaître et trouver des clients” (Romani Bach). La municipalité participe volontiers à ce type de projets dans la mesure de ses possibilités, en mettant notamment des bâtiments à disposition ou en procurant l’équipement, mais elle ne peut prendre en charge le 1 lev que chaque client est tenu de payer à chaque visite, qu’il soit assuré ou non. Certaines ONG comme Romani Bach cherchent les moyens _ d’assurer la prise en charge de ce montant _ mais de convaincre des médecins de venir s’installer ou simplement consulter dans ces quartiers.

L’éducation sanitaire est primordiale pour cette population particulièrement isolée. Mais au-delà de l’isolement provoqué par la discrimination des Roms considérés par la société bulgare comme des populations à fort risque de contagion, beaucoup de problèmes doivent être résolus à l’intérieur même de la communauté rom. La peur du Gadjo (les vaccins contiendraient des poisons destinés à les exterminer), l’illettrisme, qui empêche de lire ou de comprendre des instructions ou de suivre des conseils d’hygiène basiques, et surtout des croyances et des pratiques archaïques qui rongent la communauté rom de l’intérieur. Il existe une grande ignorance des structures sociales et du fonctionnement interne de la société rom, tout autant induite par la peur du Gadjo de pénétrer le ghetto que celle du Rom à l’y voir s’y introduire, un fossé de civilisation qu’une organisation comme ZSR essaye de réduire depuis quelques années.

ZSR s’intéresse aux maladies ayant une importance sociale touchant plus particulièrement les femmes et les enfants, elle travaille avec une équipe de MSF spécialisés dans la santé sexuelle et qui offre des soins totalement gratuits. Présente dans le quartier de Fakulteta depuis 1999, l’organisation travaille avec 10 jeunes éducateurs-médiateurs du quartier formés pour accompagner les femmes dans leur démarche de soin et de rencontre avec les médecins étrangers ou bulgares. Elle mène des campagnes de prévention et vulgarisation comme cette pièce de théâtre dont nous avons déjà parlé, jouée à la Saint Valentin pour mettre les jeunes des quartiers roms en garde contre le virus du SIDA. Des livrets traitant de risques spécifiques sont distribués aux jeunes mères, aux jeunes filles et aux prostituées. Actuellement ZSR cherche
un moyen pour changer les pratiques sexuelles des jeunes hommes. Leurs travaux sont criants de tragédie et nous font pénétrer dans un univers à des lieues de celui des ONG travaillant sur l’éducation ou la culture. Les femmes apparaissent clairement comme les victimes majeures d’une société patriarcale trop occupée à trouver les moyens de survivre pour prendre conscience de ses dérives et des répercussions sur le devenir et la cohésion de la communauté toute entière.

Dans ce milieu isolé où les lois de la société globale n’ont plus court, le commerce des femmes (prostitution, handicaps, etc.) et des pratiques d’un autre temps, servent d’exutoire à la misère comme le montre la double vie imposée à certaines épouses, sœur ou amies, contraintes de se plier au commerce nocturne ou à la mendicité (le handicap peut être un critère de choix d’une femme à marier) : “les familles sont tellement pauvres que parfois ce sont les belles-mères qui envoient les filles sur le trottoir”. ZSR qui par ses médiateurs infiltre la communauté a aussi relevé de nombreux abus et dérives sexuelles dus à des croyances relatives à l’anatomie des femmes, à la compréhension qu’ont les jeunes gens et les hommes du plaisir de leurs partenaire(s), à l’importance de la virginité pour le mariage, ou à l’ignorance de risques de M.S.T., etc.

Un gros travail de fond reste à faire, découvrir ces pratiques et croyances, et éduquer cette jeunesse en détresse. Dans le même ordre d’idée, de la compréhension et de la reconstruction de la société rom, à noter le projet de CEGA qui forme des animateurs quelques semaines et les envoie dans les communautés pour tenter de trouver la personnalité la plus charismatique et la plus compétente, celle qui pourra collaborer avec eux au développement de la communauté.

Notre sentiment est que ce secteur de la santé est délaissé en comparaison de domaines comme l’éducation et la culture, et que la responsabilité d’une politique sanitaire de qualité sur le long terme si elle peut s’appuyer sur des aides techniques et médicales étrangères incombe plutôt au gouvernement.

En résumé, on s’aperçoit que l’ensemble des projets en cours sont actuellement calqués sur les objectifs énumérés par le programme cadre d’intégration des Roms dans la société bulgare. Alors que la santé fait l’objet d’une seule recommandation “intensify programs for health education and stimulate Roma participation in them”, on a vu que les objectifs dans les domaines de l’éducation ou la culture, où sont présent de nombreux intellectuels souvent employés comme consultants, sont beaucoup plus détaillés et alimentent le fonctionnement de la quasi-totalité des ONG rencontrées.
Le fonctionnement des ONG en réseaux

Les ONG et le NCEDI
Le lien entre les activités des ONG-MR et le programme du NCEDI devient encore plus évident quand on sait qu’un des objectifs de cet organe du gouvernement est précisément de mettre en place une collaboration entre les organes gouvernementaux et les organisations locales. Après avoir été écartés de tout processus de décision les concernant, les Roms deviennent à travers ces représentants, des sujets actifs des questions les concernant même si leurs représentants ne font pas toujours l’unanimité parmi la communauté. Les représentants Roms sont des experts qui interviennent dans la formulation et l’élaboration de projets particuliers. Cependant la mise en œuvre de ce programme passe par l’intervention d’ONG en aval, sur le terrain, souvent des ONG-R, encore plus nombreuses depuis l’adoption du programme d’intégration des Roms par le gouvernement.

Dès 1999, un rapport de la Commission européenne a salué ce programme de lutte contre la discrimination et M. Romano Prodi a déclaré qu’il constituait une des avancées les plus importantes de ces dernières années pour la Bulgarie en matière de droits de l’homme. Le NCEDI s’est vu alloué 500.000 euro de l’Union en 2000 pour des projets dans les domaines comme l’éducation, l’emploi ou le logement… Mais les ONG reprochent au NCEDI de ne pas avoir redistribué cet argent et de n’avoir fait évoluter la condition des Roms que sur le papier. En mars 2000, les représentants de 70 ONG roms ont déclaré que le gouvernement n’avait toujours rien fait de concret et que les Rom continuaient à être exclus des processus de décision les concernant. Voici les avis compilés de nos ONG à ce sujet : “On se plaint tout le temps qu’on n’a pas suffisamment d’argent et en même temps, nous sommes le dernier pays d’Europe à ne pas avoir utilisé les fonds alloués. D’un côté, on dit qu’il y a des fonds et de l’autre, le gouvernement ne fait pas d’effort pour les utiliser” ; “Pour le moment, il n’y a pas de résultats, ils ne font rien. J’ai entendu dire qu’ils avaient de l’argent, mais je ne sais pas s’ils l’ont eu ce financement…” ; “J’ai eu l’opportunité de rencontrer le secrétaire de ce Conseil, je ne crois pas qu’il ait les moyens d’agir” ; “Sans commentaire. C’est une structure crée pour montrer à l’Union Européenne que la Bulgarie fait quelque chose. Ce sont des administrateurs du gouvernement” ; “Il font des projets pour obtenir des financements, ils fonctionnent comme les ONG. Mais tous ces projets ne sont finalement que des séminaires et des conférences”. ; “Très souvent, ils mélangent le budget qui est pour les
Roms avec celui des minorités. Mais je pense que les coordinateurs de l’UE, ceux qui gèrent les projets sont aussi coupables, ils donnent un financement et ne savent pas comment il est utilisé. Les rapports sont trompeurs, ils devraient envoyer quelqu’un pour observer.

Le problème semble être celui de la tutelle gouvernementale, le NCEDI dépend directement du conseil des ministres. L’actuel secrétaire, M. Yvanov et son équipe, travaille à la substitution de l’Institution en Agence d’Etat afin de posséder plus d’indépendance au niveau des prises de décision et de la gestion du budget. Certaines ONG espèrent, d’autres doutent : “Même s’ils étaient indépendants, ils feraient passer leurs partenaires, leurs amis si vous préférez, en premier”.

Les autres filières
Hormis les fonds alloués aux institutions locales, principalement le NCEDI, qui proviennent du secteur public international (banque mondiale, Union européenne, etc.), les ONG-MR locales peuvent être alimentées par :
- le secteur privé international. De grandes Fondations comme celle du roi Baudouin ou l’Open Society Fondation utilisent leurs relais locaux. La fondation de G. Soros, par exemple, envoie des fonds à l’OSF-Sofia ou à son Institut de Budapest chargés de répartir les sommes entre les meilleurs projets des organisations locales. En 2000, Soros a injecté 216 000 $ pour les Roms de Bulgarie, ce qui place la Bulgarie au 5e rang des 13 pays dotés par la Fondation pour venir en aide à cette minorité derrière la Hongrie, Macédoine, Roumanie et la République Tchèque. Soros a été cité par tous nos interlocuteurs au rang de donneur.
- des sources mixtes : le secteur publique étranger relayé par des fondations internationales. On peut citer l’exemple des gouvernements des Pays-bas et Allemand qui aident CEGA par l’intermédiaire de NOVIB ou de MATRA.

Une fund-raising compétition
Dans ces deux derniers modes d’injection de fonds, l’ONG doit faire la démarche de fund-raising, soumettre des projets à concours pour le financement dont elle a besoin. La compétition a lieu à tous les niveaux de la filière en fonction du statut international ou relais local du bailleur de fonds convoité. Cependant, si en règle générale, les prix obtenus lors d’un concours organisé par un gouvernement étran-
ger offrent la prise en charge de la totalité du budget d’un projet (un film par exemple), une Fondation comme Soros demande à ses partenaires de trouver, dans la mesure du possible, 1,5 $ pour chaque dollar alloué. A titre d’exemple, le budget 2001 de IMIR qui s’élevait à un peu plus de 150 000 $ provient de l’Open Society Foundation en majorité, mais aussi de la Suisse et du gouvernement américain, puis de gains plus modestes obtenus lors de compétitions annexes organisées par d’autres Fondations privées étrangères (celle du Roi Baudouin par exemple) ou de prix comme celui de la Commission des Droits de l’Homme (lors du 50e anniversaire de la DDH 20 000 $) ou encore de la Fondation D. Mitterrand...
Les budgets des ONG sont fonction de ceux qu’elles ont obtenus pour développer un projet particulier. Les chiffres pour 2001 vont de 200 000 $ pour CEGA, 100 000 $ pour HRP, 60 000 $ pour DBF mais 15 000 $ pour Studii romani, 5 000 $ pour ZDS ou encore 3 500 $ pour KXAM.
Ces fonds permettent de développer les projets des ONG-MR mais contribuent aussi aux frais de fonctionnement, à la rémunération du personnel permanent et temporaire, des honoraires des avocats le cas échéant… Cependant, on observe que les partenaires financiers œuvrent pour que les ONG locales deviennent indépendantes, puissent s’autofinancer. Une organisation comme CEGA à travers le projet MATRA se concentre sur la formation au fund-raising des organisations locales et parallèlement, dans un avenir proche, le statut des ONG leur permettra de développer des activités lucratives à condition de réinvestir les bénéfices dans l’organisation.

**Le modèle d’intervention**

Dans ce schéma d’intervention, les ONG qui sont plus proches du décisionnel que de l’exécutif bénéficient de plus de fonds. Leur place dans cette filière et par conséquent leur budget sont déterminés par le type d’activité qu’elles exercent. On peut les classer en trois niveaux principaux, le dernier, celui de l’exécutif, pouvant se décliner à l’infini.

- La recherche, le conseil (RC) : phase d’expertise, d’évaluation, de conceptualisation des problèmes.
- La conception et coordination de programmes et projets (CC) : la recherche appliquée à partir de la théorisation des problèmes ; planification, distribution et évaluation des tâches.
- La phase d’application des projets : phase pratique d’exécution des projets, sur le terrain, auprès de la population cible.
Ce système d’intervention des ONG en réseaux suivent des modèles dits “européen” ou “américain” d’injonction de fonds. Si le second est simplifié par rapport au premier car il a moins de partenaires, il ne semble pas plus efficace. L’exécutif, à la base de la pyramide (ONG -R) ne touche que 10 % des sommes investies, mais disent se satisfaire de ce mode de fonctionnement car elles n’ont ni les compétences, ni les relations nécessaires pour décrocher un concours international, ce qui toutefois ne les empêche pas de proposer des projets particuliers à des Fondations locales ou même internationales parmi lesquelles Soros.

Il faut toutefois citer un 3e modèle de fonctionnement, celui où il n’y a pas de médiateur entre les institutions donatrices et les ONG, où il n’est pas nécessaire à une
ONG de se présenter à un concours pour effectuer une recherche car leur réputation est suffisante pour attirer les commanditaires internationaux (Studii Romani ; Diversity).

La durée de vie

En fait, si les ONG-MR du premier et du deuxième niveau se développent parallèlement à leur réseau de relations internationales, et on constate que Studii Romani, IMIR, BHC, HRP ont plus de 10 ans d’existence, les ONG du troisième niveau et donc en particulier les ONG-R ont pour la plupart une activité en dilettante, sans cesse remise en question et en co-relation avec la durée du financement (qui excède rarement deux ans) qui leur a été octroyé pour développer ou participer à un projet ponctuel. Ce point nous a été confirmé par certains de nos interlocuteurs qui ont fait allusion par exemple à des ONG “qui sont enregistrées, mais qu’on ne sait pas où trouver, qui n’ont pas de véritable activité et qui apparaissent pour dire qu’elles existent quand il y a un événement dans le quartier” (Chef de la Police du quartier rom Fakulteta) ou qui évoquent l’existence d’ONG “qui ne sont présentes que sur le papier”, “qui ne font que de la publicité” ou “qui ne font rien”, ou encore “qui ne font pas de rapport d’activité” (Studii Romani).

Pour assurer leur pérennité, les ONG développent chacune selon leurs compétences et leurs objectifs, des stratégies d’intervention au niveau de la cible, du fonctionnement de l’organisation et de la société civile.

Au niveau de la population cible : elles entreprennent donc des actions d’éducation et de formation, d’information et prévention de quartier. Elles travaillent en collaboration avec un réseau qu’elles mettent en place ; il peut s’agir d’un partenariat avec des organisations roms installées sur le terrain (DBF, KXAM, etc.), d’un membre charismatique d’une communauté (on a vu la stratégie de CEGA), ou de collaborateurs et / ou des bénévoles (Romani Bach, ZSR, etc…). Concernant le fonctionnement de l’organisation, une des conditions de crédibilité et de durée des ONG est la bonne gestion des ressources humaines. Les ONG de niveau 1 et 2 ont toutes un staff organisé, compétent (de niveau universitaire) et interchangeable. Elles se chargent aussi de la formation et de l’encadrement de leur personnel ; elles offrent l’opportunité à des étudiants spécialistes du droit ou des sciences humaines de développer une recherche sur le terrain, s’assurant ainsi une vision relativement exhaustive de la question rom, en même temps qu’une main d’œuvre formatée au travail
méthodique et un turn-over de qualité pour faire évoluer leur effectif (DBF, CEGA, Romani Bach). Cette méthode provoque cependant quelques dérives dénoncées par certains : “Un étudiant qui travaille pour une ONG gagne plus qu’un juge de la cour. Pourquoi chercherait-il à devenir juriste alors qu’il peut trouver un travail mieux rémunéré dans le secteur ONG ? Parmi les étudiants roms ayant étudié le droit ces 10 dernières années, aucun n’a terminé ses études”. Dans le même ordre d’idée, elles organisent de conférences et des séminaires pour leurs partenaires ou conjointement avec les autres ONG ou spécialistes compétents dans des domaines particuliers. Un autre point essentiel à la prospérité des ONG est sa réputation et on a vu que les ONG de niveau 1 et 2 sont toutes dirigées ou présidées par des intellectuels de renom ayant des connexions scientifiques ou politiques au niveau international ou local. Cette réputation leur est en effet très utile pour développer des collaborations avec la société civile. Situées à l’interface des organes décisionnels et du terrain, les ONG de niveau 1 et 2 tissent un réseau en amont et en aval de leur intervention. Certains deviennent des experts ou des consultants d’institutions inter-gouvernementales ou internationales, et leur contact est plus aisé avec les municipalités. En règle générale, ces dernières (les municipalités) ont une attitude favorable vis à vis de l’ensemble de l’acteur ONG. Même si certaines “quand elles apprennent que des fondations participent aux projets, cherchent à en profiter. C’est le cas d’un projet de coopérative agricole où la participation des villageois se limitait à payer le loyer de la terre. La municipalité a triplé le prix et l’initiative a avorté” (IMIR). Toujours dans cet ordre d’idée, on a évoqué le cas des ONG qui se servaient de leurs relations politiques ou, inversement, des partis politiques qui utilisaient les ONG pour se forger une réputation. La production scientifique des ONG influence favorablement un partenaire ou un bailleur de fonds potentiel, sa stratégie de communication en est grandement facilitée surtout au niveau international. Quand nous sommes allés à DBF, A. Yvanova a décroché des cadres du mur pour nous montrer la photo de son Directeur, H. Kyutchukov, en compagnie du secrétaire général de l’Union Romani Internationale et du président Tilianov. Les membres de Studii Romani se souviennent de la manière dont leur recherche sur les Roms du Kosovo a vu le jour : “Ce sont eux qui sont venus nous chercher. Des responsables de l’Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights et l’OSCE de Varsovie nous ont demandé de faire cette recherche sur le Kosovo. Nous n’avons même pas eu à trouver le budget, il a appelé, il a dit, nous avons de l’argent, faites-le”.

Et derrière les organisations et les grands projets, il y a des hommes, toutes les occasions sont bonnes pour développer un clientélisme à quelque niveau que ce soit. Nous avons été sollicités personnellement plusieurs fois pour faire intervenir notre hypothétique réseau de relations afin qu’un projet futur aboutisse. Certaines organisations élaborent des projets fictifs “ils prennent l’argent et se le font voler dans le tramway” (Studii Romani). D’autres ne cachent pas la formidable opportunité qu’a constitué la création d’une ONG pour eux. Si des chercheurs comme Maruchiakova et Popov réorientent leur approche folkloriste vers une anthropologie sociale et culturelle plus proche de l’école occidentale comme en témoigne leur étude “Identity formation among minorities in the Balkans : The case of Roms, Egyptians and Ashkali in Kosovo” publié en 2001 à la demande de l’OSCE, cette nouvelle compréhension de l’ethnologie témoigne aussi de la difficulté des scientifiques d’Europe de l’Est à financer leurs recherches. Au-delà de la reconnaissance du peuple rom ou autres minorités, c’est la reconnaissance de leur travail ou tout simplement un moyen de gagner leur vie que recherche ces intellectuels en créant une ONG: “Nous sommes les pionniers des ONG en Bulgarie, nous avons crée notre organisation immédiatement après le changement en 1991… Nos collègues d’Europe de l’Ouest nous ont dit que c’était le temps des ONG, qu’il fallait réunir quelques personnes et créer une organisation pour trouver de l’argent et poursuivre nos recherches.” Plus loin : “Nous n’avons jamais été une organisation au sens où vous l’entendez ; ce conseil de nos collègues de l’Ouest peut paraître étonnant, mais on a commencé à comprendre que c’était comme ça que le monde fonctionnait.” Marushiakova et Popov ne sont pas les seuls intellectuels et universitaires à diriger une ONG-MR comme on l’a vu.

**Conclusion**

Pour lutter contre les grands fléaux mondiaux comme le racisme, la pauvreté, le terrorisme, qui débordent le cadre des frontières traditionnelles, des coalitions se multiplient à l’échelle de la planète. De nombreuses sociétés ou organisations se sont substituées aux Etats pour combler le fossé civilisationnel. Ces dernières années, la dénonciation par ces nouveaux acteurs de la scène mondiale de l’aggravation des tensions interethniques en Europe de l’Est a réveillé l’Europe supra-nationale, devenue vigilante face à une menace d’instabilité qui lui a fait prendre conscience de ses devoirs envers leurs futurs partenaires économiques. Nous avons vu en effet que toutes les ONG pionnières (ou presque) avaient à un
niveau ou à un autre, des connexions internationales. Nous avons vu aussi le mode de fonctionnement de ces dernières, à partir des projets soumis à des mentors occidentaux. Les ONG locales doivent rendre compte de leurs activités à un réseau avant même d’en rendre à l’Etat comme en témoigne le lobbying qu’elles ne pourraient développer sans soutien en dehors de leurs frontières (dénonciation de la discrimination).

On peut donc raisonnablement se poser la question de savoir quelle est la capacité réelle de manœuvre d’une ONG locale, et même plus, quel serait leur chance de survie si elle n’intervenaient pas sur des thèmes prioritaires de la politique internationale, s’il n’y avait pas de traités ou de directives à faire adopter par l’Etat qui gouverne leur territoire d’intervention.

En fait, l’échelle d’intervention des ONG, les faibles échantillons de population concernés par la réalisation de leurs programmes de surcroît sur le court terme, nous fait dire que leur action relève plus de la recherche appliquée qu’elle n’entraîne un large changement de la situation des Roms.

Cependant, un véritable rôle leur incombe : celui de la médiation. Là, apparaissent les ONG de la seconde génération, les ONG-R qui soulèvent les problèmes à la base, permettent des zones d’ouverture sans lesquelles nombre de foyers de tension seraient susceptibles de devenir source de crispation. Plus que l’efficience de ses interventions, plus que l’accélération du processus d’intégration graduel de cette population qui nécessite le long terme, la grande mission de l’acteur ONG est de ritualiser les conflits grâce au dialogue.

L’Occident tente d’apporter sa contribution à la question des minorités sans s’immiscer en apparence dans les affaires intérieures des pays montrées du doigt. À partir de directives et de traités, le traitement des Minorités est devenu un pilier fort de la politique internationale. Cependant, plutôt que d’envoyer comme jadis en d’autres coins de la planète ses experts sur le terrain, l’Occident alimente pour un coût modéré les spécialistes locaux de la question qui se sont engouffrés dans la niche pour pouvoir continuer leurs recherches après le bouleversement politique.

En se positionnant sur ce qui est devenu un débat et un enjeu politique majeur, la plupart des ONG sont tombées dans des situations de dépendance. Rapporteurs au niveau des instances internationales, les ONG locales sont devenues des instruments de surveillance, des Observatoires du caractère démocratique des sociétés candidates à l’Europe.
Cette nouvelle gérance, sorte de technologie politique de l'Ouest est aussi un pari, celui de la prise de conscience par l'Europe de sa diversité, de sa richesse culturelle et de son potentiel formidable d'apporter sa contribution à la survie de la biodiversité à l'heure de la mondialisation des cultures et des conflits. Dans ce sens de la préservation des peuples, nous regrettons que la dimension humanitaire de la question rom, tout aussi importante que la dimension juridique pour la dignité humaine, n’ait pas autant de succès auprès des décideurs et des bailleurs de fonds.

**Annexe 1**

9 ONG ont été rencontrées, ainsi que le Conseil National pour les Minorités ethniques et issues démographiques:

4 ONG non-spécifiques des Rom:
*International Center for Minority groups and Cultural Relations – Sofia (IMIR)*
Antim 1, 55
1000 Sofia
Samir Polikar / Chargé des relations publiques
Antonina Zheliazkova
*Creating Effective Grassroots Alternatives (CEGA)*
96, Rakovski Str.
1000 Sofia
M. Lazaroff / Coordinator Victor Giorgiev / Prsdt
*Human Rights Project (HRP)*
23 Soluska Str.
1000 Sofia
Orhan Tahir / Legal Adviser Kamilia Angelova / Psdt
*Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHC)*
7, Varbitsa St.
Krassimir Kanev President
943 90 60

5 ONG Rom:
*DIVERSITY Foundation (Balkan Foundation*
LE RÔLE DES ONG DANS LA RECONNAISSANCE DES MINORITÉS

for Cross-Cultural Education and Understanding)
Georgi S. Rakovski, 145, entrée D
1000 Sofia
Angelina Yvanov Coordinatrice, Directeur exécuteur)

Interview et rapidement Hristo Slavo Kyuchoukov Président

Studii Romani (Minority Studies Society)
Kv. E. Markov, Jasna Poljana Str.
Bl. 110, vh. G.
Elena Marushiakova / Vesselin Popov

Romani Bach
Quartier Rom: Fakulteta
Un avocat

Zdrave i sotsialno razbitie (Santé et développement
en langue rom / ZSR)
6, Macedonia Bd.
1606 Sofia
Liliana Kabaktchieva President / Mrs Antonova,
Pencheva coordinators

KXAM (Soleil en romani / KX)
1, 13 “Mart” Str.
1000 Sofia
Liley Kovatcheva / President

Et, en autre:
Conseil National pour les Minorités
Dondoukov Blvd
1000 Sofia
Penka Vassileva / phare procedures expert

1 Le 10 décembre 1948.
2 L’Article 27 de ce Pacte prévoit que : “Dans les États où il existe des minorités ethniques, religieuses ou linguistiques, les personnes appartenant à ces minorités ne peuvent être privées du droit d’avoir, en commun avec les autres membres de leur groupe, leur propre vie culturelle, de professer et de pratiquer leur propre religion, ou d’employer leur propre langue.”
3 Cette loi sur les Droits des Minorités nationales ethniques combine une autonomie culturelle à base territoriale
(lorsque la minorité représente au moins 5 % de la population locale) à une autonomie culturelle à base communautaire lorsque la minorité est éparpillée.

4 - Ce programme de lutte contre la discrimination, considéré par le gouvernement bulgare comme une étape politique dans le processus d’accession de la Bulgarie à la Communauté européenne a reçu l’approbation du Conseil de l’Europe et de l’OSCE (Organisation pour la Sécurité et la Coopération en Europe).

5 - Ce projet de loi devait être terminé en juin 2002 et être soumis au Parlement.

6 - Framework Programme for Equal Integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society.

7 - Le taux national d’enfants non scolarisés est de 3 %.

8 - Les données du dernier recensement donnent un chiffre de 13 à 14 000 habitants.
The Authors

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