

Legal, Social and Economic Challenges Facing the Roma of Central and Eastern Europe*

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Abstract

This paper argues that, quite unlike any other national or ethnic minority in the region, the Roma of Central and Eastern Europe are facing a formidable range of economic, social, cultural and political problems in the transition from Communism. In some respects, difficulties of economic adjustment, experienced by the Roma, reflect serious errors in the Communist regimes' approach to solving the gypsy 'problem'. However, they also stem from blatant discrimination and culturally uninformed treatment by educational systems and public services, in the post-Communist era, as well as the lingering effects of certain aspects of traditional Romani culture(s). The paper critically examines some of the legal and administrative measures that have been introduced by post-Communist states to address the wide-ranging difficulties experienced by the Roma. Finally, the paper puts forward a number of suggestions for achieving further, long-term improvements in the overall situation of the Roma in Central and Eastern Europe.

Introduction

The ousting of communist regimes across Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), in the late '80s, is frequently portrayed as the triumph of popular democracy, human rights and market economics.¹ However, for the bulk of an estimated six million Roma, or Gypsies, the post-Communist era has brought neither improved living standards nor the meaningful enjoyment of democracy or basic freedoms. On the contrary, Roma poverty has worsened dramatically in the transition from Communism. As a recent World Bank report notes: '[w]hile Roma have historically been among the poorest people in Europe, the extent of the collapse of their living conditions in the former socialist countries is unprecedented.'² At the same time, the incidence of anti-Roma assaults (and of anti-Roma stereotyping by various politicians and by elements in the media) has risen

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¹ See e.g. Garton Ash, Timothy (1990), *We the People* (London: Granta Books).

² Ringold, Dena, Mitchell A. Orenstein, and Erika Wilkens (2003), *Roma in an Expanding Europe: Breaking the Poverty Cycle* (Washington, D.C.: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development), p.1. See, generally, *ibid.*, at pp. 1-2, 13, and Chapter Two.

sharply, particularly in the early to mid '90s.³ According to a range of inter-governmental organisations and human rights NGOs, the new era of democracy and of supposed economic opportunity in the CEE states has been characterised by the economic, social and political exclusion of the mass of the region's Roma.⁴

The European Union has an obvious interest in the predicament of the Roma peoples of Central and Eastern Europe. The process of eastward enlargement of the EU means that the Roma 'problem' has ceased to be a largely external affair.⁵ The severe economic and social marginalization of the Roma in the CEE region may conceivably trigger waves of Roma migration from some of the first group of post-Communist accession states with substantial Roma populations, particularly the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, to more prosperous and apparently liberal countries in Western Europe.⁶ The eventual admission of a further tier of CEE states to the EU, Romania and Bulgaria - each of which has a substantial and mostly impoverished Roma minority - could sharply increase the flow of Romani migrants to the West.⁷ At the very least, as emphasised in a recent World Bank report, the failure to address the economic, social and political exclusion of the Roma in the CEE countries will pose a serious challenge to sustained economic growth and to the consolidation of democratic institutions in the region.⁸ Put simply, a large and expanding 'underclass' of semi-destitute, ill educated and alienated Roma is likely to prove a massive economic burden on the CEE states, while also straining inter-communal tensions. These are important and obvious concerns for the EU, whether in terms of its economic objectives or its more recent commitment to the recognition and protection of human rights.⁹

³ For details of the pattern of violence directed against Roma in the CEE states and of anti-Roma stereotyping see e.g. OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (2000), *Report on the situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE Area* (The Hague: OSCE), Chapter II. The Report is available at <http://www.osce.org/hcnm/documents/reports/> (accessed 3 September 2003). See, also, the Country Reports series issued by the Budapest-based *European Roma Rights Center*. See, in addition, the entries on various post-Communist states in the annual World Report published by *Human Rights Watch*. The World Reports are available at <http://www.hrw.org/reports/world/reports/> (accessed 28 March 2003).

⁴ In addition to the sources cited above (fn. 2 and 3), see e.g. the relevant sections of the European Commission's 2002 Regular Reports on Progress Towards Accession of the then candidate states from the CEE region. These are available at <http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/report2002/> (accessed 12 January 2004).

⁵ Even before the accession of a sizeable group of post-communist states to the European Union, on 1 May 2004, EU member states were confronted with the problem of Roma asylum seekers fleeing Central and Eastern Europe. See e.g. Castle-Canerová, Mít'a (2001), 'Romani refugees: the EU dimension', in Will Guy (ed.), *Between Past and Future* (Hertfordshire: Hertfordshire University Press), Chapter 6.

⁶ For a variety of reasons the size of Roma populations in the CEE states cannot be established with any degree of precision. For an estimate see e.g. Ringold *et al.* (2003), pp. 1, 12. In Bulgaria, FYR Macedonia, Romania and Slovakia, Roma are thought to comprise between six and eleven per cent of the population of the respective countries.

⁷ It is currently envisaged that Bulgaria and Romania will accede to the European Union in 2007.

⁸ Ringold *et al.* (2003), p. 1.

⁹ Article 6(2) of the consolidated text of the Treaty of European Union, dated 24 December 2002, declares that: '[t]he Union shall respect fundamental rights, as guaranteed by the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (...) and as they result from the constitutional traditions common to the Member States'. For the text of the treaty see e.g. http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/treaties/dat/EU_consol.pdf (accessed 12 January 2004). Note, also, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, dated 18 December 2000. For the text of the Charter see e.g. http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/pri/en/oj/dat/2000/c_364/c_36420001218en00010022.pdf (accessed 12 January 2004).

Beginning with a case-study of a Transylvanian village which has a mixed population of ethnic Romanians, ethnic Hungarians and Roma, this chapter goes on to examine the nature and extent of the problems confronting the Roma of the CEE region in the transition from Communism. The chapter considers some of the causes of the chronic difficulties experienced by the Roma since the collapse of state socialism. It should not be assumed that the plight of this minority can be ascribed solely to racism and to anti-Roma discrimination in the countries concerned although, of course, the continuing importance of these factors should not be discounted.

Voices from a Transylvanian Village: The Roma of *Someş* in the Transition from Communism¹⁰

Someş (not its real name) is a fairly typical village in northwestern Transylvania, in Romania. Like many of the villages in this region it has a mixed population. The residents of *Someş* comprise over eight hundred ethnic Romanians, more than three hundred ethnic Hungarians and approximately two hundred and sixty five Roma, or Gypsies. In terms of religious affiliation, the ethnic Romanians are Orthodox, the Hungarians belong to the Reformed, or Presbyterian, Church, while the Roma adhere to one or other of these religious denominations.

The Roma of *Someş*, as elsewhere in Romania and in the CEE region as a whole, insist that they were comparatively well off during the communist era. In particular, they were freed from material insecurity as the state provided them with jobs that assured them a regular income. Many of the Roma in the village, who had had little schooling, moved with their families to towns and cities where they were given work, frequently in newly built factories. Rapid and often ill-considered industrialisation was a key feature of the post-war Sovietization of the region.¹¹ Other Roma from *Someş* found work locally, whether as labourers on recently established cooperative farms or at a nearby quarry. Traditionally, a large number of Roma in the village, as many as forty seven at one time, had been popular and successful semi-professional musicians. At weekends, in groups of three to six, they played at wedding feasts and at other celebrations in the surrounding villages. In such a multicultural environment, Gypsy musicians had to be flexible and to maintain an extensive repertoire. Each of the principal ethnic communities in this part of Transylvania – Romanians, Hungarians and Roma – had their favourite songs and dances that they expected the Gypsy musicians to perform.

Miklós, a Romani resident of *Someş*, has spent his whole life in the village. Now in his late sixties he is retired and living on a small pension. For thirty years he worked as a stonemason at the local quarry, supplementing his wages with his earnings as a musician. In the single downstairs room of his tiny but immaculate wooden house he keeps the accordion that had been his pride and joy, although now he is too frail to play the cumbersome instrument. Like most other Roma in the village, Miklós, recalls the communist years with undisguised nostalgia:

'When the communists were around, life was good! Back then, poor people, peasants, everyone had something. Whether you wanted to or not, you had to go [to work]. You got what you got, but it was enough to live on! It

¹⁰ This case study of the Roma living in the Transylvanian village of *Someş* is based on semi-structured interviews conducted with Roma families and community leaders in the village in April 2003.

¹¹ See e.g. Berend, Ivan (1996), *Central and Eastern Europe 1944-1993* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 190-92.

wasn't a lot of money, maybe fifteen hundred or two thousand Lei. I earned two thousand Lei. I never managed to earn more than that.'

For most of his adult life, Miklós was in great demand as a musician. At weekends, together with his father, who was well known locally for his skill on the violin, and his wife, who accompanied them on the drum, they performed at weddings and at other festivities.

Since the end of communist rule and the gradual introduction of a market economy under successive governments, most of the Roma of *Someş*, as elsewhere in Romania and in the CEE region as a whole, have suffered in various ways. As factories closed down or shed much of their surplus workforce - measures that impacted disproportionately on the Roma - many newly redundant Gypsies decided to return with their families to their ancestral villages such as *Someş* in which they'd spent their childhood. They imagined that it would be easier to get by in a rural environment. Other Roma, who had been employed as labourers on collective farms during the socialist era, lost their jobs as the land was returned to the peasants from whom it had been expropriated. As in other countries in the region, most Roma did not own any land in the inter-war period. Therefore, they were excluded from the process of land re-privatization that was implemented in Romania in the 1990s, in an effort to correct some of the most heinous 'injustices' perpetrated by the communists. New employment opportunities in the village or nearby remain scarce, particularly for Roma. In addition to the general shortage of work, Roma job applicants have to contend with pervasive anti-Roma prejudice. The Roma are also disadvantaged by their generally low level of formal education. The fate of the two adult sons of Miklós, the retired stonemason and former accordionist, is instructive. Referring to his elder son, Miklós told me indignantly that:

'He worked, he worked on the roads for twenty years! Now he doesn't work anywhere, because where could he [find a job]? He and his family are here with me. Then there's my younger son. He worked for ten years. He learnt to be a stonemason [like me]. He has three children. Now he can't earn anything, anywhere. He went to the authorities and asked them for money. Once they gave him some after three months. After three months they gave him something.'

Even music has ceased to be a source of ready income for the village's Roma. Musical tastes have changed, while the wide availability of cassette and CD players offers a much cheaper means of entertainment than hiring a Gypsy band. Many younger Roma, including Miklós' sons and grandchildren, have even lost the urge to learn to play a musical instrument. Miklós told me, with evident sadness, about one of his grandsons:

'Here's my younger son's son. I thought to myself, he'll be like my father, he'll be a good musician! He made a good start [on the violin]. Then he got bored of it. There are no longer Gypsies coming into the world who'll grow to become musicians.'

A Romani community leader in *Someş* explained to me how most of the Roma in the village earn a living since the end of communism. Some hire themselves out as labourers to *Gadje* (i.e. non-Roma) smallholders, although such work is, at best, seasonal and very poorly paid. Sometimes, the Roma are paid in kind, with flour, *szalona* (a fatty bacon), or other foodstuffs, and receive no wages at all. Many Roma, like Miklós' younger son, rely on occasional handouts from the local authorities. Gathering mushrooms and medicinal plants that grow in hedgerows near the village

constitutes another, albeit irregular, source of income. Virtually identical modes of subsistence have been identified by an Hungarian ethnographer, Péter Szuhay, who has conducted extensive research, since the early 1990s, amongst a community of *Vlach* Roma in a village in south eastern Hungary.¹²

Paradoxically, the end of communism has partially reversed the slow process of integration on which many Roma had embarked under state socialism, or sometimes much earlier. Democracy, human rights and market economics have yielded few tangible or worthwhile results for the mass of ordinary Roma in the CEE states. For many, the post-Communist transition has become synonymous with dire poverty, insecurity and heightened social marginalisation.

Ironically, two or three *Kalderara* Romani families in *Someş*, who resisted the communist authorities' efforts to integrate them within Romanian society, have experienced far fewer problems of adjustment since 1990 than those Roma in the village who readily accepted jobs. Preferring the freedom of self-employment to a more regulated life as factory workers or as labourers on agricultural cooperatives, the *Kalderara* worked as rag and bone men during much of the socialist era. Over time, they found a new niche for themselves, trading in antiques such as nineteenth century jugs and vases. They had noticed that there was a growing market for such artifacts. Although entrepreneurial activity was generally frowned upon by communist ideologues, a minority of Romania's Gypsies, often belonging to Roma subgroups such as the *Kalderara* or the *Gabori*, were permitted to work as self-employed traders and craftsmen in Romania until the mid to late '80s, when state policies towards the Roma were tightened.

The commercial flair and spirit of self-reliance of the *Kalderara* Romani families of *Someş* has proved a major asset in the new, market oriented, post-Communist environment. The former rag and bone men of the village - who at one time were looked down upon by the other Roma in *Someş* as backward, semi-nomadic and unwilling to integrate - have transformed themselves into successful businessmen. Acquiring nineteenth century hand-painted wooden chests and other family heirlooms from a younger generation of peasants, who frequently prefer modern, factory-made furniture, they sell the assorted antiques to dealers from Hungary, Britain and other countries who find a ready market for them in western Europe.

However, for the vast majority of Roma in *Someş*, life is increasingly bleak. Like Miklós' adult sons, they lack marketable skills, or land on which to produce food for themselves and their families. As a result of their experiences under communism, they have become dangerously dependent on the state for employment, or of material assistance in case of need. One of the village's handful of *Kalderara* Romani entrepreneurs explained the predicament of *Someş*' non-*Kalderara* Roma to me. Remarking that as many as eighty per cent of the men in the village are currently unemployed, Roma and non-Roma alike, he insisted that the Roma are still in a worse position than the Romanians (and Hungarians): "[th]ey [Romanians] can still get by, because they have land, everything. But round here the Roma don't own any land, horses, cows, pigs, or sheep. They [the Roma] have nothing."

¹² Szuhay, Péter (1999), 'Foglalkozási és megélhetési stratégiák a magyarországi cigányok körében' in F. Glatz (ed.), *A cigányok Magyarországon* (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia), p. 139.

The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe in the Transition from Communism

The plight of most of the Roma in the Transylvanian village of *Someş* offers an insight into the problems experienced by the bulk of the Roma people of Central and Eastern Europe in the transition from Communism. It should be emphasised that these problems are different in character, scope and in sheer intractability from the difficulties encountered by other national or ethnic minorities, of any size, in the region. Thus, there are few, if any, analogies to be drawn between the predicament of the Roma in the CEE states and problems encountered by national minorities such as ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia, the Ukraine, Serbia, or Romania, ethnic Russians in the Baltic states, ethnic Serbs in Croatia, or ethnic Germans in Poland, Romania and Hungary.

Unlike other national and ethnic minorities in the post-Communist states, who mostly complain about the lack of educational provision in minority languages or the need for greater cultural and political recognition by the authorities, the Roma are in the throes of an economic crisis. In the shift from command to market economies the Roma suffered disproportionately, experiencing mass unemployment and growing poverty throughout the CEE region.¹³ In Hungary it has been estimated that 70% of Romani men of working age are currently unemployed as against less than 10% of the non-Romani population.¹⁴ The extent of Romani unemployment in other CEE states with significant Romani minorities,¹⁵ including the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Romania, is comparable.¹⁶ Soaring levels of Romani unemployment in the post-communist states, together with the rising cost of rents, utilities and basic foodstuffs, have contributed to worsening poverty and deprivation amongst a significant proportion of the Roma people. As noted in a recent World Bank Report:¹⁷

'Roma are the most prominent poverty risk group in many of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. They are poorer than other groups, more likely to fall into poverty, and more likely to remain poor. In some cases poverty rates for Roma are more than 10 times those of non-Roma. A recent survey found that nearly 80 percent of Roma in Romania and Bulgaria were living on less than \$4.30 per day...Even in Hungary, one of the most prosperous accession countries, 40 percent of Roma live below the poverty line.'

The root causes of the current high levels of Romani unemployment in the CEE states, a prime cause of Romani poverty, cannot be reduced to a single factor. In some instances,

¹³ See, generally, Pogány (2004). On the worsening poverty experienced by the bulk of the Roma since the end of Communism see e.g. Barany, Zoltan (2001), *East European Gypsies. Regime Change, Marginality, and Ethnopolitics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp.157-83. See, also, Ringold *et al.* (2003), Chapter 2. On the economic gains experienced by many Roma during the socialist era see Barany (2001), pp.125-43.

¹⁴ European Union's 2002 Regular Report on Hungary, p.31. This is available at <http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/report2002/> (accessed 28 March 2003).

¹⁵ For the reasons given above, the size of Romani minorities in the CEE states cannot be given with any degree of precision. However, according to figures cited by the European Commission, there are up to 800,000 Roma in Bulgaria, 300,000 in the Czech Republic, 600,000 in Hungary, 2,500,000 in Romania, and 520,000 in Slovakia. In Poland, where the bulk of the Roma were killed during World War II, it is estimated that there are up to 60,000 Gypsies. See European Commission (2002), *EU Support for Roma Communities in Central and Eastern Europe* (Brussels: European Commission), p. 4. This report is available at http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/docs/pdf/brochure_roma_may2002.pdf (accessed 31 January 2004).

¹⁶ See e.g. Ringold *et al.* (2003), pp. 35-37.

¹⁷ Ringold *et al.* (2003), pp. 1-2.

Roma may have an innate preference for informal entrepreneurial activity of various kinds, or even for subsistence occupations, over wage labour with its inevitable restrictions on individual freedom and autonomy.¹⁸

In part, the scale of Romani unemployment can be explained by the fact that, during the communist era, the authorities encouraged (sometimes even coerced) the Roma to take semi-skilled or unskilled jobs in sectors of the economy, such as heavy industry, that were to prove uncompetitive. Many of these former state-owned enterprises, employing large numbers of Roma, were closed down during the transition to a market economy, or shed much of their workforce.

Thus, it can be argued that the communist policy of integrating the Roma in the general economy, while providing them with limited training or opportunities for professional advancement, amounted to little more than proletarianization. Such policies conspicuously failed to equip the bulk of the Roma with the skills or outlook needed to obtain regular employment in modernising, increasingly competitive societies. Michael Stewart, a shrewd commentator on communist policies towards the Roma, has referred dismissively to the “creation of phantasmagorical ‘socialist’ jobs for the Gypsies which disappeared as soon as consumers had any choice over what they purchased”.¹⁹ In fact, there is a case for saying that, by generally discouraging the Roma from pursuing traditional trades or crafts, or from engaging in commerce, the communists in Central and Eastern Europe may have unwittingly rendered the Roma *less capable* of adjusting to modern economic conditions than they would have been if the authorities had been less prescriptive in their approach to the Gypsy ‘question’.

However, blatantly discriminatory practices by employers in the CEE states are also to blame for the unacceptably high levels of Romani unemployment in the region. A young Romani office worker, living in Budapest, told me, a few years ago, that she had called about a secretarial job that had been advertised in a newspaper. She was invited, along with several other applicants, to attend an interview. Sitting in the reception area, together with a number of other women who had applied for the post, she saw the manager emerge from his office and come towards them. “What’s she doing here?” the manager had asked the receptionist, gesturing towards my Romani acquaintance, who was noticeably darker skinned than the other applicants. Such stories are commonplace and reflect a general disinclination on the part of employers in the CEE region to hire Gypsies. The virulence of anti-Roma prejudice has led some lighter skinned Roma to try to pass themselves off as *Gadje*, or non-Roma, in an effort to gain social and professional acceptance.

As emphasised above, a comparative lack of marketable skills and of educational qualifications also helps to account for the difficulties experienced by Roma in finding regular employment. The statistics of Romani educational under-performance, where available, are alarming. The proportion of Romani pupils attending or completing secondary education, or going on to university or to other forms of tertiary education, is tiny. According to research done in Hungary, in the mid ‘90s, only two per cent of Roma aged 25-29 had completed secondary school.²⁰ Levels of educational achievement amongst Roma in other Central and Eastern Europe states are broadly comparable. A Romanian study, carried out in 1998, found that 18.3 per cent of

¹⁸ Ibid, at 36.

¹⁹ Stewart, Michael (2001), ‘Communist Roma policy 1945-89 as seen through the Hungarian case’, in Will Guy (ed.), *Between Past and Future: The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe* (Hertfordshire: University of Hertfordshire Press), p.87.

²⁰ Kemény, István (1999), ‘Tennivalók a cigányok/romák ügyében’, in F. Glatz (ed.), *A cigányok Magyarországon* (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia), p. 229, here: p.230.

Romani children aged 7-16 had not attended elementary school.²¹ In the mid '90s, 2.5 per cent of Czech Roma and 2.8 per cent of Slovak Roma attended (but did not necessarily complete) secondary school.²² Only 0.2 per cent of Hungarian Roma, 0.7 per cent of Romanian Roma and 0.9 per cent of Bulgarian Roma undertook tertiary education of any kind.²³

The chronic educational underperformance of the Roma in the CEE countries is a product, to some degree, of cultural insensitivity. Not infrequently, teachers have low expectations of their Romani pupils, or simply don't understand the cultural context that may shape some Romani children's behaviour in class.²⁴ In other instances, there is compelling evidence of institutionalised discrimination. For example, it is asserted by human rights experts that Romani children in the Czech Republic have been systematically allocated to 'special' schools intended for the educationally subnormal without regard to their individual abilities.²⁵ A detailed report issued by an influential NGO, the Budapest-based European Roma Rights Center, notes that:²⁶

'According to reasonable estimates, Roma are at least fifteen times more likely to be placed in remedial special schools than non-Roma. A student who has completed remedial special school has greatly restricted choices in secondary education compared to a student who has completed mainstream primary school. Romani children are thereby effectively condemned from an early age to a lifetime of diminished opportunity and self-respect. In addition, the segregation of Roma in inferior schools is used as constant legitimation for discriminatory attitudes and actions by members of the majority society.'

These alleged practices in the Czech Republic are the subject of a complaint to the European Court of Human Rights. In Hungary, a recent study of elementary schools found that pressure from non-Romani parents had resulted in the allocation of large numbers of Gypsy pupils to 'special classes'.²⁷ Researchers, who examined 192 Hungarian elementary schools, concluded that almost 85% of the children in 'special classes' are of Roma extraction.²⁸ The standard of instruction provided to the mostly Romani pupils in the 'special classes' is often unsatisfactory, while the teachers assigned to these classes are frequently poorly qualified.

However, the educational under-performance of significant numbers of Roma pupils can also be ascribed to the residual effects of deep-seated Romani cultural norms. Traditionally, the Roma viewed 'education' as the inter-generational transfer of skills, usually within families and communities, rather than as passing exams or attendance at schools. A failure to appreciate the growing importance of formal qualifications as the most reliable route to secure and well paid work remains a widespread problem,

²¹ Barany (2001), pp. 169-70. See, generally, *ibid.*, pp. 164-72.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 170.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

²⁴ The educational 'ghettoization' of Romani pupils in parts of Central and Eastern Europe and related problems are discussed in Chapter One of Pogány (2004).

²⁵ See e.g. European Roma Rights Center (1999), *A Special Remedy: Roma and Schools for the Mentally Handicapped in the Czech Republic*, Country Report Series No. 8 (Budapest: ERRC).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁷ Havas, Gábori (2002), 'A cigány tanulók elkülönítése az általános iskolában', in Terézia Reisz and Mihály Andor (eds.), *A Cigánység Társadalomismerete* (Pécs: Iskolakultúra), p. 152, here: pp. 160-72.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

particularly in poorer or more traditional Romani communities. In the view of social workers and numerous Romani community leaders, many Romani parents continue to attach insufficient importance to their children's schooling.

Not infrequently, Romani children are expected to play a part in generating income for the family from an early age, whether by hawking goods, begging or, in rural areas, helping to collect medicinal plants, nuts and other commodities that can be sold to wholesalers. Until a few years ago, children from the Romani settlement of *Pata Rât*, on the outskirts of the city of Cluj in Romania, worked alongside their parents at the municipal rubbish dump, combing through the mounds of stinking rubbish for items of value. A local Romani NGO, *Wassdas*, gradually persuaded the parents to let their children attend school.

In some instances, traditional notions of 'shame' continue to play a decisive role in shaping the attitudes and way of life of Romani sub-groups, with important implications for the education and general status of women in these communities. Amongst the *Gabori* Roma of north western Romania, for example, girls are only permitted to receive 2-3 years of schooling out of concern that an adolescent girl, attending school, might become romantically associated with a male pupil, thereby bringing shame on her family. The strict division of the sexes and the right of parents to select marriage partners for their children, while the latter are in their early teens, remain widely observed customs amongst this community.

Although the entrepreneurial culture of Romani subgroups, such the *Gabori*, has enabled them to adapt comparatively well to the demands of a market economy, the vast majority of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe have been less successful. Spiralling unemployment amongst the Roma - particularly at a time of economic transition when former communist states have been shedding many of the subsidies and welfarist structures that were built up during the socialist period - have impacted massively and disproportionately on Roma living conditions throughout the region.²⁹ Unable to keep up the rent on apartments in towns and cities, or to meet the rising cost of utilities, hundreds of thousands of Roma have vacated their homes, moving to cheaper accommodation in the countryside, or to flimsy shacks in overcrowded settlements such as the one at *Pata Rât*. Still others have become squatters, occupying buildings that frequently lack proper sanitation, water or electricity.³⁰

At both the national and international levels there has been increasing, if belated, recognition of the fact that the impoverishment and socio-economic marginalisation of the bulk of the substantial and growing Romani population threatens the long-term prosperity of several CEE states, as well as endangering their internal cohesion and democratic institutions. Since the mid to late '90s, governments throughout the region have introduced programs aimed at alleviating the acute social and economic problems experienced by their Roma minorities.

Beginning in 1995, Hungarian governments adopted a series of decrees intended to tackle some of the worst socio-economic problems experienced by the Roma. These legal measures include, for example, 'Medium-Term Measures to Improve the Living Standards and Social Position of the Roma Population'.³¹ Laying down a series of

²⁹ See, generally, Ringold *et al.* (2003), Chapter 2. On the dismantling of social and economic rights in the CEE states see *infra*, Chapter 5: Nomads.

³⁰ Ina Zoon provides many examples of this phenomenon. See e.g. Zoon, Ina (2000), *On the Margins: Roma and Public Services in Romania, Bulgaria and Macedonia* (New York: Open Society Institute), pp. 184-85, 188.

³¹ Government Resolution No. 1047/1999 (V.5.). An English translation of the resolution is available at <http://archiv.meh.hu/nekh/Angol/6-1999-1047.htm> (accessed 12 February 2004).

objectives for government departments concerned, variously, with education, employment, housing, health and social affairs, the decree sought to tackle the multiple roots of Roma disadvantage and under-achievement. In addition, Hungary has a progressive and innovative minority rights regime, allowing the country's minorities, including the Roma, to form national and local self-governing councils. The creation of these self-governing bodies constituted a radical initiative in constitutional terms, allowing national and ethnic minorities a degree of autonomy in cultural and educational affairs and embodying the still controversial principle of collective rights. As of October 2002, there are 1004 Romani, or Gypsy, councils of this type in Hungary.³²

For its part, Romania introduced an ambitious 'Roma Strategy' in 2001 designed to increase Roma employment opportunities while at the same time significantly improving Roma access to public services, including education and healthcare. In accordance with the Strategy, experts on Roma affairs have been appointed to advise county prefects, while a total of 42 local Roma offices have been instituted across the country.³³ At the national level, fifteen commissions have been established to develop sectoral strategies for tackling a wide range of problems affecting the Roma, including unemployment.

In June 2000, the Czech Government issued a resolution on the 'Concept of the Government policy towards the members of the Roma community, supporting their integration into society'.³⁴ Czech authorities subsequently launched a strategic action plan, for the period 2001-2020, to give effect to the resolution.

Nevertheless, despite these welcome initiatives, many experts remain concerned at the scale of the problems facing the Roma. In a recent report, cited above, senior economists at the World Bank felt it necessary to issue a stark warning as to the likely consequences for the CEE region of a continuing failure to tackle the multiple difficulties confronting the Roma people.³⁵

'National governments have a large stake in the welfare of Roma, for human rights and social justice concerns, but also for reasons of growth and competitiveness. In countries where Roma constitute a large and growing share of the working-age population, increasing marginalisation of Roma in poverty and long-term unemployment threatens economic stability and social cohesion.'

The economic marginalisation of the Roma, that became apparent in the closing decade of the twentieth century, was accompanied by an escalation of physical assaults directed against Roma targets in several CEE states, notably Slovakia, Romania and the Czech Republic. For example, in its 2002 World Report, Human Rights Watch, a highly respected NGO, drew attention to several incidents of anti-Roma violence in both the Czech Republic and Slovakia. With respect to Slovakia, the Report noted 'a continuing

³² These figures are drawn from the website of the Office for National and Ethnic Minorities, Budapest: 'National and ethnic minorities in Hungary', at <http://archiv.meh.hu/nekh/Angol/3-1.htm> (updated 13 May 2003, accessed 31 January 2004).

³³ For details see e.g. European Commission (2002), *Regular Report on Romania's Progress Towards Accession* (Brussels: European Commission), pp. 35-36.

³⁴ Resolution of the Government of the Czech Republic No. 599 of 14 June 2000.

³⁵ See Ringold *et al.* (2003), p.1.

pattern of police failure to prevent racist violence against Slovak Roma', offering the following damning picture of the Slovak criminal justice system:³⁶

'In a week of incidents, racist gang members beat and harassed Roma in the town of Holic, culminating in an August 13 assault on Milan Daniel that left him needing brain surgery. Roma residents asserted that the police had failed to protect them despite repeated complaints. On August 20, police finally charged two youths with the attack on Daniel. On August 30, Peter Bandur was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment for his part in the beating to death of a Roma woman, Anastazia Balasova, a year earlier... While Bandur was convicted of the more serious crime of racially motivated assault, his two accomplices received three and five years respectively for simple assault (without racist intent).''

As suggested by these grim developments in Slovakia (similar examples could be provided with respect to the treatment of Roma in the Czech Republic, Romania, Bulgaria and elsewhere), the Roma have had to contend with discriminatory and unsympathetic treatment by criminal justice systems in the post-Communist transition, in addition to widespread racist violence. They have also faced repeated denigration by parts of the media and by rightwing politicians. This contrasts with the broadly paternalistic, if authoritarian, treatment that the Roma experienced during the years of state socialism when, for example, racial stereotyping by the press or electronic media would not have been tolerated. Unsurprisingly, thousands of Roma have sought asylum in North America and Western Europe. The prospect of mass migration of mostly poor and under-qualified Roma from certain CEE states to the more prosperous and apparently liberal societies of Western Europe, within the borders of an expanded European Union, no doubt helped to focus the minds of EU political leaders on the need to assure effective protection of national and ethnic minorities in the post-communist states, and of the necessity of special measures of aid and assistance for the Roma in their countries of origin.

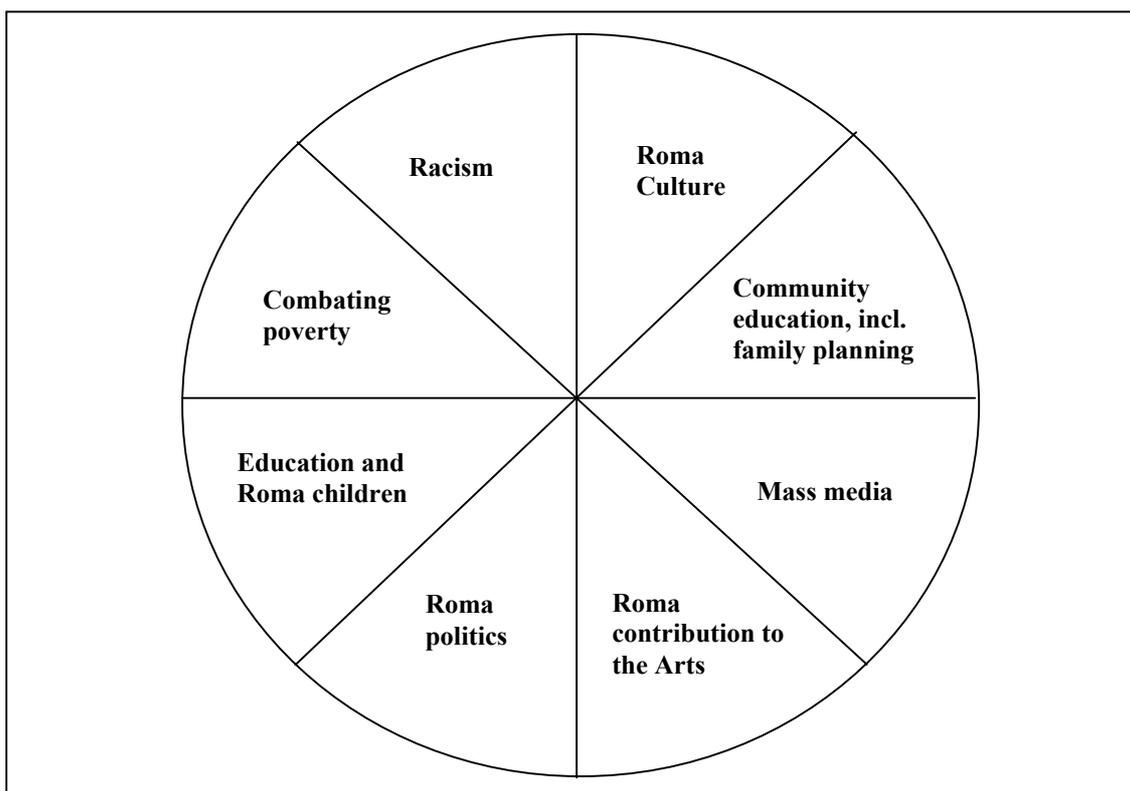
The Principal Problems Facing the Roma of the CEE States and some Tentative Solutions

One of the clearest, most elegant expositions of the principal problems facing the Roma of Central and Eastern Europe – and of some of the means needed to tackle them - has been set out in the form of a diagram by Géza Ötvös, the Romani director of the Romanian NGO, Wassdas. His catalogue of the problems confronting the mass of the Roma and of the means needed to address them is pragmatic, lacking any hint of the 'naive ideological agendas' identified by one critic of NGO involvement in Romani affairs.³⁷

³⁶ See entry for 'Slovakia' in Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2002*, at <http://hrw.org/wr2k2/europe.html> (accessed 3 September 2003).

³⁷ Trehan, Nidhi (2001), 'In the name of the Roma? The role of private foundations and NGOs', in Will Guy (ed.), *Between Past and Future: The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe* (Hertfordshire: University of Hertfordshire Press), p. 134.

Fig. 1: Géza Ötvös' diagram depicting the principal problems of Romania's Roma



Géza Ötvös' refusal to ascribe the problems of the Roma solely to racism or to a lack of political commitment on the part of the region's governments is refreshing – although these factors should not be discounted. At the same time, his carefully thought out approach to overcoming the difficulties experienced by the Roma, in the transition from Communism, illustrates the need for a broadly-based strategy involving legislation, generous and well targeted schemes of social assistance, as well as innovative approaches in teaching etc. Each of the eight issues identified by Géza Ötvös' diagram has some bearing on all the others. Efforts to tackle one problem in isolation, or to pursue a single strategy (for example based on the recognition and enforcement of basic rights), are unlikely to succeed. The same point is made in a recent World Bank report: 'a comprehensive policy approach is required to address multiple and interrelated causes of Roma poverty simultaneously.'³⁸

Romani Culture and the Roma Contribution to the Arts

The Roma are, in broad terms, a people without much sense of their own history, often living in societies where the public at large (including most professional historians) are ignorant of and indifferent to their past. The fact that the bulk of the Roma in the CEE states have little or no knowledge of their history and, frequently, a fading sense of their traditions and customs has impacted negatively on their sense of self-worth, compounding the effects of the social and economic marginalisation that they have been subject to in much of Central and Eastern Europe.

Education about Romani culture and history is as necessary for *Gadje* as for the Roma. It may help to stimulate greater respect for the Roma as well as shame at how

³⁸ Ringold *et al.* (2003), p. 6.

they have been treated by the supposedly ‘civilised’ European states.³⁹ There is insufficient awareness of the fact that the Roma were held as slaves in much of present-day Romania, often in appalling and inhuman conditions, until as late as the middle of the nineteenth century. During World War II, the Roma experienced widespread persecution, which, in some areas, may have amounted to genocide as understood by International Law.⁴⁰ Yet, during the Communist era, there was an ideologically-fuelled reluctance in the CEE states to acknowledge that the Nazis and their allies had targeted specific ethnic or religious groups, i.e. Gypsies and Jews.

Although Géza Ötvös’ diagram treats the Romani contribution to the arts separately from Romani culture and history, there are several reasons for linking the two. For the Roma, the creative arts, above all music, represent ways of preserving (or of re-creating) vital aspects of their traditional culture(s). In addition, the arts, whether music, painting, dance or literature, offer means of self-expression and of communicating with the outside, *Gadjo* world. For a minority, the arts also represent a way of earning a living. Fostering and publicizing the rich and diverse Romani contribution to the arts has become a matter of some importance. In addition to benefiting the Roma directly, an enhanced awareness of Romani artistic achievements could highlight the massively talented nature of this community, something that is frequently overlooked in popular images of the Roma in Central and Eastern Europe.

Community Education

Working with the Roma of *Pata Rât*, on the edge of the Romanian city of Cluj, Géza Ötvös became keenly aware that some of the problems experienced by significant numbers of Roma, particularly those living in such settlements, can only be alleviated through a process of social education, often in combination with the allocation of adequate resources by central or local government (or improved opportunities for the Roma to find regular employment). These are, admittedly, complex and sensitive issues. For the inhabitants of settlements such as *Pata Rât*, lack of money for toiletries and other items, as well as grossly unsatisfactory living conditions, make it difficult to maintain reasonable standards of health and of hygiene. Until *Médecines sans Frontières* paid for the installation of water pipes, for example, the Roma of *Pata Rât* lacked access to uncontaminated water.

For some, poorly educated sections of the Romani community, instruction about basic medical matters, nutrition, family planning and related subjects remains necessary, both in terms of the health and quality of life of the Roma themselves as well as their prospects of social and economic adjustment. The need for community education for elements of the Romani community – a point that is emphasised by social workers throughout the region - should not be dismissed out of some misguided notion of political correctness.

The Mass Media

Representations of the Roma in the mass media are of obvious and critical importance in shaping public attitudes towards Gypsies. Since the collapse of Communist rule the media across much of the region has repeatedly drawn attention to the ethnicity of Romani defendants charged with various offences, thereby confirming widely held

³⁹ Much the same point is made in the recent World Bank report of Ringold *et al.* (2003), p. 7: ‘[m]ulti-cultural education and a curriculum which includes the history and culture of Roma and other minorities are critical vehicles for overcoming cultural barriers.’

⁴⁰ See, generally, Pogány (2004), Chapter 3.

assumptions about the ‘innate’ criminality of the Roma.⁴¹ An article published in 2002 in a serious Romanian broadsheet illustrates the way in which the region’s media not infrequently portrays the Roma. The article, which concerned the theft of an old lady’s wheelchair in the city of Cluj, identified the likely culprits as Gypsies and proceeded to make the following blatantly racist remarks:⁴²

‘It’s no disgrace to be of Gypsy extraction! But centuries of misbehaviour [by Gypsies] are a great problem for all of us. They used to say that Gypsies are forced to steal because otherwise they couldn’t live. But how is it that Gypsies rarely feel constrained to do any work?’

Comments of this sort, particularly if published in sober broadsheets, serve only to validate and reaffirm latent prejudices; they make racism, particularly directed against Gypsies, respectable. There is a clear and compelling need for restraint amongst the region’s media if public perceptions of the Roma are to be slowly transformed. Articles suggesting that the Roma share certain collective and ineradicable traits are not only nonsensical but also dangerous.

Romani Politics

In multi-party democracies with sizeable Romani minorities, such as Romania, Slovakia, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Macedonia, the Roma have the potential to exert considerable political pressure on governments. Put simply, the Roma have a lot of votes, although in practice many do not bother to register. Apathy or ignorance about political affairs, a feeling that politicians of the left and of the right are united in their lack of genuine concern for the Roma, as well as an understandable preoccupation with more immediate concerns, has tended to translate into comparatively limited Romani participation in the political process.⁴³

A related problem has been the absence of a unified sense of Romani ethnicity or nationhood. This has hampered Romani politicians and activists seeking to influence government policy in the CEE states. In essence, the Roma comprise a *multiplicity* of minorities with little sense, as yet, of a common cultural or ethnic identity.⁴⁴ Very largely, they are a ‘people’ only in the eyes of *Gadje*, or non-Gypsies. However, amongst themselves, identity is often sharply and narrowly defined, frequently in opposition to other so-called Gypsy groups. As Sir Angus Fraser has commented, ‘[t]here is...no single Romani word corresponding to ‘Gypsy’... Each Gypsy grouping tends to look upon itself as being the authentic Gypsies.’⁴⁵ Unsurprisingly, it has proved extremely difficult for Romani politicians and activists to establish a common platform within particular states, uniting the members of the various Romani sub-groups as well as semi-integrated Roma with a diminished sense of Romani identity.

⁴¹ See e.g. Barany (2001), p. 311. However, in Hungary it would be unconstitutional to collect (let alone disseminate) information about the ethnicity of suspects, defendants or those convicted of crimes.

⁴² *Szabadság*, 28 May 2002, p. 3 (my translation from the Hungarian).

⁴³ See e.g. Barany (2001), pp. 231-39.

⁴⁴ On the Roma and the extent to which they currently recognise a sense of national identity see e.g. Pogány, István (2000), ‘Accommodating an Emergent National Identity: The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe’, in Stephen Tierney (ed.), *Accommodating National Identity* (The Hague: Kluwer), pp.175-88.

⁴⁵ Fraser, Angus M. (1995), *The Gypsies. The Peoples of Europe*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers), p. 8.

The Education of Romani Children

A growing body of literature has been devoted to the subject of the education of Romani children. One of the most original and inspirational books on the subject contains several essays about the children and elementary school in Csenyété, a tiny Hungarian village.⁴⁶ In 1996, of Csenyété's 328 inhabitants, 91.5 per cent were Gypsies, reflecting the gradual concentration (i.e. 'ghettoisation') of the Roma in poorer agricultural regions and in impoverished inner suburbs of towns and cities.

The importance of improving the educational levels of Romani children, which lag behind those of their non-Romani peers, has been stressed at various points in this book. This is, perhaps, the key to transforming the socio-economic position of the Roma in Central and Eastern Europe. At present, the proportion of Romani pupils attending or completing secondary education, or going on to either university or to various specialist colleges, is tiny. According to research conducted in Hungary, in the mid '90s, only 2 per cent of Roma aged 25-29 had completed secondary school.⁴⁷ Levels of educational attainment amongst Roma elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe are broadly comparable. According to a Romanian study, carried out in 1998, 18.3 per cent of Romani children aged 7-16 had not even attended elementary school.⁴⁸ In the mid '90s, 2.5 per cent of Czech Roma and 2.8 per cent of Slovak Roma attended (but did not necessarily complete) secondary school.⁴⁹ As little as 0.2 per cent of Hungarian Roma, 0.7 per cent of Romanian Roma and 0.9 per cent of Bulgarian Roma went on to tertiary education.⁵⁰

This massive educational under-performance must be addressed as a matter of urgency. However, a significant improvement in the educational standards of all sections of the Roma is only likely to be achieved through the intensive education (or re-education) of teachers and educational authorities throughout Central and Eastern Europe, a process that has already begun to some extent. Too often, teachers have had low expectations of their Romani pupils, or have failed to understand the cultural context that may shape their behaviour in class.⁵¹ Of course, the influence of Romani parents from poorer or more traditional communities has not always been helpful. For example, until *Wassdas* intervened, offering a variety of incentives and material support, many parents at the settlement had chosen to keep their school-age children at home, or working alongside the adults at the adjacent rubbish dump. These children were growing up without even basic literacy and numeracy skills, scarcely a preparation for a secure or fulfilling future. Notwithstanding traditional Romani expectations concerning the productive role of children, the latter should not be treated as an economic resource by their families. In this respect, it is helpful to view children as possessing rights – both in relation to schools and education systems, and vis-à-vis their parents. However, in practical terms, as some experts have noted, it may be easier to secure parental support for education through a system of incentives rather than sanctions.

⁴⁶ Kereszty, Zsuzsa and Zoltán Pólya (eds.) (1998), *Csenyété antológia* (Csenyété, Budapest, Szombathely: Bár Könyvek).

⁴⁷ Kemény (1999), p.230.

⁴⁸ Barany (2001), pp. 169-70. See, generally, *ibid.*, pp. 164-72.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁵¹ The educational 'ghettoization' of Romani pupils in parts of Central and Eastern Europe and related problems are discussed in Chapter One of Pogány (2004).

Combating Poverty

Combating Roma poverty is, without doubt, the greatest challenge facing the Roma and the societies in which they live. As noted above, a recent World Bank report confirmed that the scale of Roma poverty threatens the economic performance and social cohesion of several states in Central and Eastern Europe. The same report rightly emphasizes that:⁵²

'... Roma poverty has multiple and interrelated causes. These tend to reinforce one another in a vicious cycle of poverty and exclusion, and require a multifaceted approach. Roma often have poor access to labour markets because of low education levels, geographic isolation and discrimination...Roma often face discrimination at school and feel that schools ignore Roma language and culture. In addition, Roma sometimes lack sufficient food or clothing to support school attendance. Thus, attitudes, experiences, and social conditions conspire to reduce Roma education levels and labour market performance. Because of their interconnected roots, one cannot adequately address Roma poverty by focusing on a single aspect. Rather, a comprehensive approach is needed.'

Turning the clock back, i.e. returning to the material certainties of the socialist era is not an option. The right to work cannot be assured in societies that have transformed themselves into market economies; states in Central and Eastern Europe can no longer dictate how many jobs there are. In any event, as emphasized by Michael Stewart, many of the jobs created for the Roma under state socialism were artificial, they 'disappeared' as soon as consumers had any choice over what they purchased'.⁵³

At the same time, levels of social provision, whether for the unemployed, for the chronically sick, for the elderly, or for large families, are necessarily limited by each country's economic performance, as well as by competing priorities for state funding. Should long-term unemployment benefits take precedence over increased funding for education, even though the latter option may mean that the next generation of Romani children enjoy significantly enhanced employment prospects? These are difficult choices, even for well-intentioned governments that are committed to improving the conditions of the Roma.

The scope of the social and economic rights that the states of Central and Eastern Europe can deliver is constrained by the fact that they have become market economies, as well as by the inevitable swings of economic performance. However, basic entitlements to health care, to reasonable housing and to other forms of social provision could be made available as of right in most countries in the region. This would benefit overwhelmingly impoverished groups such as the Roma, many of whom exist at outside the margins of society. It is worth noting that the post-apartheid South African Constitution, of 1996, guarantees a range of social and economic rights. These include the right to housing, enshrined in Article 26:⁵⁴

- (1) Everyone has the right to have access to adequate housing.
- (2) The state must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of this right

⁵² Ringold et al. (2003), p. 4.

⁵³ See Stewart (2001), p. 87.

⁵⁴ For the South African Constitution see e.g. <http://www.concourt.gov.za/constitution/const02.html#26> (accessed 1 September 2003).

In addition, Article 27 of South Africa's Constitution contains rights to health care, food, water and social security:

- (1) Everyone has the right to have access to
 - health care services, including reproductive health care;
 - sufficient food and water; and
 - social security, including, if they are unable to support themselves and their dependants, appropriate social assistance.
- (2) The state must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of each of these rights.
- (3) No one may be refused emergency medical treatment.

Crucially, these rights are not simply rhetorical affirmations of political or moral intent but fully justiciable undertakings, i.e. the courts in South Africa both construe and enforce the social and economic rights contained in the Constitution.⁵⁵

Unsurprisingly, the approach adopted in the above-mentioned World Bank report is markedly different. Rather than calling for a reversion to social and economic rights, even on a much more modest scale than under state socialism, it advocates well-targeted schemes of social assistance and 'creating a better environment for job creation'.⁵⁶ In addition, the report calls for fiscal policies that do not 'discourage employers from hiring unskilled labourers'. However, such initiatives would not be incompatible with the recognition of a limited range of social and economic rights, similar to those found in the South African Constitution.

Though wary of social and economic rights, the World Bank report acknowledges that a number of civil and political rights are needed in the struggle to overcome the causes of Roma poverty.⁵⁷ These include the right to non-discrimination, on grounds of race or ethnicity, in the provision of public services and in employment matters. Arguably, programs of affirmative action and schemes of targeted assistance are also required for a minority, such as the Roma, that has been subject to long term social, economic and political marginalisation.

However, enacting and enforcing rights is not enough. Tackling the 'multiple and interrelated causes' of Roma poverty ultimately entails a transformation of the educational levels and skills of the mass of 'ordinary' Roma. Achieving this will require enormous and concerted effort on the part of governments, education authorities, teachers, social workers, Romani NGOs and a variety of other bodies – as well as by the Roma themselves.⁵⁸ The societies of Central and Eastern Europe, including employers, churches and other institutions, must be willing and enthusiastic partners in this process of social transformation. Competent, educated, enthusiastic Romani job applicants won't succeed unless employers in the region are willing (or can be induced) to discard their ingrained prejudices. This is unlikely to prove a simple task.

⁵⁵ A complaint that a right guaranteed by the Constitution has been infringed (or withheld) can be raised before the High Court in South Africa. In some circumstances, the matter may be referred to the Constitutional Court, either at the initiative of the High Court or on appeal. See the website of The Constitutional Court of South Africa: 'Information about the Constitutional Court' at <http://www.concourt.gov.za/about.html#cases> (accessed 1 September 2003).

⁵⁶ Ringold *et al.* (2003), p. 128.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.127-29.

⁵⁸ For a thorough set of policy recommendations on addressing Roma poverty see *ibid.*, pp.133-39.

At the same time, the goal of economic integration, or inclusion,⁵⁹ must not be permitted to prejudice Romani cultural autonomy or self-determination, a process that has accelerated since 1990. The Communist project was initially directed at the economic, cultural and social integration or, more properly, *assimilation* of the Roma. In the former Czechoslovakia and in Bulgaria these objectives were never abandoned by the Communist regimes. Such unashamedly assimilationist policies mirrored the efforts of Habsburg rulers, in the mid-eighteenth century, to eliminate the Roma as a distinct cultural group. The challenge for post-Communist societies in the region is to reverse the relentless deterioration in the living standards of the mass of the Roma, while supporting their right to cultural self-expression and self-awareness. At the same time, the fostering of Romani group identities must not be at the expense of individual autonomy. Human rights include the right *not* to be treated as a member of a particular national or ethnic group.

Racism

As noted above, racially-motivated assaults have been an ugly and recurrent feature of the transition process in many post-Communist states. More fundamentally, popular stereotypes about the Roma in much of Central and Eastern Europe have contributed to the process of Romani marginalisation. Understandably, successful, educated Roma, including distinguished classical musicians, sometimes prefer to draw a veil over their ethnicity out of fear for their social standing and careers.

Combating racism requires a complex, multi-faceted strategy. As suggested above, the media bear a heavy responsibility in this regard. Their portrayal of the Roma inevitably colours and reinforces popular perceptions. Educational systems can also play an important part, as already suggested, contributing to an enhanced awareness of the enormous contribution that the Roma have made, particularly in music, the arts, handicrafts and commerce. Institutions of civil society in Central and Eastern Europe, including the churches, could be much more active in combating 'anti-Gypsyism'. The established churches in the region, many of which are enormously influential, have often (though not invariably) chosen to ignore the Gypsies, in part because of the perception that they lack genuine religious devotion. As a teacher at the elementary school in the village of Csenyété remarked: '[f]or a number of reasons, the churches haven't concerned themselves with the village's Gypsies so far.'⁶⁰

Police and criminal justice systems, in much of Central and Eastern Europe, could help to combat racism by treating assaults on Romani victims as both serious breaches of the criminal law and, where the facts warrant it, as racially motivated acts. Re-housing the Roma who have drifted to settlements, small ghettos of deprivation and marginality, also represents a priority. As a recent study on Romani deprivation concluded, 'geographic and social exclusion are important correlates of poverty'.⁶¹

Combating anti-Roma racism, which involves challenging and overturning entrenched prejudices, is a long-term project. In particular, the societies of Central and Eastern Europe must learn (or re-learn) greater tolerance of cultural, religious and ethnic

⁵⁹ The recent World Bank report on Roma poverty uses terms such as 'inclusion' and 'participation' rather than 'integration' in calling for an end to Roma economic marginalisation, no doubt because 'integration' was sometimes a euphemism for 'assimilation'. See *ibid*, p. 6.

⁶⁰ Kereszty and Pólya (eds.) (1998), p. 57.

⁶¹ Ringold *et al.* (2003), p. 126.

difference.⁶² The price of securing freedom from material insecurity and deprivation, racist assaults and the general opprobrium of society should not have to be the surrender (or continued denial) of Romani identity. Roma should not have to turn themselves into *Gadje* in order to be treated with respect. Thus, one of the principal tasks of 'Europeanisation' should be to translate the rhetoric of multiculturalism, evident in a plethora of Council of Europe, OSCE and EU texts, particularly since 1990, into reality for the continent's Roma.

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⁶² On the rise of exclusivist and intolerant forms of nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe see e.g. Berend, Ivan (2003), *History Derailed* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press), pp. 114-19.

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