

**Romani Nation-building:**  
**The Claim for Recognition of a Non-Territorial Romani Nation**  
**(The Cases of Kosovo, Macedonia, and Serbia)**

By  
Senada Sali

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Supervisor: Professor Emel Akçali

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## **Abstract**

Today, there are an estimated 10-12 million Roma living dispersed all around Europe, lacking their own state and territory. After centuries of exclusion, facing hostile governments and bound by rules created without their participation, a number of Roma elites have come to the idea for claiming recognition of a single Romani non-territorial nation, as a method for improving the Romani position in Europe. The claim does not incorporate a demand for territory, and is mainly based on the argument that: 'Roma are a Nation, as all other nations, sharing same tradition, culture, origin, and language'. In this thesis, I problematize the claim for recognition of a 'non-territorial' Romani nation, put forward by the Romani elites and activists through the activities of the International Romani Union. I explore two main research questions (1) what are the perceptions of the Romani masses about their national identity, do they converge with the demands and claims of the Romani elites and activists? (2) to what extent is an elitist-constructed approach for national unity viable in cases of highly dispersed, heterogeneous, and stateless groups, such as the Roma?. In order to answer these questions, I will use the findings from my field research in Kosovo, Macedonia, and Serbia. I add to the existing literature by examining how Romani individuals, perceive their own national identity, confronting those perceptions with the demands of the elites.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Table of Contents .....	iv
Introduction .....	1
Previous Research on Roma Identity.....	5
Methodology.....	8
<b>CHAPTER 1.</b> The concept of non-territorial nation.....	12
1.1. Non-Territorial National-Cultural Autonomy by Bauer and Renner.....	12
1.2. Applying the concept of Non-Territorial National-Cultural Autonomy in Romani context.....	16
<b>CHAPTER 2.</b> Roma Nation-building.....	22
2.1. Evolution of ideas for Romani Nation.....	22
2.2. The International Romani Union (IRU).....	25
2.3. The Fifth Romani World Congress and the Declaration of a Roma Nation.....	28
2.4. Individual perception of Roma from Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia .....	32
2.4.1. Serbia.....	32
2.4.2. Macedonia.....	38
2.4.3. Kosovo.....	42
<b>CHAPTER 3.</b> Romani Nation in Praxis.....	46
3.1. The reality of a top-down approach in Romani Nation-building.....	46
Conclusion.....	53
Appendices.....	55
Bibliography.....	59

## Introduction

The Roma are the largest ethnic minority living dispersed throughout Central, Eastern and Southern Europe, lacking their own territory and state. An interesting fact is that Roma are one of the rare minorities that have never initiated a war, rebellion action, or conflict aiming to obtain territory. After centuries of exclusion and marginalization, faced with hostile governments and bound by rules created without their active participation, a number of Roma elites have put forward the idea for recognition of a non-territorial Romani nation, as a method for improving the Romani representation and position in Europe. According to those Romani elites and activists, the recognition of a separate non-territorial Romani nation would grant an opportunity for the Roma to be represented in international bodies such as the European Union and the United Nations, with the same status as other governments, and attribute them with powers to create and enforce policies specifically dealing with the Romani interest and concerns.<sup>1</sup>

The most prominent event where Roma elites and activists expressed their interest towards the idea for recognition of a single, unified Romani nation was the Fifth Congress of the International Romani Union held in 2000 (Prague), when for the first time a ‘Declaration of a Roma Nation’ was drafted and distributed among the delegates of the Congress.<sup>2</sup> In the ‘Declaration of a Roma Nation’, it is stated: ‘We are a Nation, we share the same tradition, the same culture, the same origin, the same language. We have never looked for creating a Roma State, and we do not want a State today.’<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> McGarry Aidan, *Who speaks for Roma - Political Representation of a Transnational Minority Community*, New York (2010), Chapter 6, International Romani Union p.143.

<sup>2</sup> Acton and Klimova, *The International Romani Union*, in *Between the Past and Future*, p.168-198.

<sup>3</sup> Scuka Emil, *Declaration of a Roma Nation: ‘We the Roma Nation’*, International Romani Union, 2011.p.55-56.

However, contrary to what the Declaration propagates, in reality, Roma are not a single and unified nation. There are some evident differences within the community based not only on geography, language, culture or religion but, also on socioeconomic status, levels of integration, demands and interests. A qualitative research on Roma identity strategies conducted between 2002 and 2008 by the Institute of Social Anthropology at the University of Fribourg confirms the information that even though from the outside Roma are perceived as a single group, from the inside, the individuals stress differences among themselves, and express loyalty to a particular sub-group.<sup>4</sup> However, despite the noted heterogeneity, Romani activists and elites, through the work of the International Romani Union (IRU), seek to unify all Romani communities in one Romani nation.<sup>5</sup>

This classic top-down strategy in nation-building is better known as the problem of founding, or paradox of constitutionalism. The paradox of founding is a conflicting situation in which a nation instead of being founded through a constitutive process in which the ordinary masses and the founding are mutually inclusive, is created by the activities of few individuals named as ‘ethno-political entrepreneurs’,<sup>6</sup> who adopt an act (constitution or declaration) which arbitrarily constitutes the new, previously non-existent nation.<sup>7</sup> In reality, such nation does not exist and is a mere creation of the ideas of these ‘entrepreneurs’. The paradox was for the first time allocated in the process of creation of American nation with the adoption of the Declaration of Independence. As Jacques Derrida argues, Thomas Jefferson and the rest of the founding fathers, illegitimately appointed themselves as representatives of a non-existent American nation

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<sup>4</sup> Boscoboinik Andrea, Challenging Borders and Constructing Boundaries: An analysis of Roma political processes, Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Fribourg, p.182-183

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> The term is used by Brubaker in *Ethnicity Without Groups*, p.10, but is originally taken from the work of Pierre Bourdieu on *Identity and Representation*, p.220-228.

<sup>7</sup> The paradox is explained in a more detailed manner in the conference paper of Bernal, Angelica. "Jefferson and the Paradox of Founding" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the *Midwest Political Science Association* 67th Annual National Conference, The Palmer House Hilton, Chicago, IL, Apr 02, 2009.

and proceeded to create a nation they claimed to represent.<sup>8</sup> In this aspect, the Romani elitist attempt to construct a nation and seek recognition of it, is identical to those American efforts. However, the fact the Romani community is not concentrated on one particular territory, nor aims to obtain a territory in future (as expressed in the Declaration of a Roma Nation), makes the whole Romani nation-building process very specific and unique. By seeking to create a nation beyond nation-state borders, the Roma elites challenge the current Westphalian political order primarily based on inter-state relations as a main method for organization of the global political arena. Besides that, in the current context of globalization and transformation, characterized by, creation of many supranational organizations limiting the traditional powers of states, with clear tendencies for opening borders for allowing constant flows of capital and populations from one to another state, when nationality becomes a more flux category the IRU model of constructing a non-territorial nation, presents an innovative way of solving the issues of stateless minorities that nation-states for centuries did not manage to solve. Taking as a point of departure the Romani elitist claim for recognition of a coherent Romani nation, the thesis gives a hint about the Romani national perceptions and feelings in three different geographies where a number of Roma live: Kosovo, Macedonia, and Serbia, and analyzes the convergence of those perceptions with the ideas of the Romani activist and elites.

Therefore, in order to explore the viability of a nationalist project in situations of highly diversified communities such as the Roma, and to assess the individual Romani perceptions towards the Romani elitist demands and claims, the research aims to investigate: (1) what are the perceptions of the Romani masses from Kosovo, Serbia and Macedonia regarding their national identities, do they converge with the demands and claims of the Romani elites and activists? (2)

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<sup>8</sup>Derrida Jacques, *Declarations of Independence in Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971-2001*, Stanford University Press p.49.

to what extent is an elitist-constructed approach for national unity viable in cases of highly dispersed, heterogeneous, and stateless groups, such as the Roma?. By answering on that, the research is filling a gap in: (1) empirical research of the Romani claim of ‘non-territorial’ nation by analyzing the individual perceptions of Roma from three different countries, (2) probing the viability of an elitist constructed project which goes beyond the current liberal democratic political system (3) offering a rare academic piece on transnational Romani politics, written by a young Romani scholar.

The thesis contains three chapters. The first chapter introduces the concept of non-territorial national-cultural autonomy, developed by Otto Bauer and Karl Renner, discusses its novelty in the context of the contemporary liberal democratic political system, and makes a parallel between the concept of national-cultural autonomy and the concept of Romani non-territorial nation, as promoted by the International Romani Union. The second chapter explains the changing tendencies within the Romani transnational movement, starting with some initial ideas and activities for Roma unity, and moving towards the activities of more organized formations such as the International Romani Union. The same chapter also presents the empirical findings from my field trips to Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia. The third chapter has the aim to analyze the research findings and situate them in the existing theory.

It should be noted that the goal of this research is neither to obstruct nor to denigrate the efforts and work of the International Romani Union or other Romani organizations, individuals, activists and elites. The research is rather intended to analyze the practical viability of such efforts and their reception by the wider Romani masses.



## Previous research on Romani identity

Most of the early Roma-related research, conducted by various academics and scholars primarily analyze the Romani identity as a cultural one, focusing on the Romani origins, history, art, literature, folklore and music. This is the tendency of the so-called Gypsy Lore Society, founded in 1888 by authors such as Charles Godfrey Leland, Henry Thomas Crofton, Sir Richard F. Burton and David MacRitchie.<sup>9</sup> Later on, authors such as Ian Hancock, Elena Marushiakova and Veselin Popov, Ilona Klimova- Alexander and Thomas Acton, Andrea Boscoboinik, Aidan McGarry, and Jud Nirenberg started to deal specifically with the topic of ‘Roma as a Nation’.

For instance, in the book titled ‘The Gypsies of Eastern Europe’, the Romani academic Ian Hancock discusses the East European roots of Romani nationalism and provides an overview of the Romani attempts for reunification, including the activities of the International Romani Union. Hancock compares the Roma to other nations of people lacking homeland throughout the history, as for instance, the Jewish population before 1948 and the Palestinians today.<sup>10</sup> Marushiakova and Popov relate to his work and in their article titled ‘The Roma – a Nation without a State’, present a historical background of the main political ideas in constructing a Romani nation and discuss some contemporary tendencies in the Romani nationalist movement. They allocate the first signs of Romani nation-building in the 19th century, on the Balkans within the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire, a fact which according to them explains why the first Romani organizations emerged in the Balkan countries.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, they argue that a Romani elite was developed during the socialist era and later on, this elite became the main factor in the

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<sup>9</sup> Lee Ken, Orientalism and Gypsylorism, *Social Analysis*, Issue 44(2), November 2000, p.133.

<sup>10</sup> Hancock Ian, *The East European Roots of Romani Nationalism; The Gypsies of Eastern Europe*, edited by Crowe and Kolsti, M.E.Sharpe Inc., Armonk (New York).p.133-150.

<sup>11</sup> Marushiakova Elena, Vesselin Popov: *The Roma – a Nation without a State? Historical Background and Contemporary Tendencies* (2004), p.71-96.

development of a separate Romani nation.<sup>12</sup> An overview of the work of the International Romani Union is also given in an article written by Klimova Ilona and Acton Thomas titled ‘The International Romani Union: An East European answer to West European questions’, where the authors describe the work of International Romani Union from the First Romani World Congress in London, to the Fifth Congress in Prague.<sup>13</sup> In her later work on ‘Transnational Romani and Indigenous Non territorial Self-determination Claims’, Klimova- Alexander takes a bit different approach, comparing the Romani nationalist claims with the demands of the indigenous people, and arguing that the predominant practice of self-determination through territorial separation is not well suited for geographically dispersed communities such as the Roma.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, in a paper titled ‘Challenging Borders and Constructing Boundaries: An analysis of Roma political processes’ the author Andrea Boscoboinik analyzes the process of construction of Romani nation from the perspective of challenging and building borders, and argues that, instead of establishing geographical borders for a territorial nation, the top-down elitist approach in forming a non-territorial Romani nation will create even stronger cultural and political boundaries, where before there were none.<sup>15</sup> Subsequently, focused on analyzing the processes of creation of Romani transnational organizing structures, the author Aidan McGarry in his book titled ‘Who Speaks for Roma’, highlights the fact that no transnational Romani structure has ever been elected directly by the Romani people and thus, organizing structures such as the International Romani Union, need a real feedback from the Romani grassroots in order not be detached from the wider

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Klimova Ilona and Acton Thomas, *The International Romani Union: An East European answer to West European questions; Between past and future: The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe*, edited by Guy Will (2000).p.157-226.

<sup>14</sup> Klímová-Alexander Ilona (2007), *Transnational Romani and Indigenous Non-territorial Self-determination Claims*, *Ethnopolitics: Formerly Global Review of Ethnopolitics*, p.395-416

<sup>15</sup> Boscoboinik Andrea, *Challenging Borders and Constructing Boundaries: An analysis of Roma political processes*, *Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Fribourg*, p.181-190.

Romani audience and face legitimacy issues.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, in the article named ‘Romani Political Mobilization from the First IRU Congress to the European Roma, Sinti, and Travellers Forum (ERTF)’, the author Jud Nirenberg notes that the International Romani Union is not a membership driven union, but is an organization primarily supported by short list of founders and donors - fact which creates certain risk for becoming service provider of its donors instead of being a vehicle for expression of the Romani voice and aspirations.<sup>17</sup>

This research is novel in the sense that it approaches the Roma identity from a special perspective, using the analytical lenses of the ordinary Roma.<sup>18</sup> As mentioned in the introduction, between 2002 and 2008 the Institute of Social Anthropology at the University of Fribourg conducted a research which was not specifically dealing with the individual Romani perceptions towards the IRU nationalist project, but rather it was focused on the Romani identity strategies in four Central and South East European countries (Bulgaria, Romania, Macedonia, and Moldova). The findings indicated that in those countries, Roma are generally regarded as a single group, from the outside, but from the inside, there is a high level of fragmentation among the community members.<sup>19</sup>

Additionally, this research helps in overcoming the lack of data dealing with the identity of Roma living in Kosovo. Bearing in mind that the ‘de facto’ country has recently declared an independence, it is interesting to see how these new development influenced the Romani identity and national awareness. In 2011, Melissa Hughes, student at the University of New Orleans,

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<sup>16</sup> McGarry Aidan, Who speaks for Roma - Political Representation of a Transnational Minority Community, New York (2010), Chapter 6, Notes on Legitimacy of Transnational Organizing Structures of Representation.p.147-148.

<sup>17</sup> Jud Nirenberg, Romani Political Mobilization from the First IRU Congress to the European Roma,Sinti,and Travellers Forum (ERTF);Romani Politics in Contemporary Europe, edited by Sigona Nando and Nidhi Trehan.p.94-116.

<sup>18</sup> I use the term ordinary for those members of the Romani community not belonging to political, intellectual or economic elite.

<sup>19</sup> Qualitative research by the *Institute of Social Anthropology*, University of Fribourg-Switzerland and Ethnobarometer. [www.ethnobarometer.org](http://www.ethnobarometer.org).

conducted a research on the influence of Kosovar nationalist ideologies on the Romani position in the country, and concluded that Roma experience an ‘ethnic scapegoating’ by both Albanians and Serbians in the ‘de facto’ country.<sup>20</sup> In February this year, an MA student in Political Science at CEU, Suad Skenderi, published an article titled ‘Nation or an Ethnic Community – The challenges of Roma identity’. In the article, he highlights that the process of Romani nation-building is challenging the traditional concepts of nation and nation-building.<sup>21</sup> I relate my research to this article and, therefore, pay a special attention to the specificity of the Romani nation-building by dedicating a separate chapter on this topic (*see* Chapter 2).

## **Methodology**

I am to demonstrate what are the individual perceptions of the ordinary Roma individuals regarding their national identity and analyze their convergence with the nationalistic visions of the Romani elites. In order to respond on this, the thesis uses qualitative research methods employing them in three country case studies. By examining the Romani perceptions in three, different geographies, the thesis aims to illustrate the complexity of the Romani national identity.

### ***Methods of Data Collection***

#### ***Qualitative research - Focus groups and mental mapping***

The research takes formulation which consists of focus group discussions and drawing mental maps by ordinary Roma individuals from three geographies: Kosovo, Macedonia, and Serbia. The chosen research methods are appropriate because they provide an opportunity to discover the internal feelings and opinions of the participants but also to interact, confront and

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<sup>20</sup> Hughes, Melissa, *The Romani Place in Kosovar Space: Nationalism and Kosovo’s Roma* (2011). *University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 1397.

<sup>21</sup> Skenderi Suad, *Nation or an Ethnic Community – The challenges of Roma identity*, *Romalitico -Roma Policy Analysis*, February 2015. <http://romalitico.org/index.php/content/itemlist/user/593-suadskenderi>.

compare those perceptions with the positions of other individuals, inside and outside the focus groups. As Walker Connor argues: ‘the idea of nation is a psychological matter that does not arise only in the minds of intellectuals and elites, but also in the feelings and daily experiences of ordinary people.’<sup>22</sup> Being informed about the perceptions, emotions and personal opinions of the wider masses, towards an idea that could have an impact on the future of the whole community, can make the claim more legitimate and viable.<sup>23</sup> The method of drawing mental maps provided me with the opportunity for additional qualitative assessment of the psychological dimension of the identity perceptions and feelings among the respondents. This method proved to be especially useful while conducting research in Serbia, where a number of participants were illiterate. Therefore, instead of writing their perceptions they could simply picture them.

The total number of participants in the focus groups was 45 or 15 per each country. Each focus group discussion was about two hours long, consisted of four parts: presentation of the topic, discussion, drawing mental maps and reflection. The focus groups consisted young Roma students, middle age and older educated individuals, illiterate individuals coming from marginalized communities and Romani working class. The age, gender, education, socioeconomic and other differences among the respondents was of extreme importance in order to receive feedback by various types of Roma. Targeting the Roma youth was done with the purpose to discover the national feelings and opinions of the new Romani generations, as those are generations who grew up in the period after the establishment of the International Romani Union, fact which may indicate that their individual nationalistic perceptions are not that influenced by the ideas of the Romani elites and activists. I also assumed that, by

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<sup>22</sup> Connor Walker, *Ethno- nationalism: A Quest for Understanding*, Princeton University Press, 1994, p.42.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

including this group I would be able to question the knowledge of this generation about the activities of the transnational Romani movement and the things that they have learned from their parents and older relatives.

Before starting my field research, I used my NGO contacts in all three countries in order to send invitations for the event and to ascertain the location of the research. The young Roma activist Kilino Stojkov from Serbia, the Romani radio and TV redactor from Kosovo, Daut Qulangjiu and the coordinator of Romaversitas- Macedonia, Natasha Davcheva were the main people with whom I cooperated in order to recruit participants and to find a space for conducting my research. The discussions took place in the offices of three Romani NGO's: NGO Roma Youth Network (Prishtina), NGO Romaverstas (Skopje) and Organization for Prosperity of Roma (Novi Becej). The focus group discussions were held in Romanes, Serbian and Macedonian language. Those were the languages spoken both by the respondents and by myself as a researcher. Even though, I am fluent in all three languages it proved to be very important which language I use with a certain focus group and on what level and style I articulate it in order to make my arguments and questions understandable and clear for all the participants. In times the respondents were articulating things not directly connected to the topic of this thesis. However, those situations proved to be useful in understand the complexity of the Romani national identity and the problematic features with which the topic correlates.

### *Selection of country case*

Taking into consideration the limited scope of this work and the fact that Roma are spread in more than forty countries in Europe, a detailed research covering all those countries would be a too ambitious project at this point. Still, the fact that the biggest sponsor and supporter of the project for creation of Romani non-territorial nation was the Yugoslavian state

with center in Belgrade, gives a proper justification why the focus of my work is that particular region. The Yugoslav delegations in the IRU were directly financed by the state and were the most numerous ones.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, all three geographies, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Serbia have their national representatives in the International Romani Union. For instance, the president of the First Romani World Congress was a Serbian activist, Slobodan Berberski,<sup>25</sup> Orhan Galjus from Kosovo was a vice-president and Zoran Dimov from Macedonia is the current secretary general of the International Roma Union. Furthermore, all three countries share borders, common history (as part of the Yugoslavian Federation), and have a similar proportion of Romani population living on their territories. This fact may imply that the Roma in these three countries are better informed about the activities of the International Romani Union, including the claim for non-territorial nation and a possible convergence in the Romani positions and national perceptions. However, the ‘on the ground’ analysis revealed different levels of awareness and national feelings among Romani individuals, both between and within all three countries.

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<sup>24</sup> Marushiakova Elena, Vesselin Popov: *The Roma – a Nation without a State? Historical Background and Contemporary Tendencies* (2004), p.80.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 1. The concept of Non-Territorial Nation

### *1.1. Non-territorial national-cultural autonomy by Bauer and Renner*

The claim for being recognized as a non-territorial nation made by the Romani activists and elites, in the middle of the 20th century, is a novel way for achieving Romani unity and representation, within the Romani nationalist realm. However, the claim is based on one already developed, but for a long time theoretically neglected concept, the concept of non-territorial national-cultural autonomy. This concept was initially sketched by the Austrian statesmen, politician and constitutional jurist Karl Renner, later on adopted by his socialist compatriot Otto Bauer, who managed to develop an entire method of non-territorial national-cultural autonomy, at the turn of the last century. The method was explained in a separate book named “The Nationalities Question and Social Democracy”<sup>26</sup> a book that offered important explanations of notions such as minority rights, multiculturalism and nationalism, as well as, a piece of work that is very useful for understanding the limits and challenges posed to the contemporary liberal democracies. When sketching the concept Renner was principally inspired by the famous German historian Friedrich Meinecke, who was among the first academics that tried to challenge the notion of sovereign nation-states as embodiments of ethnic values.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, the concept found its practical implementation in the context of the twentieth-century ethno-nationalist problems in the overpopulated Austro-Hungarian Empire.<sup>28</sup>

The rapid industrialization that commenced at the beginnings of the twentieth century in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, provoked an uneven development of the different parts of the

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<sup>26</sup> Bauer Otto, *The Nationalities Question and Social Democracy*, with an introduction by E. Nimni, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, forthcoming, 2000).

<sup>27</sup> Meinecke F., *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat: Studien zur Genesis des Deutschen Nationalstaates* (Munich and Berlin: R. Oldenbourg, 1917). English translation: *Cosmopolitanism and the National State* [translated by Robert B. Kimber, with an introduction by Felix Gilbert] (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970).

<sup>28</sup> Nimni, Ephraim. “Nationalist Multiculturalism in Late Imperial Austria as a Critique of Contemporary Liberalism: The Case of Bauer and Renner, *Journal of Political Ideologies* Vol. 4 No 289, (1999).



Empire, process that additionally led to massive movements within the territory of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and resulted in over-concentration of population by diverse ethnic and national origins, on one particular area.<sup>29</sup> In order to avoid potential conflicts between various ethnic and national communities living on that territory, the Austrian Socialist Party went through alteration into a Federation of several national parties, all in order to grant more rights and political recognition for the diverse communities living on the same territory. The party managed to overcome the tense situation, mainly by investing significant intellectual capacities in satisfying the diverse national and ethnic demands of the minorities living on Austro-Hungarian ground, step which prevented the possibilities of ethnic conflicts and tensions in the country.

The traditional and still predominant political system around the world, the liberal democratic political system is based on the idea of equality among individuals and the need for protecting individual rights and freedoms by developing and implementing rules enshrined in the law. That said, the biggest dilemma in such a system is: whether the liberal democratic system can accommodate the needs and demands for political recognition, and the diverse collective rights of national and ethnic minorities. As an ultimate solution, for the demands and struggles of the different national and ethnic minorities living on the territory of one nation-state, the liberals promoted the right to self-determination. The main liberal interpretation of this right is that self-determination is the right of the oppressed people to form a separate nation-state. After the First World War, this right became part of the demands of most of the newly created nations. However, today the possibility for using this right by ethnic and national minorities is very limited taking into consideration the already scarce territorial space for forming new political entities, and the practical impossibility for isolating only one ethnic or national community into a

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<sup>29</sup> Pauley B.F., *The Habsburg Legacy* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), p. 23

single territorial space, keeping in mind the fact that today ‘ethnically clean’ states are almost non-existent. The limitations of the current liberal ideology are very well illustrated in the contemporary Israeli-Palestinian dispute.<sup>30</sup> Thus, in situations when on the territory of one political entity most of the residential areas are ethnically mixed and when those different ethnic communities do not share the same visions and plans about the functioning of the nation-state, the liberal principle of self-determination could make the situation even worse by provoking events of assimilation, oppression and even ethnic cleansing.

Authors such as Will Kymlicka argue that in most of the current nation-states ethnic diversity is already a well-respected value and norm.<sup>31</sup> Contrary to that, Renner and Bauer, supported by the work of other post-nationalist authors,<sup>32</sup> argue that in the current system of nation-states, political representation of national and ethnic diversity is impossible, because of the fact that, that is totally opposite to the main liberal principle of individual equality. Thus, Renner’s concept of non-territorial national-cultural autonomy and Bauer’s method of cultural autonomy are revolutionary in many senses. First of all, both of them challenged the idea of the nation-state in times when the idea had an uncontested role and importance. Second, they contested the current liberal democratic system of governance based on equality among individuals living in sovereign nation-states and the territorial principle as a main way of political organization of every nation. Third, both Renner and Bauer agreed on a division of the notions state and nation, and construction of a new system of multinational states where communities are organized as de-territorialised national corporations, with autonomous rights.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> McGarry J. and O’Leary B., *Explaining Northern Ireland: Broken Images* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 35; E. Nimni, ‘Polynational states: liberal, illiberal or post-liberal?’, *ASEN Bulletin, The Journal of the Association for the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 13 (Summer 1997), p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Kymlicka W., *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 1

<sup>32</sup> Soysal Y., ‘Changing citizenship in Europe’, in Cesarini D. and Fulbrook M. (Eds.), *Citizenship, Nationality and Migration in Europe* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 18-19

<sup>33</sup> Carlie Aylmer McCartney, *National States and National Minorities* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1968). p. 149.

Fourth, the one century old concept of non-territorial national-cultural autonomy can find its practical implementation not only in the context on the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but also in the current circumstances, when the idea of sovereign nation-states is losing more and more from its hegemonic meaning and role because of the establishment of supranational organizations such as the European Union. Lastly but most importantly, the method of national autonomy promoted by Renner and Bauer is based on a premise that each community may enjoy autonomy within the borders of an already existing state without possessing an own exclusive territory. This is different from what most of the usual theories on national autonomy envisage.

The method of national-cultural autonomy does not require from communities to have a certain homeland, nor to aspire for acquiring one, in order to enjoy national or ethnic autonomy in a particular nation-state. In contrary, the method is based on the argument that national and ethnic communities as collectives of individuals who share same traditions, origin, language, culture and so on, have the right to enjoy autonomy within a multi-national state, no matter their territorial status. This makes the method especially suitable for stateless communities and communities that cannot have, or do not aspire to have a state of their own. As Renner argued, the lack of requirement for territorial exclusivity is what contributes for the establishment of better inter-communal relations, fostering coexistence between the members of different national and ethnic communities.<sup>34</sup> This is in contrast to the main liberal solution for the demands of ethnically diverse communities, the right to self-determination, because instead of offering territorial solution to national demands, it offers non-territorial autonomy for coexistence in already existing territorial spaces. Moreover, Bauer and Renner's method of non-territorial national-cultural autonomy mainly rests on the so-called personality principle, which refers to the personal choice of the individuals as the only condition for being part of a certain national

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<sup>34</sup> Renner Karl, 'State and Nation', in *Schriften* (Vienna: Residenz -Verlag, 1994), p. 27-31.

community, and not on the contemporary liberal principle of territoriality by which individuals are circumscribed under the domination of a particular nation by the mere fact of residence on their territory. In order to implement Renner and Bauer's ideas in practice, ethnic and national communities will have to form a single body responsible for dealing with diverse issues of national character such as culture, education, finances, media and law. In their model, this kind of body is better known as a 'national corporation'. Even though the above-presented model of non-territorial national cultural autonomy was not taken seriously in the golden age of the nation-state, when it was initially developed, the main ideas and arguments promoted by its founding fathers are very similar to what few decades later was propagated by the members of the 'Romani national corporation', the International Romani Union (IRU), in a document known as the 'Declaration of a Roma Nation'.

### ***1.2. Applying the concept of non-territorial national-cultural autonomy in Romani context***

After years of disappointment and failures of the ineffective national policies regarding the issues faced by the members of the Romani community, a new development within the Romani transnational movement, headed by the International Romani Union, was marked with the emergence of the claim for recognition of a Romani non-territorial nation. The concept behind the claim in many ways resembles the Austrian model of non-territorial national-cultural autonomy, developed a century ago.

From the academic work of Marushiakova and Popov, we discover that the concept of Romani non-territorial nation was a product of a Romani meeting held in the early 90's in Ostia, Italy.<sup>35</sup> The person who first came out with the novel idea and explained its practical functioning

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<sup>35</sup> Marushiakova Elena, Vesselin Popov: *The Roma – a Nation without a State? Historical Background and Contemporary Tendencies* (2004), p.443; Proceedings from this meeting see: "Est e ovest"; Roma, Gypsy, Travellers. East/West.

was the controversial, non-Romani member of the Italian Transradical Party, later on, IRU representative to United Nations, the activist Paolo Pietrosanti. He wrote several articles explaining this idea,<sup>36</sup> and in 1997 the same concept was mentioned in a paper of two Romani activists, Nicolae Gheorghe and Andrzej Mirga, published by the Project of Ethnic Relations.<sup>37</sup> Similarly to the concept of non-territorial national-cultural autonomy, the concept of non-territorial Romani nation was initially neglected and seen with disdain even among the most active members of the Romani transnational movement. However, things began to change in the year of 2000, with the drafting and circulation of the ‘Declaration of a Roma Nation’,<sup>38</sup> when the concept of non-territorial Roma nation was officially endorsed by the International Romani Union and subsequently, attracted both national and international attention. After this event, the International Romani Union positioned itself as an important dissemination agency both within the Romani and non-Romani nationalist realm. Therefore, the IRU activities that followed the adoption of the ‘Declaration of a Roma Nation’ were aimed to materialize Pietrosanti’s novel idea. As already explained in the previous point, dedicated to the concept of national-cultural autonomy, Bauer and Renner’s work was also in a big part neglected, and similarly to the concept of Romani nation, it represented a novelty in the time when it was promoted.

In their work on national-cultural autonomy, Bauer and Renner acknowledge that the model is especially suitable for stateless communities and communities that cannot have or do not aspire to have a state of their own.<sup>39</sup> As an example, they use the indigenous peoples.<sup>40</sup> However, the fact that the Romani community is a typical example of a stateless community in

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<sup>36</sup> Pietrosanti Paolo, Project for a Non-Territorial Republic of the Romany Nation, Spring 1994, p. 1-8. [https://groups.google.com/forum/#!topic/romano\\_liloro/z6F2SOaczCE](https://groups.google.com/forum/#!topic/romano_liloro/z6F2SOaczCE), (accessed on 10 May 2015).

<sup>37</sup> Bunescu Ioana, The Politics of Collective Identity Formation: The Genealogy of the concept of De-Territorialised Nation and its Transformations, Malmö University, Sweden. p. 107-115.

<sup>38</sup> Scuka Emil, Declaration of a Roma Nation, Appendix. p. 55-56.

<sup>39</sup> Nimni, Ephraim. “Nationalist Multiculturalism in Late Imperial Austria as a Critique of Contemporary Liberalism: The Case of Bauer and Renner, *Journal of Political Ideologies* Vol. 4 No 289, (1999).p.297.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

Europe, makes Bauer and Renner's model perfectly applicable to Roma. For that purpose, the aim of this part is to draw a parallel between the concept of non-territorial national-cultural autonomy and the IRU's concept of non-territorial Romani nation. In several occasions throughout their work, Bauer and Renner directly criticize the current liberal democratic system of governance because of its incapability to offer a solution for the political demands and struggles of ethnic and national minorities living within one nation-state. Up until today, the only solution that this system has offered to the demands and claims of oppressed communities is the right to self-determination. However, this right has often led to the isolation of certain national or ethnic community in a separate territorial entity, instead of bringing it closer to other communities. Thus, Bauer and Renner agreed on the need for re-thinking the main postulates of the contemporary liberal political ideology, and as a solution they developed a system where each national and ethnic community could enjoy autonomy within a same multinational state, no matter if that state is the place of residence, homeland, or exclusive territory of the community. In order to enable the functioning of this system, each national and ethnic community would have to establish its own 'national corporation', as a main body dealing with questions of national character, and a body responsible for establishing relations of coexistence and cooperation between that nation and other entities inside and outside of the multinational state.

In the Romani nation-building context, the International Romani Union has positioned itself as a typical Romani institution representing a national corporation, in the language of Bauer and Renner, or the main body dealing with national issues as provided in their non-territorial national-cultural autonomy model. Since the initial establishment in 1977, the International Romani Union became the leading Romani corporation representing the Roma nation in front of other national and international bodies. Evidence for that are the usual

occasions when the organization tried to establish cooperation with governments of other existent nations ( e.g. on 4 of April 2001 IRU signed Memorandum of understanding and co-operation with the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs; met with the heads of state and government representatives of Bulgaria, Italy and Yugoslavia; attended a leaders meeting of the EU in Nice; established IRU offices in Romania, Macedonia, Moldova, Bulgaria, Brussels; initiated joint projects with the Republic of Bulgaria),<sup>41</sup> and international organizations such as the United Nations, the European Union, Council of Europe and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). These actions showed the willingness of the Romani community members to coexist with other nations, a fact which is pivotal for the successful functioning of Bauer and Renner's autonomy model. Additionally, the International Romani Union as a main promoter of the concept of Romani non-territorial nation, endorsed the idea that the millions of Roma, related by common roots, culture, origin and so on, spread all around Europe represent one nation, and thus they need to be recognized as such without claiming a territory. This idea is also in line with the concept of national-cultural autonomy, because the model of non-territorial Romani nation as envisaged by the IRU, is supposed to exist within the boundaries of the current states, building parallel Romani institutions and structures which do not oppose the existing ones, and having its own Romani national representatives in international bodies, as all other nations possessing territory. Additionally, the Romani claim is a demand for political recognition and not for self-determination thus, there is no room for rejecting this demand under the explanation that territorial space for forming new states is scarce or that this process would lead to additional isolation of the Roma.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Marushiakova Elena, Vesselin Popov: *The Roma – a Nation without a State? Historical Background and Contemporary Tendencies* (2004), p.444.

<sup>42</sup> Pietrosanti Paolo, *Project for a Non-Territorial Republic of the Romany Nation*, Spring 1994, p. 1-8. [https://groups.google.com/forum/#!topic/romano\\_liloro/z6F2SOaczCE](https://groups.google.com/forum/#!topic/romano_liloro/z6F2SOaczCE), (accessed on 10 May 2015).

Similarly to Bauer and Renner, the activists of the International Romani Union have disfavored the liberal concept of self-determination and propagated the position that Roma have never wanted a territory, nor they plan to claim one in the near future. As mentioned before, Bauer and Renner's method of non-territorial national-cultural autonomy relies significantly on the so-called personality principle, meaning that the membership in a certain national community depends exclusively from the personal choice and will of individuals. Exactly the same principle can be found in the article titled: 'The Roma and Democracy: A nation without a State', published by the political advisor of Dr. Emil Scuka (president of the IRU), Mr. Sean Nazerali. In the article, Nazerali states that the membership in the non-territorial Romani nation, as envisaged by the International Romani Union, is voluntary and based on the personality principle.<sup>43</sup>

From all that was previously mentioned, we have to acknowledge that there is a significant similarity between Bauer and Renner's concept of national-cultural autonomy and the IRU model of Romani Nation. What Bauer and Renner challenged but did not manage to change a century ago, the International Romani Union is trying to achieve now. Additionally, those advocating for Romani non-territorial nation, have taken the whole idea one step further, reaching out a global community and seeking international political recognition. There is no doubt that if approved, the IRU concept of a non-territorial Romani nation would have an explosive impact on the current political order. Currently, we live in a world dominated by the hegemonic notion of nation-state and the principle of territoriality as a main tool for controlling all individuals residing on the territory of a certain state. Changing this territorially-oriented system into a non-territorial environment, where all nations have equal status and access to rights, just because of the mere fact that they are all communities of people sharing certain traditions,

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<sup>43</sup> Nazerali Sean, *The Roma and Democracy: A Nation without a State*, in *Democracy Unrealized*, p.147.



origin, language and similar, would be revolutionary. We are already witnessing certain changes that came out as a result of the globalization processes and the opening of borders. Furthermore, as IRU argues, the successful realization of the Romani claim would be beneficial not only for the Roma and a number of other stateless communities, but this would also prevent future wars and conflicts that until now have broken out in places where nationalities did not have representation, were not represented by a state or were minority in a certain state.<sup>44</sup>

For the Roma, the proposal for a non-territorial nation is certainly a step forward. The recognition of the Roma as a nation equal to all other nations would transform the Roma from a marginal community into a community on equal footing with all others. Besides that, the model may be extended further to all other disadvantaged minorities and have a positive impact on a more general level, stimulating a non-territorial, minority inclusive political space, where everyone is welcome and everyone's voice is heard. For that thing to happen, as Pietrosanti argues, we must start out from something.<sup>45</sup> And the Romani transnational movement already initiated that 'something'. The next important step is a Romani unity behind the concept. Support by the wider Romani masses is what would make the contribution of the Romani elites and activists more legitimate and transform the mere idea into a practically feasible project.

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<sup>44</sup> Pietrosanti Paolo, Project for a Non-Territorial Republic of the Romany Nation, Spring 1994, p. 1-8. [https://groups.google.com/forum/#!topic/romano\\_liloro/z6F2SOaczCE](https://groups.google.com/forum/#!topic/romano_liloro/z6F2SOaczCE), (accessed on 10 May 2015).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 2. Romani Nation-building

### *2.1. Evolution of ideas for Romani Nation*

The idea of unity among all Roma in the form of a nation, equal to all other existent nations, has been more loudly outspoken and promoted in the modern era. However, the process of Romani nation-building is a long, multidirectional process, having its roots in some pre-modern political ideas and activities for development of a single, unified Romani community. The earliest activities aiming to achieve recognition of the Romani community as a nation, equal to all other existent nations, but with specific characteristics shared only by the members of this community, can be traced back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, within the Ottoman Empire on the Balkans. The fact that everything started from there is not that surprising, if we take into consideration the substantial level of development of the Roma living within the Empire and the possibility for enjoying similar social and civil rights, as all other subjects living within the same boundaries, since the fifteenth century.

In 1868, as Marushiakova and Popov describe in their article titled ‘The Roma – a Nation without a State’, a Macedonian Roma Ilia Naumcev from Prilep, wrote a letter pleading from the authorities in Istanbul a religious worship in Romani language because of the necessity of ‘making a Romani society and taking care for the education in the community’.<sup>46</sup> Similar action was taken in 1906, when a Bulgarian Roma, Ramadan Ali addressed a petition to the National Parliament, seeking equal rights for all the Roma.<sup>47</sup> These initiatives were not very different from other 19-century efforts of nations, for achieving religious, educational, cultural, linguistic or political autonomy. Consequently, after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the thousands of well-

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<sup>46</sup> Macedonia newspaper, Tsarigrad, year 1,Nr.32,8.8.1867,p.3. The letter was commented by Elena Marushiakova, Vesselin Popov in *The Roma – a Nation without a State? Historical Background and Contemporary Tendencies* (2004).

<sup>47</sup> Hancock Ian, *The East European Roots of Romani Nationalism*, in Crowe and Kolsti, *The Gypsies of Eastern Europe*.p.139.

integrated and educated Roma from the Balkans became the main ‘engine’ of the process of reunification of the members of the Romani community worldwide, constituting a new Romani elite.

A more radical stage in the Romani nation-building was noted in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the idea for uniting Roma in a single Romani land, the so-called *Romanestan*, initially emerged. The idea was for the first time developed and propagated by the Roma Royal dynasty Kweik from Poland, descendants of Romani slaves from Romania.<sup>48</sup> Their activities mainly included sending Romani delegations in different countries, asking for pieces of territory for the Roma. They sought to provide a concrete and tangible land for all Roma, something that the Roma lacked since their initial migration from India. Thus, for instance in 1934 Jozef Kwiek sent a delegation to UN demanding territory in Namibia, where a Roma state could be established.<sup>49</sup> His successors Michal II Kwiek and Janusz Kwiek organized similar activities, seeking territories in India and Abyssinia, respectively.<sup>50</sup> An interesting illustration of the nationalist ideas of this dynasty is found in the text of the coronation speech of Janudz Kweik:

*‘I shall send a delegate to Mussolini asking him to grant us a piece of land in Abyssinia, where Roma can settle. Our people are weary of having to travel throughout the ages. The time has come for us to cease living as nomads; if the Poles will only allow us to send our children to their schools to be educated, we shall soon have our own representatives in League of Nations.’*<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Ficowski Jerzy, The Gypsies in Poland, p.29-37.

<sup>49</sup> Marushiakova Elena, Vesselin Popov: The Roma – a Nation without a State? Historical Background and Contemporary Tendencies (2004), p.448.

<sup>50</sup> Ficowski, Cyganie (The Gypsies), 101-102; Hancock, We are the Romani peoples, 117-118.

<sup>51</sup> Ficowski Jerzy, Ciganie na Polskich Drogach, p.165.

However, internal disagreements within the dynasty, as well as, the widespread anti-Roma sentiments in whole Europe contributed for little to be achieved on the ground. In reality, the dream for *Romanestan* has never been materialized, even though the claim for special representation in international and European bodies became more vocally expressed by the Romani activists and elites in the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The events of persecution and extermination of Roma during the Nazi regime marked a great silence and suppression of the Romani ideas for national unity. Things came back to its previous developments during the 1960's with the creation of the World Gypsy Committee (Comite International Tzigane) in Paris. We need to make a difference between the nationalist activities before this period, undertaken by few individuals talking in the name of the entire Romani community, and the later, more organized forms of national unity, as the one of the International World Committee.

The International Word Committee (IWC), led by the Hungarian Roma Vanko Rouda, became the milestone of a more organized Romani national movement, that in few years achieved affiliation with more than thirty Romani organizations, from more than thirty different countries. In the period between 8<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> April, 1971 the International World Committee organized the first Romani World Congress, in London.<sup>52</sup> Later on, this same committee was reorganized and renamed in what today is known as the International Romani Union (IRU). Soon after the first World Romani Congress, the IRU became the most active factor in the Romani nation-building process. With the establishment of this entity, a completely new momentum was marked. This time the idea for *Romanestan* was dropped and replaced by the concept of a

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<sup>52</sup> Puxon Grattan, The Romani movement: Rebirth and the First Romani Congress in Retrospect, in ed. Acton Thomas, *Scholarship and the Gypsy Struggle: Commitment in Romani Studies* (Hertfordshire: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2000), p.94-113.

Romani non-territorial nation, illustrated in the sentence: ‘the Roma land is everywhere where Roma can be found, because Romanestan is in the Romani hearts’.<sup>53</sup> The period that followed was characterized by several World Romani Congresses attended by hundreds of Romani representatives (mainly elites and activists), from various different countries.

## **2.2. The International Romani Union (IRU)**

The activities and ideas for Romani unity took a more organized form in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the development of the Romani elite in Europe.<sup>54</sup> In this period, a number of Romani organizations were formed in different parts of Europe, showing interest for cooperation and unity among each other. An ideal occasion for that was the First World Romani Congress held in London, in 1971.<sup>55</sup> The congress was chaired by the president of the International Gypsy Committee, a Romani activists from Yugoslavia, Slobodan Berberski.<sup>56</sup> For a secretary general was appointed Grattan Puxon, a non-Romani activist from Great Britain.<sup>57</sup> After the death of the president Slobodan Berberski, the International Gypsy Committee was reorganized and renamed in what today is known as the International Roma Union (IRU), the leading body in the international Romani politics.

On the First World Romani Congress, the delegates adopted an anthem and flag as international symbols for the Roma worldwide. Representatives of more than 15 countries agreed on accepting the traditional song ‘*Gelem, Gelem*’ (later on slightly re-edited by the Romani

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<sup>53</sup> Liegeois, J.-P.: Roma, Gypsies, Travellers. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 1994. p.257.

<sup>54</sup> Boscoboinik Andrea, Challenging Borders and Constructing Boundaries: An analysis of Roma political processes, *Institute of Social Anthropology*, University of Fribourg, p.186.

<sup>55</sup> Puxon Grattan, The Romani movement: Rebirth and the First Romani Congress in Retrospect, in ed. Acton Thomas, *Scholarship and the Gypsy Struggle: Commitment in Romani Studies* (Hertfordshire: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2000), p.94-113.

<sup>56</sup> Marushiakova Elena, Vesselin Popov: The Roma – a Nation without a State? Historical Background and Contemporary Tendencies (2004), p.440.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

musician Jarko Jovanovic), as the anthem of all the Roma.<sup>58</sup> A flag composed by green and blue color with a red wheel in the middle, symbolizing the Romani migratory heritage, was as well adopted on the Congress in London.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, at the same meeting the delegates strongly condemned the usage of various pejorative labels such as *Gypsy*, *Tsigane*, *Zigeuner* acknowledging the term *Roma* as the only acceptable term when referring to the members of this community.<sup>60</sup> The greatest achievement of this meeting was that it succeeded to bring together members of Romani organizations and independent activists from several different countries, encouraging them to take local, national and international initiatives for Romani emancipation and unity.

After its initial establishment, the International Romani Union became the main organizer of all forthcoming Romani World Congresses, and even though not the only one, represented the most active and widespread international organization for Roma. The first president of IRU became president of the Second World Romani Congress held in Geneva, between 8-11 April, 1978. During this Congress a strong Indian influence in the Romani movement was noticed. An Indian delegation, led by the Prime Minister of Punjab, attended the meeting confirming the historical evidence and belief that India was the ‘mother-land’ of Roma before their migratory movements began.<sup>61</sup> The main activities of this event were related to fostering acceptance of the International Romani Union in international organizations. For that purpose, a petition for acquiring a consultative status in the United Nations was drafted and addressed to the United

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<sup>58</sup> Appendix 3. p.58.

<sup>59</sup> Appendix 2. p.57.

<sup>60</sup> Hancock Ian, *The East European Roots of Romani Nationalism*, in Crowe and Kolsti, *The Gypsies of Eastern Europe*.p.145.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* p.146; Liegeois, J.-P.: *Roma, Gypsies, Travellers*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 1994. p.258

Nation headquarters in New York.<sup>62</sup> In 1997, the International Romani Union received consultation status in the United Nations, as a Romani non-governmental organization.<sup>63</sup>

The next Romani World Congress took place in May 1981, in Göttingen, Germany. The Congress represented cooperation between the International Romani Union and the German Sinti League.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, the Sinti activist Romani Rose was appointed as vice-president of the Congress and for president was selected Sait Balic, an activist from Yugoslavia.<sup>65</sup> The main aim of this Congress was demanding reparations of damage for the Romani victims of the Holocaust and other war crimes. With regard to that, bilateral relations were successfully established between the International Romani Union leadership, the German government, and the US Holocaust Memorial Council. After the Cold War, followed by a long break of nine years in the activities of the international Romani movement, the next World Romani Congress, partly sponsored by UNESCO, was organized in Serock (place near Warsaw), Poland between 4-13 April, 1990.<sup>66</sup> This was the most numerous meeting with more than 500 participants from almost 30 countries. President of this Congress was the Serbian Romani writer, Rajko Djuric. The Congress was better known as ‘Congress of Roma intellectuals’, and its main focus was the standardization of a common Romani language and promotion of common cultural identity among the members of the widely dispersed and fragmented community.<sup>67</sup> One of the major achievements of this Congress was the adoption of a standardized alphabet developed by the Romani philologist Marcel Courtiade. Additionally, the IRU managed to establish formal

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<sup>62</sup> Hancock Ian, *The East European Roots of Romani Nationalism*, in Crowe and Kolsti, *The Gypsies of Eastern Europe*.p.146.

<sup>63</sup> Marushiakova Elena, Vesselin Popov: *The Roma – a Nation without a State? Historical Background and Contemporary Tendencies* (2004), p.441. At the official site of IRU is written that the IRU received that status in 1993. See at <http://internationalromaniunion.org/history/> (accessed on 14 May 2015) .

<sup>64</sup> Acton and Klimova, *The International Romani Union*, in *Between the Past and the Future*.p.160.

<sup>65</sup> For more info about the Third Congress of IRU check the SFB 586, *Difference und Integration*, office in Leipzig; see also : Rishi, *Report of the Third World*, p.43-80.

<sup>66</sup> Anon, *Citizens of Europe*; John Danidzewski, *Gypsies gather to Celebrate Heritage, Urge End to Stereotypes*.

<sup>67</sup> Acton and Klimova, *The International Romani Union*, in *Between the Past and the Future*.p.160.

relations with UNICEF, Vatican, the US Department of Defence, the government of the Czech Republic and many other national or international organizations and bodies.

From meeting for establishing cooperation among Romani organizations, the World Romani Congress headed by the International Romani Union, soon became the main venue for Romani nationalism. The nationalist tendencies within the international Romani movement were mostly noticeable during the Fifth Romani World Congress, held in July 2000, in Prague. The Congress had a newly appointed president Dr. Emil Scuka from Czechoslovakia.<sup>68</sup> The program of activities for this event was mainly related to the concept of 'nation without territory/state'. With the promotion of these activities, the International Romani Union managed to position itself as a leading institution representing the Romani 'nation'.<sup>69</sup> All further activities of the organization were mainly related to the claim for recognition of a non-territorial status of the Romani nation.

### ***2.3. The Fifth World Romani Congress and the Declaration of a Roma Nation***

The Prague-based International Romani Union is the first Romani international body that visibly and loudly propagated the need for recognition of the Roma as a trans-boundary nation, nation without a territory. The main argument behind the IRU's nationalist approach is that even though some nations do not possess territory, they deserve to be treated equally as all other nations having one and thus, they need to take an active part and be represented on the international stage.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Liegeois, J.-P.: Roma, Gypsies, Travellers. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 1994, p.215.

<sup>69</sup> Boscoboinik Andrea, Challenging Borders and Constructing Boundaries: An analysis of Roma political processes, *Institute of Social Anthropology*, University of Fribourg, p.186.

<sup>70</sup> McGarry Aidan, Who speaks for Roma - Political Representation of a Transnational Minority Community, New York (2010), Chapter 6, International Romani Union p.142.



A pivotal moment in the International Romani Union activities regarding the recognition of the Romani non-territorial national status was the Fifth World Romani Congress, held in the Czechoslovak Parliament building (Prague) in July of 2000. If the Fourth World Romani Congress was better known as a ‘Congress of Romani intellectuals’, the Fifth Congress definitely represented a ‘Congress of Romani nationalists’. One of those nationalists was the President of the Congress Dr. Emil Ščuka, an activist from Czechoslovakia. The Romani nationalism that he was trying to propagate is visible in the text of one of his preliminary speeches addressed just before the Fifth Congress, when he stated: ‘the International Romani Union should no longer be considered a mere association but as the leadership of a nation. The Roma are a nation and they should be seated in organizations like the United Nations and UNESCO’.<sup>71</sup>

The agenda of the Congress envisaged discussions on topics closely related to activities and measures for uniting the Romani community in a single Nation, with the International Romani Union in the role of international Romani government. Core proposals that came out from the group talks among the delegates present at the Congress, included: establishment of International Romani University, Center for European Roma History and a Romani Museum; promotion of the standardized Romani language through literature, publications, seminars on Romani language and recognition of the language in international politics; constituting international and national Romani media; creation of centralized Romani Bank (controlled by the IRU); establishment of Romani government and embassies and developing special system of Romani tax collection (independent by nation-states; collected by the IRU, but used exclusively for the needs of the members of the Romani community).

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<sup>71</sup> Acton and Klimova, *The International Romani Union, in Between the Past and the Future*.p.172.

Moreover, Paolo Pietrosanti, a Romani Representative to the United Nations promoted the idea that Roma should not do a military or civilian service in the countries where they live, but instead they should be part of the United Nations peace-keeping forces.<sup>72</sup>

Soon after the Congress, the nationalistic ideas of Ščuka supported by majority of the International Romani Union members were articulated in a document titled “Declaration of a Roma Nation”,<sup>73</sup> circulated by e-mails, published in a handful of Czech Newspapers and presented to heads of states and international organizations. Authors as Thomas Acton and Ilona Klimova, report that the document was not officially approved by the delegates present on the Fifth Congress, but it was spontaneously distributed after its end.<sup>74</sup> The document is short and very concise. It mainly represents a declaration of the Romani elitist aspirations to convince the world to recognize the Roma as a nation, sharing one common culture, tradition, origin and language (Appendix 1).<sup>75</sup> Throughout the text of the declaration, few crucial points are made. First, the text calls on a better representation of the Romani nation, which does not want to acquire a territory, or to become a State. Second, it expresses the criticism towards the current concepts of nation and state that have led to many tragedies and disasters, not being adequate for the needs of trans-boundary nations such as the Romani. Furthermore, a claim is made for implementation of the transnational rule of law in cases of transnational communities. Finally, in the last paragraph of the declaration, a request for representation and respect towards the members of the Romani nation, and an effective implementation of the international human rights norms, such as the Universal Convention of Human Rights, is made.

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<sup>72</sup> Pietrosanti Paolo, Project for a Non-Territorial Republic of the Romany Nation, Spring 1994, [https://groups.google.com/forum/#!topic/romano\\_liloro/z6F2SOaczCE](https://groups.google.com/forum/#!topic/romano_liloro/z6F2SOaczCE), (accessed on 10 May 2015). p. 1-8.

<sup>73</sup> Appendix 1. p.55-56.

<sup>74</sup> Acton and Klimova, The International Romani Union, in *Between the Past and the Future*.p.198.

<sup>75</sup> Scuka Emil, Declaration of a Roma Nation, Appendix 1. p. 55-56.

Until today, several state representatives and heads of organizations have expressed their support towards the International Romani Union concept of Romani nation. Thus, for instance, the President of the Czech Republic Mr. Václav Havel, as well as, the Prime Ministers of Italy and Serbia, Mr. Guiliano Amato and Mr. Vojislav Koshtunica have expressed such support.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, as written on the official website of the IRU, in June 2001 the secretary-general of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan in a New York meeting with president Ščuka, supported the general work of the union and the concept of Roma nation.<sup>77</sup>

To sum up, the process of Romani nation-building is a multidirectional one. Starting from the 19<sup>th</sup> century individual efforts for equal status of the Roma situated on the Balkans, and moving towards the 20<sup>th</sup> century more radical ideas, such as the search for Romanestan. A totally new era in the Romani nationalist movement was marked with the development of Romani elite and intelligence. The formation of several Romani organizations both in Western and Eastern Europe, among which the International Romani Union paved the way for a more active involvement of the Romani elites and other influential individuals on international stage. The International Romani Union, throughout its overall work and especially with the activities undertaken on the Fifth World Romani Congress in Prague, substantially influenced the development of a new model for Romani unity and representation i.e. the concept of transnational , non-territorial Romani nation. According to the text of the most quoted nationalist Romani document, the Declaration of a Roma Nation, the members of the Romani nation do not aim to acquire territory, or to form a state of their own. In a globalized world where nation-states as models of political organizations become more obsolete, this non-territorial vision for the

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<sup>76</sup> Scuka Emil, Declaration of a Roma Nation, <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/60/132.html> (accessed on 14 May 2015) Appendix 1. p.55-56.

<sup>77</sup> Official web site of IRU, International Romani Union very active on the international scene, <http://internationalromaniunion.org/history/> (accessed on 14 May 2015)

Romani nation seems revolutionary, but still in line with some other contemporary post-modern tendencies. What remains to be accessed and seen is whether the ordinary members of the community support the nationalistic plans and visions of the Roma elites, and if this fragmented and highly diversified community is functioning as a unified nation in reality.

## ***2.4. Individual perceptions of ordinary Roma from Serbia, Macedonia, and Kosovo***

### ***2.4.1. Serbia***

The research in Serbia was conducted on 21<sup>st</sup> of April, 2015. The participants in the focus group were mainly from four Serbian municipalities: Belgrade, Novi Becej, Novo Milosevo and Lazarevac. The language used during the discussion was Serbian, but at the beginning of the discussion I also used Romanes in order to get closer and gain the trust of the participants. From the moment I started introducing myself one of the female participants asked: “Are you a Gypsy?” I responded: “Yes...I am Roma.” “Then, feel free to speak Romanes with us, whenever you do not feel comfortable speaking in Serbian”. I accepted her suggestion.

After a short round of introductions, I already had some general idea about the profiles of Roma people with whom I had to work. Among fifteen participants in total, seven were between the age of 20 and 28 and eight between the age of 35 and 55. The most educated person in the group was a 20- year-old male from Novo Miloshevo, who recently managed to enroll in university studies. The majority of the participants had only primary school, three of them completed secondary school and five participants were without any formal education. A young lady from Novo Miloshevo explained to me that the main reason for her illiteracy is the Romani tradition: “Currently, I am a mother of two kids and a housewife. I have never visited school because my parents decided to marry me when I was 12. This tradition made us illiterate.” These

practices are especially present among the Roma living in Vojvodina. And indeed, most of the participants were surprised how a Roma girl like me, is not married at the age of 23.

I started the discussion by giving a brief overview of the work of the International Romani Union and the concept of non-territorial nation. After doing that, my first question was whether they know something about the activities of the transnational Romani movement or more particularly about the work of the International Romani Union. The oldest man in the group, a 55-year-old man from the municipality of Lazarevac was more familiar with the topic. According to him, a few educated Roma in the 70's tried to unify all the Roma in one nation, in order to improve their status in Europe, organizing several meetings with that purpose. However, he highlighted the fact that he is a citizen of Serbia, and thus, Serbia has the main responsibility for protecting his rights and improving his position. Therefore, he argued: "If someone has to help Roma, then those are definitely the states where they live. We do not need imaginary terms such as nation, community or whatever. We just need to be treated as equal citizens of Serbia. Our Roma elites and activists can keep dreaming about international representation, establishing Romanestan, Socialestan (in joke) and so on... but, if states do not really wish to work with Roma on the local level all their efforts are useless."

The rest of the participants were not very familiar with the activities of the International Romani Union. They only knew which are the internationally recognized symbols of Roma (the blue-green flag and the anthem 'Gelem, gelem'). A young Romani activist from Belgrade, said that he heard that at one big meeting of Romani activist from Europe, it was decided that the term *Roma* is the only proper term that should be used when referring to the members of the Romani community. Regarding that he reacted: "For us in Serbia it is more acceptable when Serbians call us *Tsigani*, rather than *Roma*. That term *Roma* has something fake in it. We do not

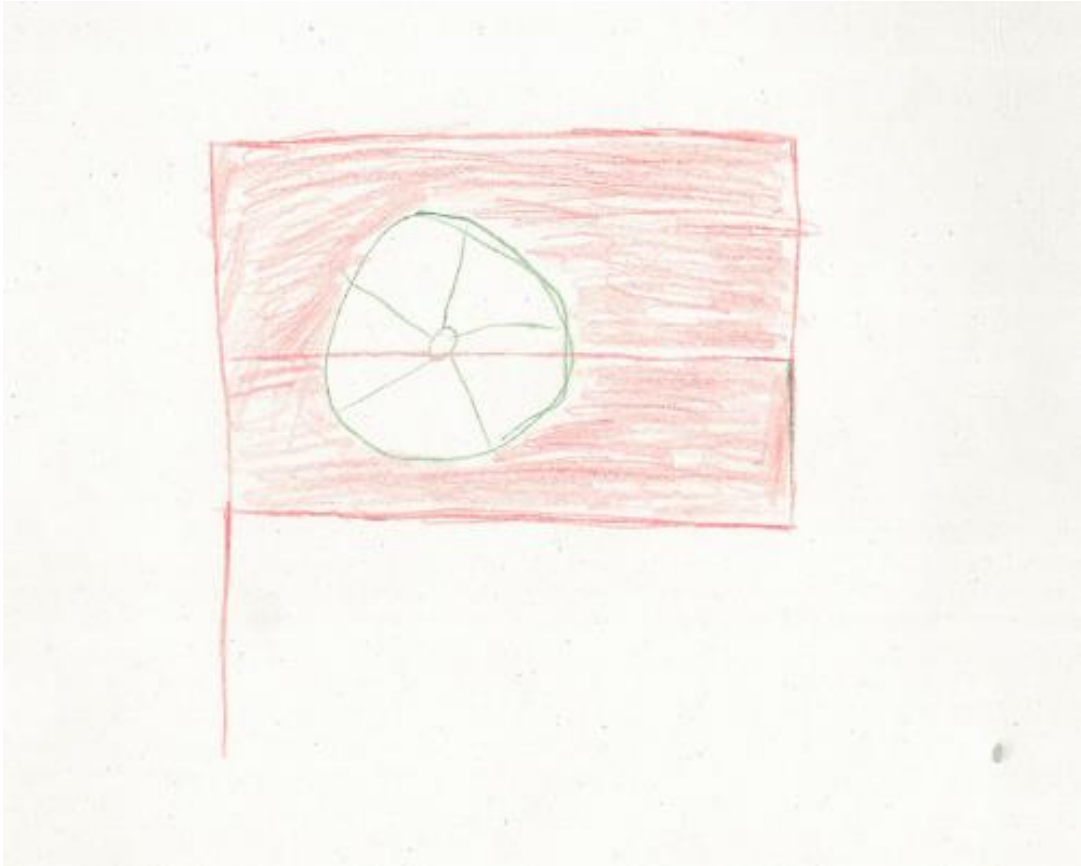
know what outsiders think about us when they say *Roma*.” Most of the participants agreed with this argument. The same participant expressed disagreement towards the idea that one Roma should represent all Roma living in Europe, on the international level. “I don’t see why we should have one representative for all of us in the European Union or in the United Nations. How is it possible for that person to know the problems of the Roma in my municipality.” On that, other participants reacted with disagreement. A Romani woman from Novi Becej argued: “For me it is not an issue who will represent us, just put some person who really knows how to do his job. All our leaders until now were unable to do their job in a proper way. They gave us promises but failed to accomplish them.”

The next question for discussion was related to their individual opinion about the characteristics that unite Roma as a nation. A young unemployed Roma from Beograd stated that for him his only nationality is Serbian and that he does not perceive his Romani identity as national. “I have Romani blood, but my nationality is Serbian, my motherland is Serbia (not India), and thus Serbia needs to care about my future, no one else”. A middle-aged man from Lazarevac explained an issue that he encountered in his community. According to his story, the municipality of Lazarevac decided to allocate money for Romani language classes in a local primary school in Lazarevac. The problem that appeared was that the teacher was speaking Vlach dialect of the Romani language and thus, the students had difficulties in understanding the lessons. This created confusion among the students, the teacher, and the parents. The same person stated that in Serbia a significant part of the Roma do not speak Romanes. “Some Romani sub-groups such as the so-called Tamari, speak only Serbian and the Roma Ashkali speak only Albanian.” Plus he added that there is a religious and cultural diversity among the Roma Orthodox and the Roma Muslims living in Serbia. “The Roma Muslims are better integrated than

us, they speak three or four languages and they are more united.” Another person from Lazarevac confirmed this. According to the most educated participant in the group, a 20-year-old male from Novo Miloshevo, tradition is what unites all the Roma from Serbia. “We have a big respect towards the older members of the family and they marry us very young. Thus, a big part of the community is uneducated. I do not know if that is the case with the Roma in Macedonia or in other countries, but here it is like that.”

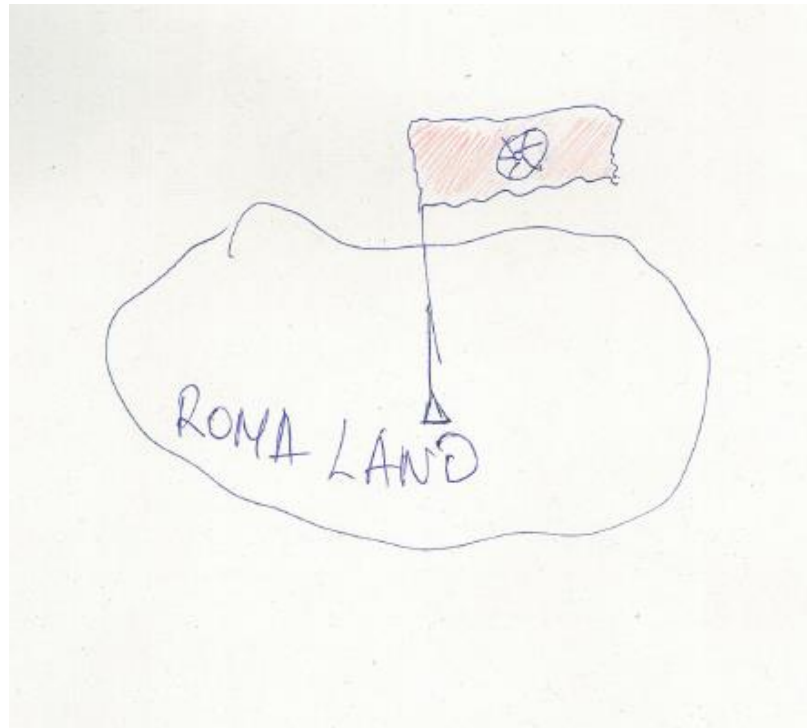
The last question for discussion was how they envisage the Romani community in the future. The primary answer was that they do not see a reason why Roma should be united in the future if until now they were not. A person from Belgrade stated: “We do not need to be a united in order to be successful. We just need to have jobs in order to maintain our families and contribute to the country where we live. If every individual has a job and piece of bread earned decently on his table, no one will think badly about that person.” The rest of the participants agreed that in future they see each other living in Serbia and coexisting with other nationalities. What they currently miss is a job in order to have better living conditions.

The remaining time was dedicated to drawing and interpreting mental maps. The main concept on which they all had to draw a map was a Roma nation. Because of the limited scope of this work I decided to present only those maps that represented perceptions directly connected with the topic of this thesis. Thus, for instance, a young Romani male from Novi Becej drew a Romani flag, similar to the one adopted on the First Romani World Congress in London. Even though he did not know what that flag symbolizes, he stated that that is the first thing that comes to his mind when thinking on Roma as a nation.

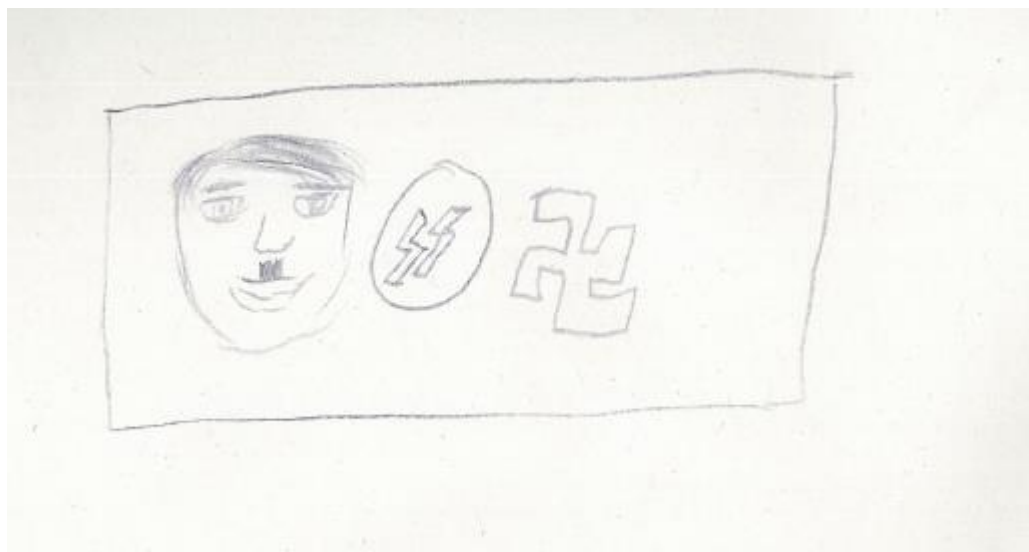


Another person drew a flag on a particular territory and on the top of the drawing he wrote 'Roma Land'. On the question why he drew a piece of land, the person stated that he would like to live in a Roma land united with all other Roma. However, the realization of such an idea is impossible because of lack of unity among the community members, he added.





The most impressive drawing was the one done by a Romani woman from Lazarevac. She drew a swastika and a face which resembled Hitler. Her explanation was that what really unites Roma is their common history of persecution and extermination, especially during the Nazi regime.



#### **2.4.2. Macedonia**

The research in Macedonia was conducted on 30<sup>th</sup> of April, in the NGO Romaversitas in Skopje. Ten participants were from the capital city, one participant was from Prilep and four from Tetovo. The discussion was held in Macedonian and there were no difficulties or obstacles in the communication with the participants because of the fact that I originally come from the same country. After a short round of introductions, I discovered that all of the respondents are young Romani students between the age of 20 and 25. Contrary to the situation in Serbia, the participants in Macedonia all had university education. I started the discussion by giving a brief overview of the activities of the International Romani Union and the concept of non-territorial nation.

After finishing with that, my first question for the participants was whether they are familiar with the activities of the transnational Romani movement or more particularly with the work of the International Romani Union. The majority of the participants did not have any idea about the IRU and its main activities. A young Romani student from the municipality of Shuto Orizari was more informed on the topic because, as he explained, he knew one of the current members of the IRU and he heard that recently he was appointed by some Romani elites and activists to be a Prime Minister of the Roma (laughing). Similarly to the participants in Serbia, the rest of the respondents were only aware of the existence of Romani national symbols.

The next question was related to the main characteristics uniting the Roma as a nation. One female student from the capital claimed that Roma in Macedonia have the status of national minority recognized under the constitutional provisions of the country. Additionally she noted: “For being a nation it is not necessary to have a state. It is more important to have people who share the same customs, traditions, speak the same language.” A student from Prilep disagreed with the previous respondent. He argued that the Roma from Prilep do not speak the Romani

language, they only speak Macedonian. The same practice was confirmed by the participants coming from Tetovo. They explained that not all Romani sub-groups know the Romani language. “The only Romani sub-group that preserved the main roots of the Romani language and still uses the language in daily conversations are the Roma Gjambaza.” - stated a Romani girl from Tetovo. A participant from the Romani municipality, Shuto Orizari quickly reacted to this by saying: “What kind of Roma are those Roma who do not know their mother tongue? A real Roma has to speak Romanes and be proud of his Romani identity.” Another participant from the capital argued that the only feature that is common for most of the Roma from Macedonia is religion. According to him more, than 80 % of the Roma in the country are Muslims and their Romani traditions and way of living are highly influenced by their religion.” He continued his argument by adding: “I have heard that Roma from Spain, France, Italy are not Muslims. If that is true, then not all Roma share the same religion and tradition.” Furthermore, one participant from Skopje stated: “There are 3 main things shared by all the Roma around the world. Those are stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination that other nations have about them”.

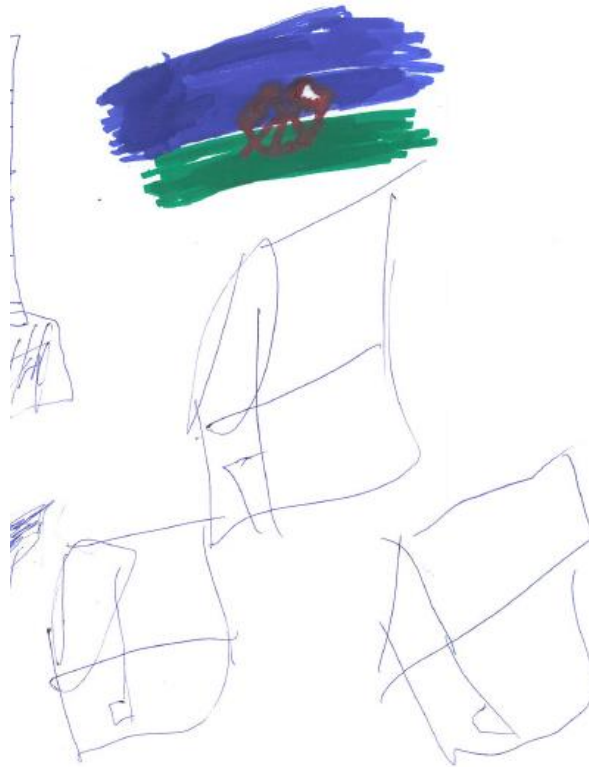
The last discussion question was how the participants envisage the Roma community in the future. Similarly to the Serbian participants most of the respondents in Macedonia were skeptical about the possibility of unity among Roma. A participant from Tetovo argued: “If we, the Roma from Macedonia, did not manage to unite in order to express our revolt towards the recent government border controls limiting the Roma leaving this country, then how can we expect that all Roma from Europe unite around a same aim?” He used as an example the lack of unity among the Romani political parties in Macedonia saying: “There are seven Roma political parties in Macedonia and they cannot agree on making one coalition. Being separated, they fragment the Romani voice and, thus, we cannot reach the needed majority for getting more

rights in the country. Therefore, I think what we really need in future is to be guided by a real and capable Romani leader.”

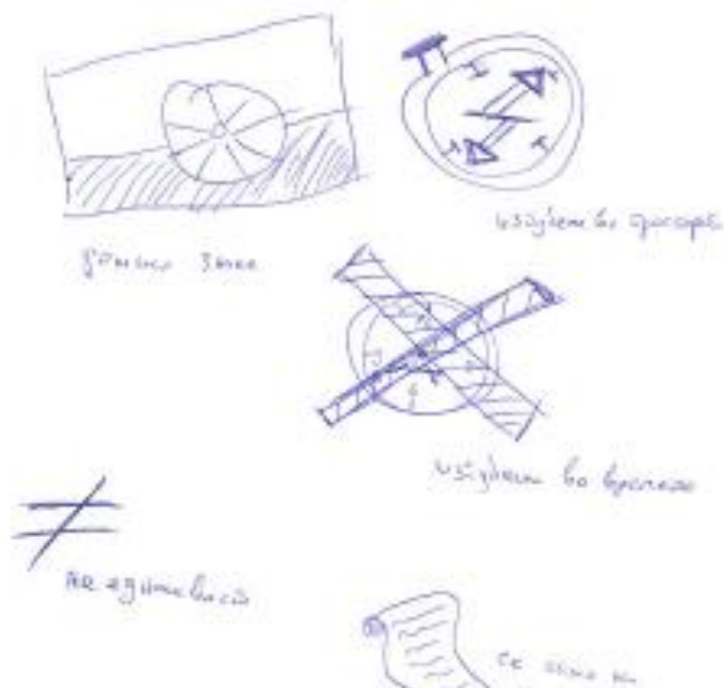
Like in Serbia, the final part of the research in Macedonia also included drawing mental maps on the topic of Roma Nation and interpreting them. Thus, for instance, a young Romani student from the capital city drew a map of the European continent. He explained that the Roma are a real Europeans. They live in all countries around Europe.



A participant from Suto Orizari drew a Romani *mahala* (Romani term for municipality), with a number of houses and a Romani flag at the top of the drawing. He explained that he would like to see all the Roma living together in one territory or state. He expressed his wish for future Romani mobilization with the aim of creating a Romani state and he stated that Shuto Orizari is a perfect example that such Romani state can really function.



The last mental map was drawn by a male Romani student from the capital city. He drew several elements on his mental map: the Romani flag, a compass and a sign of inequality. He explained that the Romani flag is significant to him because the wheel on it symbolizes the Romani migration from India. Additionally, he drew a compass, because according to him Roma are currently lost in space and they need guidance in order to achieve real progress. He agreed with what one of the previous participants stated: “A strong and charismatic Romani leader can provide us with good guidance”. Lastly, he stated that what is really common for all Roma worldwide, is their unequal position in society compared to other individuals.



### 2.4.3. Kosovo

The research in Kosovo was conducted on 23rd of April in Prishtina. The participants in the focus group were from two municipalities: Prizren and Prishtina. From the beginning of our discussion, the participants expressed their wish to communicate in Romani language. Therefore, the whole discussion was held in Romanes. It was my first time in the country and to meet with Kosovo's Roma. I was interested to hear about the Romani position in the country both in the pre-war and in the post-war period. After a short round of introductions - throughout which I discovered that the participants are between the age of 25 and 40 and that they are all educated and employed, one of the older participants, a journalist from Prizren shortly explained to me the Romani position in the 'de facto' state. He said: "We are very pleased that an educated Romani

girl is interested about her Romani brothers and sisters living in Kosovo. In Prishtina before the war, we were more than ten thousand Roma. After the war the number of our people significantly decreased. Most of them left the place in search of a better future. Now there are less than 20 Roma families living here. In Prizren, there are around five thousand. This number was also bigger before the war. One important issue that the Romani community is facing in Kosovo is an identity crisis. A meaningful part of the community declare themselves as Ashkali or Egyptians. They speak only Albanian and claim that they are different than the *Magjups* - a pejorative Albanian label for Roma. However, when there are some funds directed to the Romani community they also apply and benefit from them.”

I started the discussion with the question whether they are familiar with the activities of the transnational Romani movement or more particularly with the work of the International Romani Union. The majority of the participants were informed about the activities of the IRU. They even mentioned the name of the Kosovar vice-president of the IRU, Mr. Orhan Galjus and knew details from the Congresses. A person from Prishtina stated: “As a person actively involved in several Roma NGO’s, I had the opportunity to follow the work of IRU. I think that they were really active until their Fifth Congress. After that their activities somehow stagnated.” Another person working as a journalist in Prishina added: “The Roma activists tried to unite all Roma from Europe and maybe worldwide. This was done gradually since their First Congress. But something went wrong...Probably, the main reason is the lack of consensus among those activists. You know the Roma. In our community, everyone wants to be a leader and no one wants to be led by another”.

The next question for discussion was related to the individual opinions of the participants on the main characteristics that unite the Roma as a nation. Almost all the participants repeated

one same answer. The Romani language is what unites all the Roma in the world. An interesting answer was given by a Romani women from Prizren, she said: “Roma from different places and sub-groups speak different dialects, but the bases are the same. Every language has its local versions, the same applies to our language. We have to be proud of it because we succeed in keeping it after centuries of persecution. The language is our cultural heritage and that is what makes us special”.

The last discussion question was how they envisage the Roma community in the future. There was a big variety among the given answers. Some of the participants expressed their wish to live in a Romani state. A young girl from Prishtina stated: “I wish my kids could grow up in a Romani state, among Roma people, with a Roma president, schools, hospitals...” A male participant from Prizren agreed with her and added: “If all Roma unite, we could start a Third World War. The only thing that we need is someone to provoke the nationalism in us. If we had a strong leader having clear visions about the community we would reach very far.” However, most of the participants envisaged their future in Kosovo. One such person noted: “We all share Romani blood, but we do not need to isolate ourselves on a particular territory. Territory means nothing without good opportunities in it. If Kosovo needs more than 30 years for consolidation, I could not imagine how many centuries the Roma would need for such thing”.

Some of the mental maps drawn by the participants in this focus group represented an ordinary person and a territory with a Romani flag. One participant imagined the Romani nation as a community that in the past had its own territory, but after the migration from India that community became fragmented and spread around the world. Another respondent explained that there are no differences between the members of the Romani community and people from other nations thus, his wish was to continue living in Kosovo with other nations, as he did until now.



“We are all people and we need to coexist with each other in the territories we already live”- was the explanation of a participant from Prishtina.



## Chapter 3. Romani Nation in Praxis

### *3.1. The reality of a top-down approach in Romani nation-building*

So far I have presented and discussed the concept of non-territorial national-cultural autonomy developed by Bauer and Renner, the International Romani Union's concept of non-territorial Romani nation, the evolution of ideas for Roma unity and the empirical data from my field research in Kosovo, Macedonia, and Serbia. The aim of this chapter is to reveal how far the nationalistic ideas of the Romani elites and activists presented through the activities of the International Romani Union converge with the individual perceptions of the ordinary Roma who took part in the research held in the above-mentioned countries. Throughout this analysis, the thesis makes both theoretical and empirical contributions to the existing studies on non-territorial national-cultural autonomy and the literature dealing with the subject of Romani identity. By offering empirical data on individual perceptions of ordinary Roma individuals from three countries, as well as, by analyzing the practical viability of a top-down elitist strategy in nation-building, the thesis shows that the existing theories need to be grounded on a larger and better quality empirical work, especially when dealing with complex national identities of highly dispersed and heterogeneous stateless groups, such as the Roma.

The research data demonstrate that the participants, members of the Romani community in all three countries, do not share the same culture, religion, and language. Respondents from all three countries have argued that not all Roma in those countries speak the Romani language. Moreover, different Romani sub-groups use diverse dialects of the language and some Romani individuals use languages other than the Romani, as their mother-tongues. Example for that are the Roma Tamari who speak only Serbian or the Roma from the Macedonian municipalities Priliep and Gostivar who use the Macedonian language as a mother tongue. This finding relates

to the argument that many Roma speak and use as mother tongues, languages such as: Arabic, Turkish, Greek, Albanian, Romanian, Hungarian, Spanish and others, made by the authors Elena Marushiakova and Veselin Popov.<sup>78</sup> Additionally, the majority of the respondents in all three countries claimed a religious diversity among the Romani populations. According to their testimonies, part of the community members practice the Muslim religion (and customs related to that religion) and another part practice the Christian Orthodox religion. These findings challenge the common parameters of national unity that the Romani elites and activists through the work of the International Romani Union seek to propagate. As stated in the Declaration of a Roma Nation “We are a Nation, we share same tradition, the same culture, the same origin, the same language; we are a Nation”.<sup>79</sup>

Marushiakova and Popov also argue that, a nation is not only a unit of people bound by common parameters. Those people need to show some awareness regarding their unity as a community.<sup>80</sup> The ‘on the ground’ research revealed a lack of unity among the Roma individuals in all three countries. In several instances the respondents made distinctions between ‘us’ the Orthodox Roma and ‘them’ the Muslim Roma, ‘us’ the Roma speaking Romanes and ‘them’ who do not, as well as, a distinction between sedentary Roma and Roma who migrate from other places to ‘our’ country. This finding goes in line with what Boscoboinik notes in one of her articles. She argues that some Roma make a distinction between them and the ‘other’ Roma, particularly the stereotyped image of Roma as thief, swindler, liar etc.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Marushiakova Elena, Vesselin Popov: *The Roma – a Nation without a State? Historical Background and Contemporary Tendencies* (2004), p.451.

<sup>79</sup> Appendix 1. p.55-56.

<sup>80</sup> Marushiakova Elena, Vesselin Popov: *The Roma – a Nation without a State? Historical Background and Contemporary Tendencies* (2004), p.443.

<sup>81</sup> Boscoboinik Andrea, *Challenging Borders and Constructing Boundaries: An analysis of Roma political processes*, Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Fribourg, p.188.

One of the most important decisions of the International Romani Union is the one regarding the official use of the term *Roma*. Since the First Romani World Congress held in London, the Romani elites and activists condemned the usage of various pejorative labels such as *Gypsy*, *Tsigane*, *Zigeuner* when referring to members of this community.<sup>82</sup> However, the research data demonstrate that not all Romani individuals agree with the terminology promoted by the International Romani Union. In Serbia, the majority of the participants agreed that for them the term *Tsigani* is more acceptable than the term *Roma*, or as Bocoboinik notes ordinary individuals truly mistrust the term *Roma*.<sup>83</sup> Additionally, as a Romani girl living for two years in Hungary, I had the opportunity to hear the term '*Ciganyok*' more often than the term *Roma*, within a Romani exclusive environment. Furthermore, from the work of Marushiakova and Popov we can also discover that the term *Tsigane* is more acceptable among the members of this community living in Russia and Bulgaria.<sup>84</sup>

A relatively small number of respondents were aware of the existence of the International Romani Union.<sup>85</sup> Most of the ordinary Roma respondents, especially the younger ones, were not informed about the activities of this organization. Moreover, Romani individuals from all three countries were not familiar with the concept of non-territorial Roma nation, promoted by the International Romani Union. These findings imply that the concept of Roma nation is mainly restricted among a limited circle of Roma, mainly among the so-called 'Romani professionals' and those who actively follow the activities of the Romani elites and activists. Additionally, the

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<sup>82</sup> Hancock Ian, *The East European Roots of Romani Nationalism*, in Crowe and Kolsti, *The Gypsies of Eastern Europe*, p.145

<sup>83</sup> Boscoboinik Andrea, *Challenging Borders and Constructing Boundaries: An analysis of Roma political processes*, Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Fribourg, p.188.

<sup>84</sup> Marushiakova Elena, Vesselin Popov: *The Roma – a Nation without a State? Historical Background and Contemporary Tendencies* (2004), p.453.

<sup>85</sup> The focus group in Kosovo was an exception. The participants in that group were better informed about the topic because most of them had some NGO experience or worked as journalists.

respondents expressed a lack of trust in the promises made by the Romani elites and activists. It appears that legitimacy, lack of trust, and support by ordinary masses are the key issues faced by the members of the International Romani Union. Furthermore, authors such as Jud Nirenberg, allocate certain risk for the IRU being a service provider of its donors, rather than a vehicle for expression of the real Romani voice and aspirations.<sup>86</sup> In the words of Boscoboinik, this finding confirms that : ‘the project for Romani unity does not work its way up from the bottom to the top but is rather limited to a circle of identity managers, political entrepreneurs and even strangers to the group’.<sup>87</sup> Even in Bauer and Renner’s model of national-cultural autonomy, the so-called ‘national corporations’ are public bodies that seek to reach wider audience and to promote the interests of all members of a particular national or ethnic community. They are not restricted only among limited circles.

On top of all, the research reveals that not all the Roma lost their desire for an independent state. This desire was visible in the statements of several respondents who clearly argued that they would like to live in a Romani State. The Roma from the Romani municipality Shuto Orizari in Macedonia were the loudest in declaring such aspirations. The finding directly challenges the International Romani Union’s mostly repeated claim: “We have never looked for creating a state and we do not want a State today”,<sup>88</sup> expressed in the Declaration of a Roma Nation. Besides that, this IRU claim also neglects the 1930’s and 1940’s Romani efforts to

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<sup>86</sup> Nirenberg Jud, *Romani Political Mobilization from the First IRU Congress to the European Roma, Sinti and Travellers Forum*; Sigona Nando and Trehan Nidhi, *Romani Politics in Contemporary Europe: Poverty, Ethnic Mobilization and the Neoliberal Order*, Foreword by Etienne Balibar, Palgrave Macmilan.p.99.

<sup>87</sup> Boscoboinik Andrea, *Challenging Borders and Constructing Boundaries: An analysis of Roma political processes*, Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Fribourg, p.183.

<sup>88</sup> Appendix 1. p.55-56.

secure a geographical homeland, described by authors such as the Romani academic Ian Hancock.<sup>89</sup>

Last but not the least, majority of the respondents from all three geographies, argued that they envisage themselves as an integral part of the nations among which they live. Respondents from Serbia, Kosovo, and Macedonia stated that they are nationals of the counties where they are born and live and thus, those countries have the primary responsibility to care about their demands and interests. The idea of ‘Roma being an integral part of the nation among which they live’ is in convergence with the positions of the majority Roma from Greece, who since the Fifth Romani World Congress opposed the concept of Romani nation and declared that they are not a special nation, but part of the Greek nation.<sup>90</sup>

Overall, the research conducted in all three countries revealed a lack of wider reception of the Romani elitist top-down strategies in developing a Romani non-territorial nation. The research data demonstrate that ordinary Romani masses from Kosovo, Macedonia, and Serbia still do not perceive themselves as members of one unified Romani non-territorial nation, but they mainly perceive their Roma identity in a narrower sense. Moreover, most of them are not familiar with the activities of the International Romani Union and show a sense of distrust towards the activities of the Romani elites and activists. The Romani respondents from all three countries claimed existence of a linguistic, cultural and religious heterogeneity among the Roma individuals and sub-groups. It seems that the main features that really ally these individuals into a separate group are not the ‘national parameters’ but rather, what Andre Liebich calls a ‘social narrative’ meaning the common problems they face, in the form of stereotypes, discrimination,

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<sup>89</sup> Hancock Ian, *The East European Roots of Romani Nationalism; The Gypsies of Eastern Europe*, edited by Crowe and Kolsti, M.E. Sharpe Inc., Armonk (New York), p.133-150.

<sup>90</sup> Greek Roma Leaders Lash Out at International Romani Union: “No to the Demand for Recognition as Nation Without a State AIM Athens, August 6, 2000”. Information distributed by Greek Helsinki Monitor office@greekhelsinki.gr through their regular e-mail network list at 06 Aug 2000 and at 09 May 2001.

and marginalization caused by the attitudes of surrounding people. An especially interesting research finding was the one that revealed that, no matter the centuries of exclusion and marginalization faced by the members of this community, ordinary Roma individuals from all three research countries still perceive themselves as an ‘integral part’ and citizens of the societies where they live. Thus, they expect more to be done by the national and local authorities rather than by the Romani elites and activists.

These findings show that even though the IRU concept of non-territorial nation fits perfectly to what according to Bauer and Renner is required for enjoying a non-territorial autonomy - a national corporation dealing with the questions of national character of a particular stateless community,<sup>91</sup> in practice the fragmentation and lack of unity among the ordinary members of the stateless community, the sense of distrust towards their leaders and elites, and the unawareness of the wider masses regarding the existence of a national movement (as shown in the case of the Roma), are all important factors that can have a crucial impact on materializing the concept of non-territorial national-cultural autonomy. Since the majority of the existing literature on non-territorial national-cultural autonomy and non-territorial nation focuses on analyzing procedural issues, explaining what is needed for enjoying national-cultural autonomy or providing an overview of the nation-building activities undertaken by the leaders or elite members of the so-called national corporations, the conclusion based on the perceptions of ordinary people targeted by these concepts provide us with different insights. Hence, this research contributes to the existing literature on non-territorial national-cultural autonomy and non-territorial nation by analyzing the concept from a specific perspective – using the analytical lenses of the ordinary people, members of a stateless community. Thus, future studies on this

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<sup>91</sup> Nimni, Ephraim. “Nationalist Multiculturalism in Late Imperial Austria as a Critique of Contemporary Liberalism: The Case of Bauer and Renner, *Journal of Political Ideologies* Vol. 4 No 292, (1999).

topic would need to pay a special attention to the specificities of each stateless community when trying to implement the theoretical concepts of non-territorial nation or autonomy, as well as, to ground their research on a larger and better quality empirical work among the ordinary masses. Regarding the question whether Roma will ever become a unified non-territorial nation and enjoy a national-cultural autonomy, that mostly depends from the legitimacy and credibility of the Romani elites and leaders and the ways they decide to include and represent the voice of the wider Romani masses in future.



## Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to investigate the perceptions of ordinary Roma masses towards their national identity, the convergence of these perceptions with the elitist visions and demands, as well as, to assess the viability of an elitist constructed project for national unity, in cases of highly heterogeneous and dispersed groups without territory or state of their own, such as the Roma. A totally new momentum in the Romani efforts for unity was marked with the development of a Romani elite and intelligence. The formation of several Romani organizations all around Europe, among which the International Romani Union paved the way for a more active involvement of the Romani elites and activists on the international stage. The International Romani Union, throughout its work and especially with the activities undertaken on the Fifth World Romani Congress in 2000, substantially influenced the development of a novel strategy of Romani unity and representation - the concept of non-territorial Romani nation. Even though the idea of non-territorial Roma nation is novel within Romani realms, its roots can be found in the model of non-territorial national-cultural autonomy developed by Karl Renner and Otto Bauer, a century ago. The ideas behind the concept were articulated in the text of the Declaration of a Roma Nation, where it is stated: "We are a Nation, we share the same culture, the same tradition, the same origin, the same language; we are a Nation. We have never looked for creating a Roma state, and we do not want a state today..."

Using the data collected during my fieldwork in Kosovo, Serbia, and Macedonia I conclude that the heterogeneous ordinary masses still do not perceive themselves as members of a single, unified Romani nation. Besides that, no matter the centuries of exclusion and marginalization, ordinary Roma individuals still perceive themselves as an 'integral part' of the nation among which they live. Furthermore, the study revealed that the majority individuals are

not aware of the existence and activities of the International Romani Union and they generally distrust the Romani elites and activists, expecting more to be done by the national and local authorities.

The main findings of my research imply that further studies of non-territorial national-cultural autonomy and non-territorial nation will face serious practical limitations if they do not pay special attention to the specificities of the particular stateless community. Thus, for instance, the low level of unity among the ordinary masses, distrust in members of the national corporation, and lack of awareness about the existence of a nationalist movement, proved to be essential when implementing the concept of non-territorial nation within the context of a stateless community like the Romani. Besides that, studies and literature on this matter need to be grounded on a larger and better quality empirical work, when dealing with complex national identities and highly dispersed and heterogeneous groups. Lastly, I need to acknowledge that the findings of this research are limited to the chosen samples in the selected case study countries (Kosovo, Serbia, and Macedonia). However, individuals of Roma origin are spread all around the European continent and worldwide. Hence, the study has a great potential to be further developed and enriched by including greater number of countries, wider perspectives and additional theories, which ultimately may lead to developing a whole body of literature on the particular topic.

Appendix I: International Romani Union ‘Declaration of a Nation’: attached as distributed at the Fifth  
World Romani Congress in Prague 2000

Emil Scuka  
President of an International Romani Union ( IRU )  
E-mail: <prague\_office@romaniunion.org>

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## **WE, THE ROMA NATION**

Individuals belonging to the Roma Nation call for a representation of their Nation, which does not want to become a State. We ask for being recognized as a Nation, for the sake of Roma and of non-Roma individuals, who share the need to deal with the nowadays new challenges. We, a Nation of which over half a million persons were exterminated in a forgotten Holocaust, a Nation of individuals too often discriminated, marginalized, victim of intolerance and persecutions, we have a dream, and we are engaged in fulfilling it. We are a Nation, we share the same tradition, the same culture, the same origin, the same language; we are a Nation. We have never looked for creating a Roma State. And we do not want a State today, when the new society and the new economy are concretely and progressively crossing-over the importance and the adequacy of the State as the way how individuals organize themselves.

The will to consubstantiate the concept of a Nation and the one of a State has led and is still leading to tragedies and wars, disasters and massacres. The history of the Roma Nation cuts through such a coincidence, which is evidently not anymore adequate to the needs of individuals. We, the Roma Nation, offer to the individuals belonging to the other Nations our adequacy to the new world.

We have a dream, the political concrete dream of the rule of law being the rule for each and everybody, in the frame and thanks to a juridical system able to assure democracy, freedom, liberty to each and everybody, being adequate to the changing world, the changing society, the changing economy. We have a dream, the one of the rule of law being a method, and not a value. A pragmatic, concrete, way how individuals agree on rules, institutions, juridical norms, adequate to the new needs. A transnational Nation as the Roma one needs a transnational rule of law: this is evident; we do believe that such a need is shared by any individual, independently of the Nation he or she belongs to.

We do know that a shy debate regarding the adequacy of the State to the changing needs of the global society—a global society which should not be organized exclusively from above—is involving prominent personalities in Europe and in the entire UN Community.

We are also convinced that the request itself of a representation for the Roma Nation is a great help to find an answer to the crucial question regarding the needed reforms of the existing international institutions and rules. Our dream is therefore of great actuality and it is very concrete. It is what we offer the entire world community. The Roma Nation, each and every individual belonging to it look for and need a world where the international Charters on Human Rights are Laws, are perenptory rules, providing exigible rights. Such a will is a need for the Roma; is it so only for Roma?

We are aware that the main carachteristic of the Roma Nation, the one of being a Nation without searching for the establishment of a State, is today a great, adequate resource of freedom and legality for each individual, and of the successfull functioning for the world community.

We have a dream, and we are engaged in the implementation of it: we offer to the humanity a request, the one of having a representation as a Nation, the Nation we are. Giving an answer to such a request would let the entire humanity make a substancial step forward.

We know democracy and freedom to equal the rule of law, which can be assured only through the creation of institutions and juridical rules adequate and constantly adjusted to the necessarily changing needs of individuals.

We are to offer our culture, our tradition, the resource which is in our historic refusal of searching for a state: the most adequate resource of awareness to the nowadays world. That's why we look for a representation, and new ways of representing individuals apart from their belonging to one or to another nation. Nowadays politics is not adequate to the nowadays needs of individuals in a changing world; and to the needs of all those persons still suffering starvation and violations of their fundamental human rights. And we offer, we propose a question, while proposing and offering a path, a concrete, possible, needed path, on which to start walking together.

We, the Roma Nation, have something to share, right by asking for a representation, respect, implementation of the existing International Charter on Human Rights, so that each individual can look at them as at existing, concrete warranties for her or his today and future.

## Appendix II: Roma Flag

Adopted at the First Romani World Congress, London, 1971.



### Appendix III: Roma Anthem “Gelem, Gelem”

Adopted at the First Romani World Congress, London, 1971

#### Gelem, Gelem

Gelem, gelem, lungone dromensa  
Maladilem bakhtale Romensa  
A Romale katar tumen aven,  
E tsarensa bahktale dromensa?

#### A Romale, A Chavale

Vi man sas ek bari familiya,  
Murdadas la e kali legiya  
Aven mansa sa lumniake Roma,  
Kai putaile e romane droma  
Ake vriama, usti Rom akana,  
Men khutasa misto kai kera

#### A Romale, A Chavale

#### We Traveled On

I went, I went on long roads  
I met happy Roma  
O Roma where do you come from,  
With tents on happy roads?

#### O Roma, O brothers

I once had a great family,  
The Black Legions murdered them  
Come with me Roma from all the world  
For the Roma roads have opened  
Now is the time, rise up Roma now,  
We will rise high if we act

#### O Roma, O brothers

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