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**EFFECTS OF NORMALIZATION ON
CZECHOSLOVAK ROMA EMANCIPATION EFFORTS
DURING FIRST THREE WORLD ROMA
CONGRESSES**

Thesis submitted to the Department of Historical Studies, Central European University
Private University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Arts degree in
Historical Studies

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, Michal Mižigár, candidate for the MA degree in Comparative History declare herewith that the present thesis titled “Effects of Normalization on Czechoslovak Roma Emancipation Efforts During First Three World Roma Congresses” is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the position of the Roma emancipation movement in both international and domestic contexts. It focuses specifically on the participation of Czechoslovak Romani delegations in the first three World Romani Congresses – held in 1971 in the United Kingdom, 1978 in Switzerland, and 1981 in West Germany – and examines how these events influenced Romani political awareness and the formation of a Romani intelligentsia. The second key question addressed is to what extent Roma were part of the dissident movement during the period of Normalization in Czechoslovakia. The research is based on the analysis of archival documents, Charter 77 materials, and published sources by Romani activists themselves. The findings show that Roma were active members of the broader opposition to the communist regime, yet their contribution has often been overlooked in Czech historiography. This thesis aims to highlight the importance of recognizing Romani political and cultural resistance as an integral part of Czechoslovak history and to contribute to a deeper understanding of the process of Roma emancipation.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1969, the Union of Gypsies-Roma (Svaz Cikánů-Romů), the first Roma organization in the Czech lands, was allowed by Czechoslovak state authorities to be founded. This was a crucial moment for the Roma who had an opportunity to contribute to the solution of the so-called “Gypsy question” („cikánská otázka“) which was made possible through the emancipation of the Roma per se. Before the Union of Gypsies-Roma, there were attempts since the 1950s when the Roma needed to respond to the implementation of the Czechoslovak state assimilatory policies that were affecting them in their everyday life. These Roma did not want to remain as victims but were reacting and trying to get self-organized. Emancipation was a response not only for their problems but was also an attempt to preserve Roma culture in the wake of assimilatory policies coming from the state.

In April 1971, the First World Roma Congress was held in Orpington, near London, and was attended by the Czechoslovak Roma delegation from the Union of Gypsies-Roma. This became a crucial turning point for the transnational Roma movement during the Cold War. This transnational Roma movement consisted of Roma representatives and pro-Roma activists, academics, and journalists from both the Western and Eastern sides of the Iron Curtain.

The First World Roma Congress approved the Roma flag, the anthem “Gelem gelem” and the umbrella autoethnonym Roma for all their groups instead of the versions put on Roma by non-Roma people, for example, an English word gypsy and similar racial slurs in other languages. Besides these above-mentioned adopted symbols, there was as well among the others recognition of the Roma as a national minority which could assure the emancipation of the Roma with political and cultural rights.

Unfortunately, in 1973, the Union of the Gypsies-Roma was disbanded by the state and the leaders were labelled *personae non grata* and their ties with the transnational movement were severed. Later, two other World Roma Congresses were held in Geneva in 1978, and then in Göttingen in 1981.

Between 1973 and 1989, the transnational Roma movement expanded and achieved significant milestones. Meanwhile, in Czechoslovakia, the Roma community faced increasing marginalization, leading to the loss of their intelligentsia. The Czechoslovak regime systematically placed Roma children in so-called special schools, enforcing policies that promoted assimilation and deeply affected the entire Roma minority.

During the Normalization period (1969-1989), after the Union of Gypsies-Roma was dissolved, the Roma were pushed to the margins of society, stripped of political representation and institutional support. They had no means of resisting the state-led assimilation policies. Given this context, what role did the former leaders of the Union of Gypsies-Roma play in society at the time?

In this thesis, I want to deal with the three following questions. How did the Roma movement in Czechoslovakia intertwine with that of the transnational Roma movement in Europe? How does Roma institutionalization come into the picture of dissident politics in the 1970s? Were the Roma activists during Normalization a part of Czechoslovak dissent historiography?

Structure of my thesis

In the following chapter, I am going to present Roma emancipation in two subchapters in order to provide the context and background under which the Roma movement was evolving. In each following chapter, I will bring two subchapters for comparison with the Czechoslovak

case and that of the transnational Roma movement.¹ In the subchapter dealing with the Roma emancipation in Europe, I want to provide you with the chronology of some key examples of the Roma emancipatory initiatives across Europe. The following subchapter will deal with the case of Czechoslovakia from the oldest sources which were found recently.

In the second chapter, there will be three subchapters. The initial subchapter is titled “First World Roma Congress,” where the First World Roma Congress will be presented and contextualized. The second subchapter will discuss the outcomes of the First World Roma Congress which have been buttressing Roma identity since 1971. The third and final subchapter of this second chapter will consist of an analysis of the report(s) written by some of the key participants at the Congress in London who were representing the Union of Gypsies-Roma from Czechoslovakia.

The third chapter will deal with the founding of the organization of the International Romani Union in 1977, and the first subchapter here will contain the Second World Roma Congress which was held the following year. Roma from non-Czechoslovak countries, surprisingly even the United States, will be presented in the third chapter. The second subchapter will then continue the Czechoslovak perspective and will show the consequences of the Normalization politics in Czechoslovakia after the 1968 Warsaw Pact Invasion. This is essential to understand how the Normalization period influenced the situation of Czech Roma and obstructed their participation in the Second World Roma Congress.

In the fourth and last chapter, the Third World Roma Congress in Germany, which is a milestone of Roma political representation historiography, will be highlighted. At that time, the transnational Roma movement grew and was joined by Sinti in Germany. They together

1. I am aware that I can in my perception of transnational movement all European countries at those times. Therefore, I will in this thesis mean by transnational movement in particular the development of World Roma congress.

manage to achieve recognition of the Holocaust by Germany. After 40 long years, Roma Holocaust survivors were acknowledged as victims of Nazi Germany. In the meantime, in Czechoslovakia, human rights were infringed. Charter 77, a dissent group, had emerged to point out these injustices. However, the Roma whose human rights were violated were not an exception. Their political, cultural, and minority rights were also suppressed. Roma leaders and activists were in a similar position as the other Czech dissidents, whose historiography is well-documented and has foundational narratives that include Václav Havel. Therefore, I am going to present the inclusion of Czech-Roma dissidents who are often left out of the common Czech historiography from this time period, and thus provide a nuanced perspective to the narrative of Socialist Czechoslovakian history.

Methodology

To present these arguments, I have collected several kinds of sources, such as interviews, mixed media, official correspondence, etc. In fact, it is not easy to bring enough of the relevant sources toward the First World Roma Congress, since it was one of the events of Roma history which is not considered up till today in the same way as the similar events in the histories of great nations. To write the history of an event where the goal was in self-naming of the marginalized and, throughout centuries, oppressed people in Europe while declaring themselves as a nation which had no territory nor its own institutions means to go beyond the state archives, national libraries, and other conveniences that the great histories have.

In my thesis, I employ a comparative method by juxtaposing the Czechoslovak Roma movement with the transnational Roma movement. I aim to reconstruct the engagement of Czechoslovak Roma within the broader transnational context, with a particular focus on the development of the International Romani Union, which was officially founded in 1977. While

discussing the Czechoslovak case, I will provide a more in-depth analysis to highlight its unique dynamics and contributions.

My research is based on archival sources and oral history, including interviews, to offer a comprehensive understanding of these movements and their historical development.

In my thesis, I draw from archival materials from three archives and personal interviews. This archive is maintained by the organization Most information about the First World Roma Congress I found in **Bishopgate Institute** located in London. This archive has personal collections of Grattan Puxon which allowed me to where I had opportunity to gather the information about the organizational issues and internal communication of the organizers of the Congress. Bishop Institute is in London and it predominantly holds collections for feminism, LGBT+ community, and other topics. The second archive I am drawing from is the archive of **Museum of Roma Culture** in Brno (Muzeum romské kultury v Brně), the Czech Republic, which provided me with the internal reports of the organization the Union of the Gypsies-Roma (Svaz Cikánů-Romů) and helped me to access the magazines *Románo lil* (Roma Letter) published during the four years of existence of the Union of the Gypsies-Roma. **The Moravian Land Archive in Brno** (Moravský zemský archiv v Brně)– several times visited (probably 5 times) and researched the fonds relevant of the archive of the former Union of the Gypsies-Roma where. It is a huge advantage since the Union of Gypsies-Roma was a state organization.

Another important group of sources for my study is my recorded interviews with Grattan Puxon, Will Guy, and Thomas Acton. All of them attended the First World Romani Congress in person.

1. 20TH CENTURY – CENTURY OF ROMANI EMANCIPATION

Until recently, it was believed that there were not many sources proving the Roma history in European countries with the exception of those under the Ottoman Empires. For example, Shakir Pashov (1898-1981) in Bulgaria founded the first Roma organization in 1910 in Vidin (Bulgaria).²

This lack of the sources was leading me into assumptions that the Roma as those most illiterate communities in the history due to marginalization by society cannot have a huge amount of the written sources that could enable us to historicize the movement of Roma like those of other peoples, since the Roma were genuinely in the position that could not write their own history. However, we still need to research archives. Unfortunately, so far, not many historians dealt with the history of the Roma and those historians researching grand histories of the privileged nations having available their own archives lack elemental knowledge of Romani Studies that could be used as an auxiliary tool for researching about the Roma in the past. Therefore, the history of the Roma is still remaining as an interest for several Romani studies experts and a few historians.

Later on, *Roma Voices in History*, a sourcebook edited by Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov, was created through the collaboration with researchers from several countries throughout Europe. They managed to bring many new sources relevant to this debate of the Roma movement.³

² For more details see Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov, "The First Gypsy/Roma Organizations, Churches and Newspapers," in *From Dust to Digital: Ten Years of the Endangered Archives Programme* (2015), 190. Elena Marushiakova, Vesselin Popov, and Lilyana Kovacheva, *Shakir M. Pashov: History of the Gypsies in Bulgaria and Europe: Roma* (Leiden: Brill, 2023).

³ Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov, eds., *Roma Voices in History: A Sourcebook* (Brill | Schöningh, February 22, 2021)

The above-mentioned book shows that efforts for the civic emancipation of the Roma are now traceable in the archives of 19th-century European empires, including the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires. In each empire, the Roma had different legal positions. For example, in the lands ruled by the Ottomans, the Roma Muslims were entitled to have civic rights. In contrast, their counterparts of the same ethnicity, the Roma Christians had to pay a poll-tax for the Christian infidels (*jizya*) and *devşirme* so that their boys were not drafted into the army. However, in the newly independent Balkan countries after World War I, both Roma Christians and Roma Muslims were on the same level and their paths more or less intersect.⁴

On the other hand, in Western Europe the Roma that lived in the old nation states did not have such advantages like those Roma Muslims in the Ottoman Empire. According to Angus M. Fraser, the Roma Evangelical Church was an illustration of the mass pan-Roma organization surpassing the borders among the Roma subgroup communities.⁵ The reason for the steady growth of this movement backed by Pentecostalism is, as Fraser states, the situation in which the Roma found themselves after World War II. The churches were competing with the nascent new church led by Clément le Cossec (1901-2001), a pastor from Brittany with *gadžo*, a non-Roma, origin.⁶

Roma Evangelical Church spread very fast in France and Spain. In the 1970s, the evangelizations were in even in the United States of America and United Kingdom. During the first decade, they managed to build solid facilities with 70,000 baptized Roma people, 1,600 preachers and 400 pastors of Roma origin.⁷

⁴ Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov, eds., *Roma Voices in History: A Sourcebook* (Brill | Schöningh, February 22, 2021), 26–31.

⁵ Angus Fraser, *The Gypsies* (Blackwell, 1992), 315.

⁶ Fraser, *The Gypsies*, 313.

⁷ Fraser, *The Gypsies*, 314.

Here, we can see that Roma after World War II found themselves in especially arduous times such that the churches were helping them. They were in material and mental need after the Holocaust. Let us take into the consideration that this is all happening in the time when Europe is divided by the Iron Curtain and the background of the Cold War. Moreover, the Roma in Western Europe are attempting to solve basic human rights as is where to encamp while being driven out by the police. With this context, there is a rise in the number of Roma pastors, as this became a conduit toward political solidarity and representation, as well as a method for Roma to articulate the needs of their respective communities. Fraser himself confirms: "... whereas the established churches demanded long periods of training for their priests, this one relied on inducting lay preachers (all males) from Gypsy families - the very people who knew where to turn next and who could speak the language of the prospective converts and, radiating assurance, address them in extemporaneous sermons on simple biblical themes."⁸ The number of Pentecostal Roma believers grew steadily, since it might have brought them hope in the situation they found themselves in.

Through the backgrounds, places, and times of the genesis of the local Roma movements in the 19th century Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, and Russian empires and in 20th century Western Europe, the various movements share differing but similar features. From this macro historiography, this paper will now focus on the creation of the Roma movement(s) from Czechoslovakia with that of the transnational case, predominantly the one leading to the organization of the First World Roma Congress in 1971.

⁸ Fraser, *The Gypsies*, 313.

Roma emancipation in Europe

Prior to World War II

I am starting with the interwar period, when two important events were held. Nevertheless, I consider it crucial to mention them since the idea of the following events were continuing. On the 8th of October 1933, a congress in Romania was held which became significant for the idea of the congress in 1971.⁹ Another interesting event in this decade was the coronation of the Roma King, Jozef Kwiek from the Kwiek dynasty, in Poland in 1934.¹⁰ Marushiakova and Popov state that he sent the delegation to the United Nations to ask for land in Namibia, and other kings from this dynasty were trying to negotiate for land in India, the UK, and even negotiate directly with Mussolini.¹¹ These activities from the interwar period were discontinued by World War II, the darkest chapter of the history of the Roma.

Postwar transnationalization of the Roma movement

After World War II, the Roma were starting a new chapter by transforming their national congresses and local European Roma movements into a transnational movement that extended beyond the borders of the Iron Curtain. According to Thomas Acton, two groups of Roma intelligentsia are key to understanding the transnational Roma movement at this time: the *Romani Nomenklatura*, a group of Roma intellectuals from the civil and military

⁹ See more in the article by Petre Matei, "Between Nationalism and Pragmatism: The Roma Movement in Interwar Romania," *Social Inclusion* 8, 2 (June 2020): 305-315.

¹⁰ Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov, "The Roma – a Nation without a State? Historical Background and Contemporary Tendencies" (2013) In: Burszta, Wojciech, Tomasz Kamusella and Sebastian Wojciechowski, eds. *Nationalismus Across the Globe: An Overview of the Nationalism of State-endowed and Stateless Nations*. Poznan: School of Humanities and Journalism, 433-455.

¹¹ Marushiakova and Popov, "The Roma," 435. This is an anachronism; the authors most likely meant the League of Nations, since the United Nations was established in 1945.

bureaucracies who were gathering around the Romen Theatre in Moscow, and that was the way they were articulating their ideas. Furthermore, though this group had to adjust to the idea of socialism, they had opportunities to meet some Roma intellectuals from the Eastern Block, thanks to the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON).¹²

At the same time, in the western side of Europe, a similar effort of nascent Roma internationalism was occurring in Paris.¹³ Acton emphasizes that similarly as in the USSR, the Roma intelligentsia in Western Europe was also gathering in artistic circles. However, unlike in the Soviet Union, the Roma movement in France was intertwined with the Light and Life Movement (*La Vie et Lumière*), the first Kalderash Pentecostal congregation¹⁴ in the Saint-Denis district, on the outskirts of Paris, in 1960. Acton states that Matéo Maximoff (1917–1999), an evangelical pastor and writer, was the first Roma that wrote about the genocide of Roma perpetrated by Nazi Germany,¹⁵ and founded the above-mentioned Roma Pentecostal congregation with Stevo and Loulou from the Demeter vitsa.¹⁶ The symbiosis of these congregations interconnected Roma from different Roma sub-groups and countries. The Manouche,¹⁷ Russian Roma, Yugoslav Roma, and several Roma subgroups from Romania, such as the Ursari, Rudari, and Kalderash. This is how the Roma in Paris, with different Roma subgroup backgrounds and country origins, met. The most known people of them that played an important part in the transnational Roma movement is actor Yul Brynner from the Soviet

¹² Thomas Acton, “Beginnings and Growth of Transnational Movements of Roma to Achieve Civil Rights after the Holocaust,” *RomArchive*, accessed August 08, 2024, <https://www.romarchive.eu/en/roma-civil-rights-movement/beginnings-and-growth-transnational-movements-roma/>.

¹³ Acton, “Beginnings.”

¹⁴ Acton, “Beginnings.”

¹⁵ Matéo Maximoff was born as a Kalderash from his paternal side and a Manouche from his maternal side. His mother was a cousin of a Roma-Manouche guitarist virtuoso Django Reinhardt (1910–1953).

¹⁶ Vitsa - extended family in Roma communities.

¹⁷ Manouche (in Roma language *manuš* - human) is also the name for the ethnic subgroup of Roma living in France, Belgium, and other countries of Western Europe.

Union, musician Jarko Jovanovic from Yugoslavia, and Jan Kochanowski, the first Roma to hold a PhD in linguistics, who came to Paris as a refugee from Latvia.¹⁸

Vajda Voevod III and his *Romanestan* quest

If we talk about the transnationalization of the Roma movement in Paris during the 1960s, we cannot leave out in this story Ionel Rotaru (1918-1982), a person who was closely connected with the topic of Roma emancipation, despite not being connected to the previously mentioned Roma Pentecostal congregation. According to Acton, Rotaru was a would-be writer and painter who joined the group of Roma intellectuals and musicians in France (Matéo Maximoff, Jarko Jovanović, Dr. Jan Kochanowski, etc.) in 1958.¹⁹

Maria Sierra also states that Ionel Rotaru, a Roma refugee from Romania, coined the term *Romanestan*.²⁰ *Romanestan*, which is “a Romanes word whose meaning is ambiguous; it can be understood as an unspecified ‘place’ for Roma or as a potential Romani nation state.”²¹ The *Romanestan* that Rotaru imagined is the most visible aspect of an ambitious plan that demanded rights for those labelled and treated as *Gypsies*, not only in France, but throughout Europe, and even the whole world.²²

As an artist, Rotaru decided to draw the attention of the public to himself. Therefore, on the 24th of May, 1959, Ionel Rotaru made a performance in which he coronated himself as king with the name Vajda Voevod III, King of the Ursari Tsiganes.²³ This event was attended by the public and especially by Roma intelligentsia. However, unlike the coronation of the king

¹⁸ Acton, “Beginnings.”

¹⁹ Acton, “Beginnings.”

²⁰ Maria Sierra, “Creating Romanestan: A Place to be a Gypsy in Post-Nazi Europe,” *European History Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (2019): 272-292.

²¹ Sierra, “Creating Romanestan,” 273-74.

²² Sierra, “Creating Romanestan,” 273-74.

²³ Thomas A. Acton, Jean-Pierre Liégeois, and Bim Mason, “Ionel Rotaru (Vajda Voevod III) as a Writer,” in *Ästhetik(en) der Roma*, ed. Marina Ortrud M. Hertrampf and Kirsten von Hagen (Munich: DFG, 2020), 147ff.

of the Kwiek monarchy in Poland, Ionel Rotaru, with his alter ego Vajda Voevod III, was significantly buttressed by the various Roma subgroups in Paris. The Roma from various origins and belonging to their Roma subgroups because, as Acton states, “he helped, first with immigration matters and then, increasingly, with individual reparations claims against West Germany.”²⁴

Furthermore, he was also backed by Jacques and Louis Dauvergnne, two half-brothers with mixed French and Rudari origin.²⁵ Acton states that these two additional and well-known Roma, the brothers known among the Roma as Vanko and Léulea Rouda, helped Vajda Voevod III found two key Roma organizations: Organization Nationale Gitane (ONG) and Communauté Mondiale Gitane (CMG), which were the first Romani organizations in Paris. These organizations also published its journal *La Voix Mondiale Tzigane* (1961-1968).²⁶

Acton, Liégeois, and Mason mention that Vajda Voevod III was at his time perceived as an instigator. They agree that he was a pioneer of Roma activism which was developed 15 years later.²⁷

As an activist, Vajda Voevod III contributed with his travels to the consolidation of the nascent Roma transnational movement in various countries with efforts to gain supporters for the recognition of reparations by West Germany. He wanted reparations not only in France, but also behind the Iron Curtain in Yugoslavia. In addition to the challenges the Roma had to go through in Eastern Europe in particular, there were also challenges among the Travellers in Dublin, who were represented by Grattan Puxon.

²⁴ Acton, “Beginnings.”

²⁵ Acton, “Beginnings.”

²⁶ Acton, “Beginnings.”

²⁷ Other examples of Roma seeking political representation include the Kwiek family history, which included aspirations for statehood.

In 1965, according to Sierra, the organizations founded by Vajda Voevod III in France were disbanded by the state when he became a stateless person. Therefore, since the state branded Voevod III as a stateless person, his organizations were no longer legal since they were led by a “foreigner.”²⁸ As a result, he escaped to London, and then to Dublin where he met Puxon who relates: “... The next morning, unaware in my youthful enthusiasm of what I might be getting into, I agreed not just to join the CMG but become instantly a member of the Directing Committee of the newly outlawed organization.”²⁹

At the same time, in 1965, as Angus Fraser states, the *Comité International Tsigane* (CIT, International Gypsy Committee) was founded.³⁰ Puxon, however, continued with them the collaboration that had been already established thanks to Vajda Voevod III. The idea of *Romanestan* faded with Vajda Voevod III fleeing from France and the organizing of the First World Roma Congress became the priority to unite people from both Western and Eastern Europe. In 1966, Vanko Rouda, the head of CIT, was able to organize the First International Roma congress to which Puxon wanted to bring a delegation of Romanichals from Ireland. However, the absence of the delegations from Eastern Europe, due to the politics of the regimes at this time, would weaken the effectiveness of the international Roma representation, as Puxon himself states.³¹

Roma emancipation in Czechoslovakia

After World War II, 583 native Bohemian and Moravian Roma returned from concentration camps (out of 6,500 living there before the war) who were still persecuted on the

²⁸ Sierra, “Creating Romanestan,” 283.

²⁹ Grattan Puxon, “The Romani Movement: Rebirth and the First World Romani Congress in Retrospect,” in Thomas Acton, ed., *Scholarship and the Gypsy Struggle* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2000), 96.

³⁰ Fraser, *The Gypsies*, 316.

³¹ Puxon, “Romani Movement,” 105.

basis of the Law no. 117 of 1927.³² Thus, it is easy to conclude that the majority of the Czech and Moravian Roma perished in the Holocaust. However, those who survived horrors in concentration camps, operated not only by German Nazis, even though they came to still democratic Czechoslovakia, were persecuted again, on the basis of the Law no. 117 of 1927, applying to itinerant Gypsies. According to this law, the Roma were chased out of the villages and were forbidden to enter the regional cities or spa towns.³³

After World War II, Slovak Roma living in dismal poverty started migrating to the Czech lands to work as cheap labourers.

In June 1950, Czechoslovak Minister of Social Welfare Evžen Erban presented the efforts of Roma for their self-determination and self-organization at the central level of the Czechoslovak government. Starting from this meeting, Helena Sadílková writes that it was prescribed to use the expression “persons of gypsy origin” instead of gypsy. Nota bene, furthermore, the expression “persons of the gypsy origin” was used quite rarely because it could lead to separatism.³⁴

During the implementation of the first two Five-year plans implementation (1949-1953 and 1956-1960), the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia focused on industrial development. After the regime displaced 3 million Germans, the Roma from Eastern Slovakia were needed as the cheap labor power. However, the regime implemented the repressive policy towards the

³² This law affected the Roma in the first Czechoslovak Republic, thanks to collected data as the evidence which enabled the government to catch Roma people and send them to their deaths. First, to the concentration camps operated by the Czechs in Lety (near Písek) and Hodonín (near Kunštát), and subsequently, the survivors were deported to the Nazi concentration camps, namely to Auschwitz Birkenau. Cf. For more see Ctibor Nečas, *Romové v České republice včera a dnes*. [Roma People in the Czech Republic Yesterday and Today]. 5th ed. (Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2002).

³³ Pavelčíková, “Romové v českých zemích” [Roma in the Czech Lands], 28.

³⁴ Helena Sadílková, Dušan Slačka, and Milada Závodská, *Aby bylo i s námi počítáno: Společensko-politická angažovanost Romů a snahy o založení romské organizace v poválečném Československu*. [So that You Count on Us too: Politico-social engagement of Roma and their efforts to establish a Romani organization in postwar Czechoslovakia] (Museum of Romani Culture, 2018), 65.

Roma including the homogenization for all the Roma groups without any regard to their ethnic identity. Roma people coming from Eastern Slovakia, for example, had a long tradition of speaking in their local Romani language, as they lived isolated from the majority of Slovaks, despite having been settled for several centuries. However, another group of the Roma, the Lovari Roma³⁵ were nomads and did not fit the “settled” vision of the government. These Roma were affected by the Law no. 74 of 1958 “On the permanent settlement of nomadic and semi-nomadic people.” As a result, in February of 1959, about 19,200 Roma were caught in the Czech lands when the law required Roma people to be registered.³⁶ These people were forced to stay where they got caught, the wheels of their caravans were cut off and the municipality was obliged to offer them housing and employment, despite in fact having neither.

The dispersion of Roma people from Slovakia to the determined regions in the Czech lands was later organized based on the government resolution passed with no. 502 in 1965. The goals of the passed resolution, as Ctibor Nečas states, were to eliminate shacks, to solve housing, to send children to school, and to integrate men able to work into employment.³⁷

Roma movements

Roma people in Czech lands knew that their migration from Slovakia was arranged and, therefore, they decided to negotiate on the procedure with state institutions. According to Helena Sadílková:

The internal conditions for the formation of the unions were formed as early as the early 1950s within a broader group of Romani people who were engaged in various ways in the events of the time and who were involved in various ways in the complex of ideological considerations, negotiations, and the

³⁵ Lovari Roma came from Hungarian speaking lands. Their group is called according to their craft. *Ló* in Hungarian means horse. So, their main craft making their living was horse-trading, and therefore they led a nomadic life.

³⁶ Ctibor Nečas, *Romové v České republice včera a dnes*. [Roma People in the Czech Republic Yesterday and Today]. 5th ed. (Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2002), 101.

³⁷ Nečas, *Romové v České republice*, [Roma People in the Czech Republic], 102.

implementation of approved measures concerning Romani people, known at the time as “solving the Gypsy question” or “solving the Gypsy problem.”³⁸

Sadílková describes the efforts of Roma people in Czechoslovakia to establish their own organizations. The efforts had not been successful, but there were at least some occasional possibilities to be found:

- *Sdružení slovenských Cikánů* (the Association of Slovak Gypsies) in 1949.³⁹
- *Svaz československých Cikánů* (Union of Czechoslovak Gypsies) in 1950 and “celostátní svaz Cikánů” (National Association of Gypsies) in 1951.⁴⁰
- *Románo kultúrno jekhetaniben – Zväz československých Cigánov* (Roma Cultural Association - Union of Czechoslovak Gypsies) in 1957.⁴¹
- *Románo jekhetaniben – Sväz československých Cigánov* (Roma Association - Union of Czechoslovak Gypsies) a “společenská masová organizace Cikánů” (mass social organization of Gypsies) in Spring 1968.⁴²

In June of 1950, Evžen Erban, a Czechoslovak Minister of Social Welfare, presented the efforts of Roma for self-determination and self-organizing at the central level of the Czechoslovak government. Minister Erban decided about assimilation of Roma and rejected to recognize them as a nationality.⁴³

Later on, the Brno Region National Committee on the 26th of June, 1950, informed the Minister of Social Welfare about the establishment of the Temporary committee of the Roma

³⁸ Sadílková et al., *Aby bylo i s námi počítáno*, [Count on Us Too], 27.

³⁹ Sadílková et al., *Aby bylo i s námi počítáno*, [Count on Us Too], 30.

⁴⁰ Sadílková et al., *Aby bylo i s námi počítáno*, [Count on Us Too], 32.

⁴¹ Sadílková et al., *Aby bylo i s námi počítáno*, [Count on Us Too], 39.

⁴² Sadílková et al., *Aby bylo i s námi počítáno*, [Count on Us Too], 44.

⁴³ Sadílková et al., *Aby bylo i s námi počítáno*, [Count on Us Too], 64.

organization, the Ministry reacted with a message that the delegate from a ministerial meeting, Rudolf Daniel, had not been granted permission to act independently. Erban's ministry had established communication with the Brno Region National Committees which was informing them quickly, and well, in the matter of the possible autonomous initiatives of Roma activists stipulating an opportunity to adjust liberal practice of the power of authority in the regions.⁴⁴

All the above efforts to found the organization were not successful until 1969, as Donert states that the Union of Gypsies-Roma, which was "the first Roma organization in the Czech lands ever," was allowed to be founded with an affiliation to the National Front. On the 29th of August, the Union of Gypsies-Roma commenced with founding a congress in Brno under the leadership of Ing. Miroslav Holomek.⁴⁵ Due to the popularity of the newly founded Union of Gypsies-Roma, they received the invitation by Comité International Tsigane to attend the pilgrimage in Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer.⁴⁶ On this pilgrimage, they had the opportunity to meet other Roma activists from Western Europe with whom they established contacts. That is how they were invited in the following year to participate in the First World Romani Congress in the UK.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Sadílková et al., *Aby bylo i s námi počítáno*, [Count on Us Too], 66.

⁴⁵ Celia Donert, *The Rights of the Roma: The Struggle for Citizenship in Postwar Czechoslovakia* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 189-190.

⁴⁶ Donert, *The Rights of the Roma*, 207.

⁴⁷ For more information, see the chapter by Donert, "Prague Spring for Roma!" in *The Rights of the Roma*, 180-213.

2. FIRST WORLD ROMA CONGRESS IN THE UK

“Our people must combine and organize to work locally, nationally and internationally. Our problems are the same everywhere: we must proceed with own forms of education, preserve and develop our Romani culture, bring a new dynamism into our communities and forge a future in accordance with our life-style and beliefs. We have been passive long enough and I believe – starting today – we can succeed”.

Slobodan Berberski, first elected president at First World Roma Congress, *Race Today* (192:1971)

In this chapter, I am following the examination of Roma movement on the transnational level by the reconstruction of the First World Roma Congress and its outcomes with the aid of two articles. Grattan Puxon’s article “The Romani Movement”⁴⁸ published in 2002 shares, retrospectively, his memories from the First World Roma Congress. To avoid a contradiction arising from the topic of mind and memory, I will contrast this article with “The First World Romani Congress”⁴⁹, a contemporary article by the same author published 2 months after the Congress itself.

The second part of this thesis will focus on the challenges and circumstances under which the Czechoslovak delegation, the representatives from the Union of Gypsies-Roma who took part in the First World Roma Congress, experienced.

⁴⁸ Grattan Puxon, “The Romani Movement: Rebirth and the First World Romani Congress in Retrospect,” in *Scholarship and the Gypsy Struggle*, ed. Thomas A. Acton (University of Hertfordshire Press, 2000), 94–113.

⁴⁹ Grattan Puxon, “The First World Romani Congress,” *Race Today* 3, no. 6 (June, 1971), 192-197.

First World Roma Congress

Preparatory conference for the First World Roma Congress

In the archive of Grattan Puxon, I found an invitation for the First World Roma Congress in English and Spanish versions. In my view, these documents are worthy to be analyzed for the background and the First World Roma Congress. This will enable us to see the circumstances under which the First World Roma Congress happened.

The English version of the “Invitation to the preparatory conference” for the First World Roma Congress was supposed to be held during April 5th to April 10th, in 1971, near London. The introduction of the invitation provides us with the background that at that time new Roma organizations were emerging all across Europe which “reflect many different needs, many different situations. But they have in common the desire to improve the situation of the scattered Romani communities and to bring together, at least in purpose, these dedicated to a better world, a world in which Romanies will have a place”.⁵⁰ Therefore, it was needed to summon the Roma activists and leaders and to a conference which could “... prepare the ground for more effective coordination between the different branches of the movement.”⁵¹

The invitation continues informing about that the organizers of the conference, the Gypsy Council in the UK represented by Grattan Puxon, which was a British branch of the Comité International Tsigane, had led discussions with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) about the possibility to get a consultative status with UNESCO which could support the culture and education in the countries where the Roma lived.

⁵⁰ *Invitation to the World Romani Congress (Preparatory Conference, London April 1971)*, folder “Puxon/294 World Romani Congresses and Other GRT Events,” Grattan Puxon Papers, Bishopsgate Institute, London, UK.

⁵¹ Ibid.

The purpose of the conference in the UK was to gather various delegations and to work separately in organized commissions, such as a social and educational commission, a commission for Roma language, and a commission for war crimes and reparations. Initially, the participants of the conference should have established and collaborated for the congress that was supposed to be held in the following year in the UNESCO Palace in Paris.⁵²

In addition, at the end of the invitation, the organizers ask delegations that would be applying to bring along artists willing to perform at the two concerts that will be held during the conference.

Shift from Preparatory conference to the First World Roma Congress

At the time of the preparations for the Preparatory conference, an anti-gypsy action was happening, which Puxon himself related:

“Antigypsy feeling in the village [Chelsfield] was running high. Residents were upset by an encampment of Gypsies on a local roadside. A protest meeting had packed the Memorial Hall and a committee had been set up pledged “to get rid of them once and for all.” A local doctor called on shopkeepers to refuse service to the Gypsies. He wanted their caravans impounded by the police. Mr. Baker cautioned me, for his sake and our own, to keep the location [of the Congress] secret as long as possible.”⁵³

This proves as well not mentioning the venue of World Roma Congress in the press release:

“Those journalists interested in attending the Open Day Session... may leave their name and number in our visitors book and will be notified beforehand.”⁵⁴

⁵² *Invitation to the World Romani Congress (Preparatory Conference, London April 1971)*, folder “Puxon/294 World Romani Congresses and Other GRT Events,” Grattan Puxon Papers, Bishopsgate Institute, London, UK.

⁵³ Grattan Puxon, “The Romani Movement: Rebirth and the First World Romani Congress in Retrospect,” 105.

⁵⁴ *Invitation to the World Romani Congress (Preparatory Conference, London April 1971)*, folder “Puxon/294 World Romani Congresses and Other GRT Events,” Grattan Puxon Papers, Bishopsgate Institute, London, UK.

According to the program, the Roma Congress was scheduled to take place in one week, from April 5th to April 12th, in 1971.⁵⁵ In this subchapter, I will adhere to this program and try to reconstruct the whole event based on the memories of Grattan Puxon and archival materials.

On Monday, April 5th, 1971, the congress commenced by the Exhibition, its name is not mentioned in the program, at the National Book League. The following day, the Gypsy Council met with the Department of the Environment.⁵⁶

On Wednesday, April 7th, the delegations arrived in London from where they moved to Cannock House, a private school in Chelsfield, in which the delegates could be as well accommodated.⁵⁷ Among the participants, there were Roma delegates from Spain, France, Belgium, Great Britain, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia. Unlike the majority of delegations coming from capitalistic and democratic western European countries, official Roma delegations from Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia were coming officially from the socialist countries. Delegations from Bulgaria were not approved to participate. Similarly, there was no delegation from Romania except for a musician who performed at the festival, and as well Vilho Koivisto represented Finland for the lack of the financial resources for others to participate. Overall, according to Puxon, in terms of the diversity of the Roma participants' backgrounds according to their Roma ethnic subgroups, these included Vlax subgroups (Arlija, Djambasha, Kalderasha and Lovara), Sinti and Manush, Kale, Romanichals and Minceir (Irish Travellers).⁵⁸

⁵⁵ *World Romani Congress: Programme 1971*, folder "Puxon/294 World Romani Congresses and Other GRT Events," Grattan Puxon Papers, Bishopsgate Institute, London, UK.

⁵⁶ *World Romani Congress: Programme 1971*. "Puxon/294 World Romani Congresses and Other GRT Events," Grattan Puxon Papers, Bishopsgate Institute, London, UK.

⁵⁷ Grattan Puxon, "The Romani Movement: Rebirth and the First World Romani Congress in Retrospect," 105.

⁵⁸ Puxon, "The Romani," 106.

The General Session of the Congress, the most crucial part of this week full of various events, was held from Thursday, April 8th to Monday, April 12th, 1971.

On Thursday, April 8th, the first general assembly was commenced by welcoming by Grattan Puxon,⁵⁹ and a presentation of the Comité International Tsigane (CIT, International Gypsy Committee) by Vanko Rouda, the head of CIT. Slobodan Berberski from Yugoslavia, a participant elected as the first president of the congress, took the floor with a Czechoslovak Roma delegate named Antonín Daniel. Both were presenting the situation of the Roma in their countries, in Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. In the afternoon, there was a meeting with the British delegate to the Council of Europe, Joan Vickers.⁶⁰

On Friday, April 9th, the participants worked on the following commissions as it had already been agreed upon beforehand: the War Crimes and Reparation Commission, the Education Commission, the Cultural Commission, the Social Commission, and the Language Commission. In this section, for clarity, each commission will be summarized, since their individual importance is significant to understand the complexity and intellectual density of the First World Romani Congress.

Puxon relates that during the War Crimes and Reparation Commission, when Berberski, a newly elected president of the Congress, asked all those attending for a two-minute silence “...for the half-million of our people destroyed by fascisms,” “... despite the intervening quarter-century, still conjured doleful memories. Heavy emotion was engendered...”⁶¹ Leulea Rouda, the chair of the commission, mentioned that there had been created on the behalf of the International Romani Committee a research team, formed of Grattan Puxon and Donald

⁵⁹ See his edited speech in Puxon, “The First World Romani Congress,” *Race Today* 3, no. 6 (June, 1971), 192.

⁶⁰ For a full description of the details during the days, see Donald Kenrick, “The World Romani Congress - April 1971,” *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* Third Series, vol. 50 (1971), 1-2, 101-197.

⁶¹ Puxon, “The Romani,” 107.

Kenrick, which carried out the three-year research of the crimes against the Roma people perpetrated by the Nazis.⁶² In the following, this research was published in the book titled *The Destiny of Europe's Gypsies*.⁶³ To conclude this commission, Puxon states the task of War Crimes and Reparation Commission is "...to assist individuals to obtain compensation through their own or the German governments; to negotiate for possible block reparations to be lodged with UNESCO for the benefit of the present generation of Romani children... and to keep alive the memory of those who died, through the erection of monuments and the commemoration of appropriate dates in the calendar of massacres which occurred between 1936 and 1945."⁶⁴

The Education Commission, chaired by Antonín Daniel from Czechoslovakia, was dealing with the equal access to an equal education of Roma children. In particular, *Romandrom* schools, schools in the UK for Roma Traveller children, which had support from such celebrities as Frank Sinatra, John Lennon, and Yoko Ono, all of whom supported the Gypsy Council.⁶⁵ However, a clash started regarding the travelling. Lady Plowden, a director of the Gypsy Council, did not support it. Puxon expresses his surprise that Roma from Eastern Europe had a similar approach. Puxon said, "It came as an unexpected irony, therefore, when views similar to those of Lady Plowden were echoed by some east European Roma, Ladislav Demeter voiced their feeling when he said that travelling was undesirable. He told the congress that the settlement of nomadic families was a prerequisite to the successful education of their children."⁶⁶ In the article published 30 years before, Puxon confirms that the settled Roma in Czechoslovakia preferred another approach to education than those Roma living in Western European countries. The Commission reached the six recommendations below and the venue

⁶² Puxon, "The First World Romani Congress," 194.

⁶³ Donald Kenrick and Grattan Puxon, *The Destiny of Europe's Gypsies*. (Heinemann Educational for Sussex University Press, 1972).

⁶⁴ Puxon, "The First World Romani Congress," 194.

⁶⁵ Puxon, "The Romani," 107.

⁶⁶ Puxon, "The Romani," 108.

for the next meeting of the Commission was set as Skopje for next year, with no exact date yet agreed.⁶⁷

- 1) It is essential to intensify the struggle against illiteracy amongst nomadic and settled Roms alike;
- 2) the use of Romanes in schools, where appropriate should be officially recognized;
- 3) whatever possible Romani teachers should be employed in schools attended by Romani children;
- 4) in the absence of permanent buildings, caravan schools for nomadic Roms are to be encouraged and research conducted to improve methods of instruction used in them;
- 5) nursery schools should be established for children of pre-school age to prepare them for entry into state schools;
- 6) in every program of education, the Romani culture and values must be respected.

(Puxon, 193 –194:1971)

The Cultural Commission, chaired by Dr. Ján Cibul'a, an exile from Czechoslovakia living in Switzerland, focused on raising awareness in public about the Roma culture which had been retained despite the history of the Roma. Music was also mentioned since the Roma musicians influenced in popular and classical music, for instance, Beethoven, Liszt, and Brahms. The Cultural Commission agreed on the following three recommendations with the plan of the next session of this commission to commence in November of the following year, in Switzerland.⁶⁸

- 1) a central institute should be set up collect songs, legends, fables, stories and poems from different countries so that they should be available for comparison and research;
- 2) a world Romani festival should be organized, if possible in 1973 with the aid of UNESCO, to present ensembles from each country;
- 3) regular visits of song and dance ensembles should be arranged between the communities.

(Puxon, 194 –194:1971)

⁶⁷ Puxon, "The First World Romani Congress," 193-194.

⁶⁸ Puxon, "The First World Romani Congress," 194.

The Social Commission was chaired by Abdi Fajk from Macedonia, at that time part of Yugoslavia, and aimed to produce reports to be proposed to the Council of Europe, UNESCO, and the United Nations. The second activity was focusing on a collaboration with the European Commission on Human Rights and the UN Commission. The next meeting of the commission was planned for the following April, in West Germany, in 1972.⁶⁹

The Language Commission, chaired by Juan de Dios Ramirez from Spain, set itself a target to unify and standardise Romani language(s) with the respect to the dialects and particularities to create and to publish a journal called *Romani Čib*. According to the plan, the following meeting would be in September of 1972, and was supposed to be held in Barcelona.⁷⁰

On Saturday, April 10th, the Congress took a pre-arranged trip to Walsall, near Birmingham, to visit a caravan site at Slackey Lane, which was deemed an unofficial site for caravans. Donald Kenrick mentioned in his article that the delegates from the congress burned a tent in memory of three children, who were burned to death in a caravan during an eviction by police, after a local council approval. This situation profoundly affected the delegates, so they resolved spontaneously to protest at the police station and to pin the plea for providing the site for camping for the Romani Travellers on the door of the Town Hall.⁷¹

On Sunday, April 11th, as Kenrick states, the Third General Assembly was held. According to plan, following congresses should take place in 1973, in Paris, and in 1975, in Yugoslavia.⁷²

⁶⁹ Puxon, "The First World Romani Congress," 194

⁷⁰ Puxon, "The First World Romani Congress," 194.

⁷¹ Kenrick, "The World Romani Congress - April 1971." *Gypsy Lore Society*. 1971, vol. 50, nos. 1-2, January-April 1971. This needs a page number.

⁷² Kenrick, "The World Romani Congress," 105.

Furthermore, three people were chosen as members of the secretariat in the lead under Vanko Rouda to prepare for the next congress.⁷³ In addition, the congress agreed on accepting Juan de Dios Ramirez's program consisting of 10 points containing tasks such that Roma organizations should support CIT, decision of the Congress to send to the Council of Europe, and UNESCO, etc.⁷⁴

On Monday, April 12th, the whole week was concluded by the Press Conference and festival at Parliament Hill Fields, in Hampstead.⁷⁵ The festival had an audience of around 1,000 people and offered not only an artistic program, but also a memorial event for the Romani victims of the Holocaust, and a parade to a near lake with the statue of Kali Sara.⁷⁶ In addition, there was a display of traditional crafts, such as fortune-telling and other Roma handcrafts, an engagement ceremony of a Roma couple, and a commemoration for Roma victims of the Nazis.⁷⁷

That is how the First World Roma Congress happened and as Puxon mentions retrospectively: "...the Congress can be seen to have provided both meeting and departure point. If it lacked the trappings of the grand occasion, which the Palais de l'UNESCO might have bestowed, nobody can deny its credibility... But because it was the first, those present had had the unique opportunity and privilege of adopting the Romani flag, re-uniting Roma symbolically with India as ancient homeland..."⁷⁸

⁷³ Kenrick, "The World Romani Congress," 105.

⁷⁴ Kenrick, "The World Romani Congress," 105-106.

⁷⁵ *World Romani Congress: Programme 1971*, folder "Puxon/294 World Romani Congresses and Other GRT Events," Grattan Puxon Papers, Bishopsgate Institute, London, UK..

⁷⁶ Kali Sara (Black Sara) is venerated by the Roma in France as a saint and patron of their community. Each year in May, she is honored during a pilgrimage to Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer.

⁷⁷ Kenrick, "The World Romani Congress" 107.

⁷⁸ Puxon, "The Romani," 113.

Outcomes of the symbols

Roma flag

The Roma flag at the First World Roma congress was used from the congress in the 1930s in Bucharest which was initially bicolor of green and blue colors. Puxon mentioned that he had seen it by Vajda Voevod III, who carried it during the commemoration of the Romani victims to the Holocaust, in 1967, in Paris. Furthermore, he added that the red wheel in the middle, the Indian red chakra wheel, was added on his recommendation.⁷⁹ This Puxon as well confirms and contextualizes the purpose of Weer Rajendra Rishi, an Indian scholar and diplomat, to get support by India which was having good relationships with Yugoslavia within the Non-aligned Movement.⁸⁰

Romani anthem

Žarko Jovanović,⁸¹ a balalaika virtuoso who after World War II left Yugoslavia for France, was writing the lyrics and rehearsing with the delegates on the bus heading to Walsall, near Birmingham. During the commemoration of three Roma children that were burned to death, this anthem was sung for the first time in public.⁸²

Djelem, djelem	We travel on, travel on
Lungone dromenca	Along the eternal road
Maladilem bahtale romenca	Everywhere meeting happy Roms
E carenca bahtale dromenca	

⁷⁹ Personal interview with Grattan Puxon in July 2019, in Colchester, England.

⁸⁰ Grattan Puxon, "An Account of the First World Roma Congress Held in London in 1971," *Harvard FXB Center for Health & Human Rights*, 2019, 9.

⁸¹ Jovanović's first name Žarko is sometimes written in the literature according to French orthography – Jarko.

⁸² See Puxon, "An Account of the First World Roma Congress," 7-8 and Puxon, "The Romani Movement," 110 (2002).

<p>A Romale, a chavale</p> <p>Vi mansa su bari familija</p> <p>Murdada la e kali legija</p> <p>Ake vjama usti Rom akana</p> <p>Men hutasa mishto kaj kerasa</p> <p>A Romale a chavale</p>	<p>Once I had a great family</p> <p>But the Jackboot Brigade took them away</p> <p>Listen Romanis, the time has</p> <p>Come to rise up and break</p> <p>With our dark past</p>
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Source: Puxon -1971:194

The above extract is in a loose translation. It is necessary to mention that Žarko Jovanović in this song is reflecting his experience during World War II when he was imprisoned and joined the partisans. “Kali legija” in the lyrics is a translation of Black Legion, the Ustaše Militia, in Croatia during World War II.⁸³

Auto-ethnonym Rom

During an examination of the relevant literature, I have found out that avoidance of racial slurs such as English *Gypsy*, German *Zigeuner*, Slavic *Cigán* or Hungarian *Cigány* and slurs in other languages were condemned, leading to the promotion of the autoethnym *Roma* as an umbrella term for all the groups of Romani, except for Sinti. Though it was discussed, and this topic has been a core contemporary topic of the relations of the majority societies

⁸³ “Žarko Jovanović,” The European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture, accessed August 8, 2024, <https://eriac.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/ZARKO-JOVANOVIC.pdf>.

towards Roma, it was not mentioned as a direct symbol of the congress, neither by Puxon nor Kenrick.⁸⁴

8th of April as Romani National Day

Though Puxon says that the 8th of April should be celebrated as Romani National Day, Kenrick in his paper mentions that it “...should be adopted as an international day...”⁸⁵ Today, this legacy continues, for instance in contemporary Czech Republic, the 8th of April has been celebrated since 2001.

Czechoslovakia

Movement in Czechoslovakia

Upon the founding of the Union of Gypsy-Roma in Czechoslovakia, collaboration with the foreign Roma organizations started after a worker from the Ethnographic Museum in Budapest visited the Union in December 1969, who promised them to bring them together with Roma in Hungary.⁸⁶ This was an impetus to contact the other organizations in Europe, as she continues that they sent their letters to Roma organizations in Western Europe. That is how the Central Committee of the Gypsy-Roma Union got the invitation to the international Romani congress.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Scholars such as Ian F. Hancock, "The emergence of Romani organizations," *We are the Romani People*. (University of Hertfordshire Press, 2005): 120-121. Or Will Guy, "Romani identity and post-Communist policy" in *Between past and future: the Roma of Central and Eastern Europe*. ed. Will Guy (2001), 19.

⁸⁵ Kenrick, "The World Romani Congress," 105.

⁸⁶ Nina Pavelčíková. *Romové v českých zemích v letech 1945-1989*. [Roma in the Czech Lands during 1945-1989], (Úřad dokumentace a vyšetřování zločinů komunismu, 2002), 109.

⁸⁷ Pavelčíková, *Romové v českých zemích v letech 1945-1989*. [Roma in the Czech Lands during 1945-1989], 109.

Thanks to this contact, the Czech delegation of the Union of Gypsy-Roma participated in the pilgrimage in Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, in May of 1970.⁸⁸ In the following year, the Central Committee of the Union of Gypsy-Roma received invitations to participate in the preparatory committee of the World Congress and the festival in the UK. Initially, the Central Committee of the Union of Gypsy-Roma demanded permission to attend the congress with 5-6 members of the team of musical ensemble to perform at the festival.⁸⁹

However, the Department of Social Organizations and International Politics of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia only approved Miroslav Holomek, Antonín Daniel, and Tomáš Holomek to participate in the Congress. Furthermore, Miroslav Holomek was entrusted to “consult the performance of the delegation members on the congress with the department of social organizations and international politics of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party.”⁹⁰ That is how the delegation was authorized to “properly promote and advocate the political position of Gypsy-Roma in the capitalist system and in Czechoslovakia, the different possibilities of their education and socio-political involvement (membership of Gypsy-Roma and their functions in representative bodies, including the Federal Assembly, their equal application in all spheres of life in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic).”⁹¹

⁸⁸ See the Report about the participation of the Union of Gypsy-Roma at the pilgrimage in Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, in France. Antonín Daniel, “Mezinárodní setkání Romů” [International Meeting of Roma] in *Románo l'il*, no. 4 (1970), 23. And Antonín Daniel, “Mezinárodní setkání Romů (dokončení)” [International Meeting of Roma (finished)] in *Románo l'il*, no.1 (1971), 10-11.

⁸⁹ *Zpráva o vyslání delegace SCR ČSR na světový kongres a festival Romů v Londýně - návrh ze dne 1.3. 1971.* [Report on sending a delegation of the SCR of the Czechoslovak Republic to the World Congress and Festival of the Roma in London - proposal of 1 March 1971]. Moravský Archiv, I Fond G 434, Karton 30, inv. 151.

⁹⁰ Decision - Appendix no. 1 of the letter of 26.3.1971 from the Department of Social Organizations and International Politics of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia to the Central Committee of the Union of the Gypsy-Roma. Národní Archiv. Značka: KSČ-ÚV-02/4. Fond: KSČ - Ústřední výbor 1945-1989, Praha - sekretariát 1966-1971.

⁹¹ Original text: "... vhodně propagovat a prosazovat politické postavení Cikánů-Romů v kapitalistickém zřízení a u nás, na rozdílné možnosti jejich vzdělávání a společensko-politické angažovanosti (členství Cikánů-Romů a jejich funkce v zastupitelských sborech včetně Federálního shromáždění, jejich rovnoprávné uplatňování ve všech oblastech života v ČSSR)." Appendix no. 1 of the letter dated 26 March 1971 from the Department of Social

Reporting about the First Roma Congress by delegates in their home countries - Comparison and contextualisation of the published and not-published report(s) written by participants allowed to travel for Congress

Upon their arrival, the members of the Czechoslovak delegation wrote the internal report for the Union of the Gypsies-Roma about their participation in the First World Roma Congress. The report was named “The Report of the delegation of the central committee of the Union of the Gypsies-Roma Czech Socialistic Republic from the World Congress and festival of the Roma in London in - 7th – 12th April 1971”⁹² which comprises 14 pages. This report underwent a short editorial revision and was subsequently published in the magazine of the Union of the Gypsies-Roma named *Románo l'il* (The Roma letter). Furthermore, the article was enriched by ethnographer and art historian Eva Davidová’s photos, which also included captions. Both materials are unique, and I want to make them known. Thus, I am going to describe them in detail below.

The first part of the report, in the following 4 pages, is headed “WORLD CONGRESS AND FESTIVAL OF THE ROMA IN LONDON 7. – 12. 4. 1971 (From the report of the delegation of the Central Committee of the Union of Gypsies-Roma in Czechoslovakia).”⁹³ The group of the Czechoslovak delegation travelling to the United Kingdom comprised of 4 members approved by Czechoslovak state authorities. The first member was Secretary of the Central Committee of the Union of the Gypsies–Roma Dr. Tomáš Holomek. The second

Organizations and International Politics of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia to the Central Committee of the Union of the Gypsy-Roma, Národní archiv, file KSČ-ÚV-02/4, collection KSČ – Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Praha – sekretariát 1966–1971.

⁹² *Zpráva delegace ÚV SCR, Londýn 7. - 12. dubna 1971*. [Report of the Delegation of the Central Committee of the Union of Gypsies-Roma, London, April 7–12, 1971]. Muzeum romské kultury, Brno. Folder: MRK 178/2004.

⁹³ “Světový kongres a festival Romů v Londýně 7.–12. 4. 1971 (Ze zprávy delegace ÚV Svazu Cikánů-Romů v ČSR).” [World Congress and Festival of the Roma in London, April 7–12, 1971 (From the Report of the Delegation of the Central Committee of the Union of Gypsies-Roma in Czechoslovakia)] in *Románo l'il*, no. 3, (1971), 21.

member was Ladislav Demeter, members of the preliminary central committee and president of the central committee ing. Miroslav Holomek. Ultimately, only 3 of them participated in the congress since Miroslav Holomek was evidently ill. There is an interesting detail to add: that, according to Czech historian Schuster, the Union of the Gypsies-Roma wanted initially to send six delegates to the United Kingdom, however, only four of them were allowed by state authorities to depart to England.⁹⁴ The Czechoslovak delegation had to be accompanied by the musical ensemble of brothers Horváths from Brno consisting of 6 musicians who, as it is stated, “did not depart for technical reasons.”⁹⁵ Another interesting thing is that in the report published in *Románo l'il*, we can see that the above listed members of the delegation were chosen. The same was mentioned in the internal report for the Union of the Gypsies-Roma which looked like this:

“Dr. Vanko Rouda, a president of the French Roma, informed the Union of the Gypsies-Roma in written form about the possibility of reception of the delegation from Central Committee of the Union of the Gypsies-Roma. He sent out an invitation for 4-member delegation and 6-member musical ensemble altogether...”⁹⁶

The report continues that, after this, they decided to choose Miroslav Holomek, Antonín Daniel, Tomáš Holomek, and Ladislav Demeter.⁹⁷ On the following page of the report we can find justification for choosing exactly these members: they had a satisfactory command of foreign languages, and they had an expertise in frame of the Union of the Gypsies-Roma.

⁹⁴ Michal Schuster, “První světový romský kongres v Orpingtonu u Londýna [The First World Romani Congress in Orpington near London],” *Bulletin Muzea romské kultury, státní příspěvkové organizace* 20 (2011), 212.

⁹⁵ “Světový kongres a festival Romů v Londýně 7.–12. 4. 1971 (Ze zprávy delegace ÚV Svazu Cikánů-Romů v ČSR).” [World Congress and Festival of the Roma in London, April 7–12, 1971 (From the Report of the Delegation of the Central Committee of the Union of Gypsies-Roma in Czechoslovakia)] in *Románo l'il*, no. 3, (1971), 21.

⁹⁶ *Zpráva delegace ÚV SCR, Londýn 7. - 12. dubna 1971*. [Report of the Delegation of the Central Committee of the Union of Gypsies-Roma, London, April 7–12, 1971]. Muzeum romské kultury, Brno. Folder: MRK 178/2004.

⁹⁷ *Zpráva delegace ÚV SCR, Londýn 7. - 12. dubna 1971*. [Report of the Delegation of the Central Committee of the Union of Gypsies-Roma, London, April 7–12, 1971]. Muzeum romské kultury, Brno. Folder: MRK 178/2004, 1.

Michal Schuster, a historian of the Museum of Romani culture in Brno at the time of publishing his article, states in footnote that the governmental authorities did not approve participation of 6 members of the delegation without stating the reference on the source.⁹⁸ Nina Pavelčíková explains that the central committee of the Union of the Gypsies–Roma initially wanted to dispatch 6 people, however, the state allowed only 4 members.⁹⁹ This information is mentioned in the footnote without any reference to the source whereas in the report published in *Románo l'il* we can find no further information about it. In contrast, in both documents, in report published in *Románo l'il* and in internal report, we cannot find any mention and it seems that the report intentionally disguises the influence of the state authorities. The remaining three names are not known as they had not been stated anywhere.

Though I have mentioned above that I did not know the names. However, two of them were Karel Holomek and Milena Hübschmannová¹⁰⁰ Karel Holomek taught machine engineering as an assistant specialist at the University of the Defence in Brno from where he was released after the screenings of the opinions on the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia. He tried to work in the Union of the Gypsies-Roma, however, the union was forced by state authorities to release him as well. Since that time, he was working as a laborer and in 1981 he was imprisoned for spreading *samizdat* literature. The second person who could not participate in the World Roma Congress was a Czech Indologist and expert on Roma culture named Milena Hübschmannová. She led the social sciences commission in frame of the

⁹⁸ Nota bene, Michal Schuster worked in the Museum of the Romani Culture in Brno among whose founders belongs as well current director of the museum Jana Horváthová (née Holomková) who is the granddaughter of Tomáš Holomek as well as the daughter of Karel Holomek (Tomáš Holomek's son) who was as well the of the founders. I suppose the contact on them might be a source for him or he just forgot to state references. This needs to be edited for clarity.

⁹⁹ Nina Pavelčíková. *Romové v českých zemích v letech 1945-1989*. [Roma in the Czech Lands during 1945-1989], (Úřad dokumentace a vyšetřování zločinů komunismu, 2002), 108.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Karel Holomek (1937) in September 2016 in Prague, Czech Republic. Nota bene, my position was not researcher for this topic, we were colleagues as members of the Inter-ministerial Commission for Roma Communities Affairs at the Government of the Czech Republic.

Union and was considered as an instigator of “Memorandum to fundamental questions of the Roma (Gypsy) problematic and the specification of the social status of the Roma (Gypsies),¹⁰¹ further as Roma memorandum, which was published in April of 1970. The document was written by non-Roma scholars supporting the Union of the Gypsies–Roma: Hübschmannová, Davidová, and Srb, having conducted their research among the Roma since the 1960’s, according to Pavelčíková, and they refused the present policy of assimilation and dispersion of Roma people.¹⁰²

Besides this, the article, processed report, is briefly mentioning the travels to the venue, which was the Cannock House in Chelsfield, a private school. Another day, the 8th of April, the congress started by work of the four mentioned commissions: *social commission (sociálně-právní)*, *education commission (školská)*, *cultural commission (kulturní)* a *War Crimes commission (pro odškodnění obětí nacismu za 2. Světové války)*.

At the first glance, the criticism of the capitalist countries for their approaches towards the Roma is obvious and one can always see comparisons. As it is starting, in a report “Dr. Vanko Rouda, the president of French Roma, criticized negative relationship of the state authorities in the capitalist states.”¹⁰³

On the following page, I am quoting:

“Dr Tomáš Holomek, on behalf of the Union of Gypsies and Roma in the Czechoslovak Republic, gave a greeting that emphasized the social position of our Roma in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and highlighted the mission

¹⁰¹ “Memorandum k základním otázkám cikánské problematiky a vymezení společenského postavení Cikánů-Romů” [Memorandum to fundamental questions of the Roma (Gypsy) problematic and the specification of the social status of the Roma (Gypsies)]. in *Románo Lil*, no. 2 (1970), 11-15.

¹⁰² Nina Pavelčíková, *Romové v českých zemích v letech 1945-1989*. [Roma in the Czech Lands during 1945-1989], (Úřad dokumentace a vyšetřování zločinů komunismu, 2002), 106.

¹⁰³ “Světový kongres a festival Romů v Londýně 7.–12. 4. 1971 (Ze zprávy delegace ÚV Svazu Cikánů-Romů v ČSR).” [World Congress and Festival of the Roma in London, April 7–12, 1971 (From the Report of the Delegation of the Central Committee of the Union of Gypsies-Roma in Czechoslovakia)] in *Románo Lil*, no. 3, (1971), 21.

of our social organization as the only Roma interest organization in Europe and the world in general that is part of the political system of the National Front of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. He pointed out that there is no racial discrimination against Roma in the CSSR, that every citizen in our homeland has equal rights and duties, and that every Roma person has the opportunity to obtain any kind of education and status, without distinction of religious or political beliefs. His speech was welcomed by all the delegates. Only the delegates from England, West Germany, and Spain showed signs of doubt. These doubts were dispelled in a joint exchange of views on the position of the Roma in socialist and capitalist states.”¹⁰⁴

The Social Commission was represented by Czechoslovak Roma delegation member Tomáš Holomek. Here is another comparison and as well critic of England: “... Here it is necessary to show, at least briefly, how Romani people live in England: they are nomads, they are not employed, and all Romani people are reserved only certain places to stay where they can stay, at least for a certain period of time, in their "caravans", caravans connected to cars. The Roma have exchanged their means of transport (horses and carts with tarpaulins) for cars with trailers.”¹⁰⁵ This might indirectly denote that this is a part of capitalistic society, especially during the first Czechoslovak Republic when the Roma minority was similarly perceived. Socialists forbid the wandering by issuing the discriminatory Act No. 117/1927 Coll. “On Wandering Gypsies” which affected especially the Roma from Vlax Community, so-called Lovari.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ “Za svaz Cikánů-Romů v ČSR pronesl zdraví Dr. Tomáš Holomek, který zdůraznil společenské postavení našich Romů v ČSSR a vyzdvihl poslání naší společenské organizace jako jediné zájmové organizace Romů v Evropě a ve světě vůbec, která je součástí politického systému Národní fronty ČSSR. Poukázal na to, že v ČSSR neexistuje rasová diskriminace Romů, že v naší vlasti má každý občan stejná práva a povinnosti a že i každý Rom má možnost získat jakékoliv vzdělání a postavení bez rozdílu náboženského a politického přesvědčení. Jeho projev byl kvitován všemi delegáty. Pouze delegáti Anglie, západního Německa a Španělska projevovaly známky pochybností. Tyto pochybnosti byly vyvráceny při společné výměně názorů na postavení Romů v státech socialistických a kapitalistických.” *Románo l'il*, no. 3, (1971), 21.

¹⁰⁵ „... Zde je třeba alespoň krátce ukázat, jak žijí Romové v Anglii: kočují, nejsou zaměstnání, i a všem Romům jsou vyhrazena jen určitá místa k pobytu, kde mohou aspoň po určitou dobu zůstat ve svých „karavanech“, obytných vozech, napojených na auta. Svůj dopravní prostředek (koně a vozíky s plachtami) vyměnili Romové za osobní automobily s přívěsnými vozy. ...“ *Románo l'il*, no. 3, (1971), 21.

¹⁰⁶ Act no. 117/ 1927 Coll. (Czechoslovakia) on “wandering Gypsies”, available at www.holocaust.cz/dejiny/pronasledovani-a-genocida-romu/pronasledovani-a-genocida-romu-v-ceskychzemich/pronasledovani-a-genocida-romu-2/zakon-ze-dne-14-cervence-1927-o-potulnych-cikanech/, accessed February 7, 2024.

This subchapter dealing with the social commission is concluded “... It goes without saying that, in contrast to this state of affairs, our delegation highlighted the positive attitude of our political and state authorities toward solving the Romani question, because only a socialist system gives the Romani people the opportunity to solve their problems on their own, with abundant help and in cooperation with the political and state authorities, through their organization (the Gypsy-Roma Union).”¹⁰⁷

The Education Commission was represented by the Czechoslovak Roma, Antonín Daniel, who criticized the so-called "Caravan School":

In England, Romani children have a school in the countryside or in a place where Romani people are staying. You can't talk about a pedagogical process at all. The schools are not equipped, the teachers are limited to a kind of explanation, the children move in with their parents after a fortnight's stay. The English teachers have not been able to explain how they record attendance, they have no overview of the state of teaching...”¹⁰⁸

Surprisingly, though the UK was failing with justice and citizenship rights towards the Roma-Traveller and Traveller communities, Czechoslovakia was granting Roma pupils schools with all equipment, however the special ones. The majority of healthy and bright Roma children were educated in special schools intended for children with mental impairment.¹⁰⁹ This grave issue has been still persisting in today's Czech Republic.

¹⁰⁷ „... Je samozřejmé, že oproti tomuto stavu vyzvedla naše delegace kladný postoj našich politických a státních orgánů k řešení romské otázky, neboť pouze socialistické zřízení dává možnost Romům, aby své problémy za vydatné pomoci a ve spolupráci s politickými a státními orgány, prostřednictvím své organizace (Svaz Cikánů-Romů), řešili Romové sami.“ *Románo l'il*, no. 3, (1971), 21.

¹⁰⁸ „... kritizoval tzv. „Karavan – School“. V Anglii mají romské děti školu přímo v přírodě, nebo v místě, kde se Romové právě zdržují. Nedá se vůbec hovořit o pedagogickém procesu. Školy nejsou vybaveny, učitelé se omezují na jakýsi výklad, děti se po čtrnáctidenním pobytu stěhují se svými rodiči. Angličtí učitelé nebyli schopni vysvětlit, jak evidují docházku, nemají přehled o stavu výuky...” *Románo l'il*, no. 3, (1971), 23.

¹⁰⁹ Nina Pavelčíková. *Romové v českých zemích v letech 1945-1989*. [Roma in the Czech Lands during 1945-1989], (Úřad dokumentace a vyšetřování zločinů komunismu, 2002), 103-104.

In the War Crimes Commission, which was led by Vanko Rouda, Dr. Tomáš Holomek “as a member of this commission, spoke in the discussion and said that in our Czechoslovakia this issue has been dealt with for a long time by the Union of Anti-Fascist Fighters and that according to the applicable laws, the requirements are fulfilled and compensation is implemented.”¹¹⁰

Ladislav Demeter led the Cultural Commission. For this group, the Russian language is mentioned in the report as a language of communication. The main topic of the debate was focused on Roma folklore and traditions of the Roma in each country which testify that the Roma were accommodating themselves to them and their culture. However, the participants were aware that “... the Roma had been influencing positively musical culture of the nations. Not only, but they also had been influencing literary output, for instance, constructive Romanticism (G. Sand, V. Hugo, A. S. Pushkin, ...).”¹¹¹

In this citation we can see that the Roma from different countries were trying to put together information about the Roma since at these times was not teaching about Roma ordinary culture. Therefore, such information, which might enable people to look on Roma culture from another prism and change their perception of it, are considered rare. Moreover, another point of view is to contextualize the Roma with European culture, to point out that the Roma were parts of the societies among them they had lived, and this knowledge could buttress that. The sub-chapter dedicated to Cultural Commission is concluded by its resolution:

The Commission agreed, among other things, that it is necessary to collect and write down in Romani in all countries Romani fairy tales, legends, poetry, dramatic works, to organize annual parades of Romani ensembles from all nations (the organizing country to be determined by UNESCO), ... to write a

¹¹⁰ „... jako člen této komise, vystoupil v diskusi a hovořil v tom směru, že v naší ČSSR se touto otázkou zabývá již delší dobu Svaz protifašistických bojovníků a že podle platných zákonů jsou splněny jejich náležitosti, odškodnění je realizováno. ...“ *Románo l'il*, no. 3, (1971), 23.

¹¹¹ „... Romové pozitivně ovlivňovali hudební kulturu národů. Nejen to, ale ovlivňovali i literární tvorbu, například konstruktivní romantismus (G. Sandová, V. Hugo, A. S. Puškin, ...). *Románo l'il*, no. 3, (1971), 24.

textbook of a single Romani language for the whole world, and to strive for a uniform designation of ROM in all countries (for clarification: instead of Gypsy, Zigeuner, Gypsi, etc.).¹¹²

It comes to my mind that Roma representatives participating in the First World Roma Congress realized that their culture was not supported in the countries they lived. They needed to establish institutions that would not only preserve their cultural heritage, but also research, and teach about it. Interesting to me is the discussion of the Roma nation and the need to create a common Roma language. The question remains how it would look like, and which dialect of Roma language would be considered as the main one.¹¹³ Both the ideas to preserve transnational cultural heritage and language of the Roma people make me curious whether the Roma participants coming from Czechoslovakia were realizing that these ideas are in clash with the idea of proletariat and with assimilatory policies of Communist government, whose goal was to get rid of the Roma of all differences from the majority society--including their national identity, language, culture, and historical consciousness.

All discussed above was pertaining to the longer part of this report dealing about the happening of the congress and it comprises 4 pages. Furthermore, there are left 3 pages

¹¹² „Komise se mimo jiné shodla na tom, že je potřeba sebrat a zapsat v romštině ve všech zemích romské pohádky, legendy, poesii, dramatická díla, pořádat každoroční přehlídky romských souborů všech národů (pořadatelskou zemi určí UNESCO), ... sepsat učebnici jednotného romského jazyka pro celý svět, a usilovat ve všech zemích o jednotné označení ROM (na vysvětlenou: namísto Cikán, Zigeuner, Gypsi atd.)“*Románo lil*, no. 3, (1971), 24.

¹¹³ Unfortunately, there is nowhere to find a detailed discussion about the language. I can suppose that they would choose one of the following dialects. First, it comes to me that the Lovari or Kalderash dialects from the Vlax Roma who live in the Balkans, Russia, across Europe, and the Americas. Another dialect could be proposed, which is any dialect of Balkan Roma who were really ambitious, however, their dialect is not as widely used all over the world as those Vlax dialects. The huge disadvantage of Vlax dialects that they are unintelligible for dialect speakers who are not influenced by Hungarian and Romanian language since the loanwords from this language impede the other dialect speakers to understand the Vlax dialects.

underlined headings “VISIT IN BIRMINGHAM”,¹¹⁴ “FESTIVAL IN HEMPSTEAD (about 45 km from London)”¹¹⁵ and “AIMS AND MISSION OF THE CONGRESS.”¹¹⁶

During the congress, the participants visited Walsall (which is about 10 miles from Birmingham) where three little children were burned to death in a caravan that caught fire. It was all because of the conflict of the Roma with policemen who wanted to expel them from the site where they were camping with their caravans. For Czechoslovak participants with their experience from a socialist country, to see such rude treatment of the Roma in the UK caused disillusionment, as they state in the report: “This sad event is an unmistakable testimony to discrimination against Romani people of the coarsest grain, a trampling on all the rights of citizens in a democratic state, a denial of humanism, and casts a bad light on a state that was supposed to be a model of democracy for capitalist states.”¹¹⁷

The part devoted to festival with heading “FESTIVAL IN HEMPSTEAD (about 45 km from London)”¹¹⁸ contains authors who express their sorrow that the Horváths brothers could not participate in this festival.¹¹⁹

“AIM AND MISSION OF THE CONGRESS” is a heading on the last page of the report starting the list of the congress’ aims.¹²⁰ Those aims can be summed up into activities on how to secure exchange of the position of the Roma in the countries, possibilities on how to

¹¹⁴ „NÁVŠTĚVA V BIRMINGHAMU“, *Románo l'il*, no. 3, (1971), 25.

¹¹⁵ „FESTIVAL V HEAMPSTEAD (asi 45 km od Londýna). [Festival in Hampstead (about 45 km from London)].“, *Románo l'il*, no. 3, (1971), 26.

¹¹⁶ „CÍL A POSLÁNÍ KONGRESU“, [Goal and Mission of the Congress]. *Románo l'il*, no. 3, (1971), 27.

¹¹⁷ “Tato smutná událost je neklamným svědectvím diskriminace Romů nejhrubšího zrna, je také pošlapáním veškerých práv občanů v demokratickém státě, je popřením humanismu a vrhá špatné světlo na stát, který měl a má být vzorem demokracie pro kapitalistické státy,” *Románo l'il*, no. 3, (1971), 25.

¹¹⁸ “Tato smutná” *Románo l'il*, 26.

¹¹⁹ “Tato smutná” *Románo l'il*, 26.

¹²⁰ “Tato smutná” *Románo l'il*, 27.

collaborate with state politicians and state institutions, comparison of the situation of Roma people in capitalist and socialist countries and suggestions for collaborating with the UN.¹²¹

The paragraph below states that the Czechoslovak delegation was "... excellent not only politically but also professionally."¹²² According to the authors of the reports, this congress also functioned as a consultation about the problems of the Roma at those times, such as, "social problem, education of Roma children, cultural sphere and the question of compensation of all Roma people who were in the Nazi camps as well as the development and cultivation of Roma language."¹²³ All these problems, as is in the following paragraph discussed, seem to be differently solved in capitalist countries which is meant negatively. They believe that "... only Socialist system led by the KSČ is capable of solving the long-term problem of Roma people."¹²⁴ Another contribution of the Congress is the meeting of Dr. Vanko Rouda, French Roma and communist.

In the penultimate paragraph, let us note the language of socialist propaganda, the frequent comparisons between the democratic state and the socialist state in its weaknesses, and the total denial of the negative things the socialist regime did to the Roma in Czechoslovakia.

"... The irreconcilable class contrasts between the Roma and the majority English society - on the one hand, immense wealth, luxury, the latest technical advances, high civilization, and on the other hand, profound social and cultural backwardness, ignorance, discrimination of the coarsest grain, without political rights, without any social amenities and benefits - in short, allowed us to see for ourselves what it means for the Roma to live in a capitalist society..."¹²⁵

¹²¹ "Tato smutná" *Románo ľil*, 27.

¹²² "Tato smutná" *Románo ľil*, 27.

¹²³ "Tato smutná" *Románo ľil*, 27.

¹²⁴ "Tato smutná" *Románo ľil*, 27.

¹²⁵ "... V nesmiřitelné třídní protiklady mezi Romy a majoritní anglickou společností – na jedné straně nesmírné bohatství, přepych, nejnovější technické pokroky, vysoká civilizace a na druhé straně hluboká sociální a kulturní zaostalost, nevědomost, diskriminace nejhrubšího zrna, bez politických práv, bez jakýchkoli sociálních

The authors of this report find themselves in a place where they have to compromise. They knew well what it meant not to have political rights. *Nota bene*, how long did it take to fight for permission to establish the Union of Gypsies-Roma, or not to have a say in the situation that the government decides, for example, in the situation of the assimilationist policies of the communist regime, such as the organized dispersal of Roma from Slovakia to Bohemia. This activity represented the severing of family ties, the eviction of families from their settlements to foreign Czech or Moravian towns, and the exposure of their culture and language to contempt, which led to the forgetting of the Romani language.¹²⁶

The delegates from Czechoslovakia believed in the idea of communism/socialism because the communists were the first to count on the Roma in society, to offer them a social background and some kind of status in society that was not equal, although it at least looked that way. For this reason, the delegates knew very well what was happening in Czechoslovakia after the invasion of the Warsaw Pact troops. However, for the sake of the Roma minority's interests, they were forced to cooperate diplomatically with the leadership of the Communist Party, as the last paragraph shows: "We are proud to live in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic - a country that we love very much and a country that shows all countries the way to solve the long-term problem of the Roma without a fail."¹²⁷ The report was authored and signed by comrades Antonín Daniel, Dr. Tomáš Holomek, and Ladislav Demeter.

vymožeností a výhod – zkrátka umožnil nám poznat na vlastní oči, co to znamená pro Romy žít v kapitalistické společnosti," *Románo l'il.*, 27.

¹²⁶ Nina Pavelčíková. *Romové v českých zemích v letech 1945-1989*. [Roma in the Czech Lands during 1945-1989], (Úřad dokumentace a vyšetřování zločinů komunismu, 2002), 102-105.

¹²⁷ „Jsme hrdi na to, že žijeme v Československé socialistické republice – v zemi, jíž máme velmi rádi a v zemi, která ukazuje všem zemím cestu, jak vyřešit dlouhodobý problém Romů beze zbytku.“ *Románo l'il*, no. 3, (1971), 27.

“We want more than simply to be citizens with state citizenship, we want our ČSSR to be our homeland in every respect; we want to be proud of our socialist homeland”.

Anton Facuna
head the Union of Gypsies-Roma in Slovakia
(Celia Donert, 181)

3. SECOND WORLD ROMA CONGRESS IN GENEVA

Congress in Geneva

Klímová and Acton provide an overview of the development of the transnational Roma movement following the First World Roma Congress. They describe how the Committee for International Romani Union (CIT) neither succeeded in drafting statutes nor in preparing a subsequent congress. In the background of these developments, Grattan Puxon relocated to Yugoslavia, while Slobodan Berberski, the elected president of the First World Roma Congress, was reportedly said to have passed away.¹²⁸

However, according to Puxon, Berberski continued to serve as president of the World Roma Congress until the Second Congress. During this period, he was particularly active in Yugoslavia as a member of the League of Communists, notably engaging in negotiations with Vice-President Edvard Kardelj and Aleš Bebler, Yugoslavia’s former Permanent Representative to the United Nations.¹²⁹

For the Second World Roma Congress, a driving impetus was when the Schukternak Reindhardt Jazz Quintet, a hired Sinti group playing Manouche jazz, performed on Swiss

¹²⁸ Thomas Acton and Ilona Klímová, “The International Romani Union: An East European answer to West European questions?” in *Between Past and Future: The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Will Guy (University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001), 160.

¹²⁹ Grattan Puxon, personal e-mail to author, July 31, 2024.

Radio, since they were Gypsies.¹³⁰ This event led Karl Rinderknecht, the reporter from the Swiss radio who hired the band to Switzerland, to start a collaboration with Mateo Maximoff and Ján Cibul'a. With the aid of the World Council of Churches, Cibul'a, Maximoff, and Rinderknecht could prepare the Second World Romani Congress in Geneva, in which Ján Cibul'a became a president of the World Roma Congress.

A year before the congress, the International Romani Union (IRU) was founded in Switzerland and Ján Cibul'a became its president. In the 2nd World Romani congress were as well adopted the statutes of IRU.¹³¹ Klímová and Acton add that these statutes were elaborated by Czechoslovak members which, as they state, in "profoundly 'democratic centralist' was, like most quasi-governmental Communist front organizations in Eastern Europe at that time with local representatives being selected by the central officers."¹³² Furthermore, they write that at that time in Eastern Europe there was not ran any non-governmental organization which explains that Yugoslav members and Ján Cibul'a, as a Roma emigree from Czechoslovakia to Switzerland, are taking leading positions of International Romani Union.¹³³ However, Vanko Rouda, a founder of Comité International Tsigane (CIT, International Gypsy Committee), was opposing it, though the newly established organization International Romani Union, was not evidence to leave the International Roma Committee.¹³⁴

Though the Second World Roma Congress was planned to be held in Paris and Yugoslavia, in fact it was organized seven years after the First World Roma Congress in Geneva, during April 8th to 11th, 1978.

¹³⁰ Acton and Klímová, "International Romani Union," 160.

¹³¹ Acton and Klímová, "International Romani Union," 160.

¹³² Acton and Klímová, "International Romani Union," 160.

¹³³ Acton and Klímová, "International Romani Union," 160.

¹³⁴ Ian Hancock, "The East European Roots of Romani Nationalism," *Nationalities Papers* 19, no. 3 (1991), 262.

At the First World Roma Congress in the UK, Roma World Congress had been established relations with India thanks to Padmashri Weer R. Rishi, who later founded the Indian Institute of Romani Studies in Chandigarh, Punjab, India, and started publishing journal *Roma*¹³⁵ and in 1976 he organized the first festival of Roma culture in Chandigarh.¹³⁶ This had an immensely positive symbolic influence on the Roma transnational movement. Therefore, as Hancock writes, the delegates from India were the Prime Minister of Punjab, and his Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Education who insisted on applying to the Congress for non-governmental status within the United Nations.¹³⁷ Thus, during the congress, a petition was prepared which the group of representatives for IRU, the Honorary President of IRU Yul Brynner, Ronald Lee, and writer John Tene submitted to the bureau of the United Nations in New York. Thanks to this, over 70 regional and national Romani organizations in around 28 countries were united under the frame of the International Romani Union.¹³⁸ That is how the IRU finally gained consultative status at the UN Social and Economic Commission in 1979.¹³⁹

During this congress, it was decided there would be a leadership in triad: Ján Cibul'a replaced Berberski in presidency, Šaip Jusuf from Macedonia, Yugoslavia, became a vice president, and Yul Brynner as honorary president.¹⁴⁰

Overall, 60–120 delegates and overseers from 26 countries participated in the 2nd World Romani Congress.¹⁴¹ We can see that the participation of Roma at this congress has expanded

¹³⁵ Evidently the journal has been published since 1974. For more information see: "Rishi Saw Bright Future for 'Roma Museum' Chandigarh," *Punjab Monitor*, accessed August 12, 2024, <https://www.punjabmonitor.com/2013/04/rishi-saw-bright-future-for-roma-museum.html>.

¹³⁶ Marushiakova and, Popov. "The Roma – a Nation without a State?" *Historical Background and Contemporary Tendencies*, 7.

¹³⁷ Hancock, "The East European Roots of Romani Nationalism," 262.

¹³⁸ Hancock, "The East European Roots of Romani Nationalism," 263.

¹³⁹ Fraser, *The Gypsies*, 316.

¹⁴⁰ Donald Kenrick, *Historical Dictionary of the Gypsies (Romanies)* (Scarecrow Press, 2007), 293.

¹⁴¹ There is a discrepancy in the number of attendees. Ian Hancock on page 262 in his article "The East European Roots of Romani Nationalism." On the other hand, Angus Fraser states that 120 participants attended the congress in *The Gypsies* on page 316.

to include those who have come from the United States of America. The rights of Roma were not equal with their majority counterparts no matter on which side of the Iron Curtain they lived. On the other hand, from closer Czechoslovakia, whose delegates at the First Congress were so active, no official delegation attended the Second Congress. In the following subchapter, I am going to discuss the causation of their absence.

Situation in Czechoslovakia

In previous chapters, I started providing a chronology of the postwar Roma movement in Czechoslovakia (chapter 1), and an analysis of the report by representatives of the Union of Gypsies-Roma who participated in First World Roma Congress in England in 1971. In this chapter, I want to describe the circumstances that the Roma in Czechoslovakia were going through. These events were the impetus of the emancipation of the Roma in Czechoslovakia, which was a precondition of movement in Czechoslovakia and to cover the time span to the Second World Roma congress which happened in Geneva in 1978.

Unlike at the First World Roma Congress, the Roma delegation from Czechoslovakia was not allowed by the regime to officially participate at the next congress anymore. At that time, the Union of Gypsies-Roma (UGR) was already disbanded by the regime.

We have to take into account what was happening at that time in Czechoslovakia. Due to the Warsaw Pact Invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, the regime hardened. However, though the Roma delegation of Czechoslovakia participated in the First World Roma Congress, albeit under the surveillance of Czechoslovak embassy workers from London Embassy, the activity of the Union of Gypsies-Roma still could work for a few years until 1973 when it was *voluntarily* disbanded.

In my view, the Union of Gypsies-Roma was disbanded for two reasons. First, though the Union of Gypsies-Roma was founded in 1969, after the invasion, it was established on the basis of the ideas of the Prague Spring.¹⁴² Second, the regime was aware of the persecution of the Roma who were making efforts to resist against the assimilatory politics since the 1950s, but those Roma did not have a political voice that could articulate the challenges they had been facing or their own political representation. However, in the 1970s, the situation was totally different. The Roma in Czechoslovakia had their own organization, and support from transnational Roma movements from abroad and especially from the Western Europe. These two reasons are why the regime prevented Czech-Roma to attend the Second World Roma Congress.

To elaborate, let me first deal with the Prague Spring and then with the oppressive assimilatory politics towards the Roma. Both of which are crucial to take into account so that we can understand why the first Roma organization in Czechoslovakia was shut down and how it affected the emancipation of the Roma in Czechoslovakia. Afterwards, we can move forward.

Swift shift from short Prague Spring with Socialism with Human Face to long Normalization

In 1968, “Socialism with Human Face” [Socialismus s lidskou tváří] became the slogan of the politics in the head of Alexander Dubček, which brought loosened restrictions and the process of democratisation. These triggered ideas of people to push through the expected development of society before February of 1948 in Czechoslovakia.¹⁴³

The Action Plan of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia ([Akční plán KSČ]), a crucial document starting reforms during the Prague Spring, was bringing:

¹⁴² See more in my part about the Prague Spring in on page 46.

¹⁴³ Jiří Vykoukal, Bohuslav Litera, Miroslav Tejchman, *Východ: vznik, vývoj a rozpad sovětského bloku 1944-1989* (Libri, 2000), 384.

“recognition of the plurality of interests in society, but political plurality was envisaged only within the framework of socialism and in the form of an extension of the independence and ‘opposition’ of the components of the National Front. The program also brought about a certain shift in the existing conception of the party: the reformers emphasised in particular the removal of party privileges and the abolition of the ‘cadre ceiling’ for non-party members. However, the program insisted on party leadership, promising only that it would no longer be practiced in the earlier dictatorial ways, but politically, by gaining the consent of society.”¹⁴⁴

Furthermore, it brought economic reforms, federalisation of the state, separation of powers, human rights and freedoms with regards to religion, press, and national minorities’ rights. In June of the same year, the rehabilitations were approved by a law which pledged rehabilitation and indemnification even to non-Communists.¹⁴⁵ Among other marginalised groups, various initiatives emerged in pursuit of political and social rehabilitation. These included the *Memorandum of the Czechoslovak Catholic Bishops*, the establishment of the *Club of Committed Non-Party Members (Klub angažovaných nestraníků, KAN)*, and *Club 231 (Klub 231)*, named after the *Law for the Protection of the People's Democratic Establishment*. The latter served as a platform for former political prisoners who had been convicted under this repressive legislation. Furthermore, in Slovakia, Slovak Organization for the Protection of Human Rights [Slovenská organizácia na obranu ľudských práv], and other organizations like Sokol, an organization for sport, or scout organization for children and youth Junák, was founded.¹⁴⁶ In terms of legislative shifts, in June 1968, the law on judicial rehabilitation of unjustly persecuted political prisoners was adopted, as well as the law about federal solution of Czecho-Slovak proportion. Decline of censorship allowed the newspaper *Literární noviny* [Literary Newspaper] to publish under a new name *Literární listy* [Literary Letters] along with other revues.¹⁴⁷ Ludvík Vaculík, a Czech writer, published a manifesto called *2000 slov* [2000

¹⁴⁴ Jan Křen, *Dvě století střední Evropy*. [Two centuries of Central Europe] (Argo, 2006), 759.

¹⁴⁵ Jan Křen, *Dvě století střední Evropy*. [Two centuries of Central Europe], 760.

¹⁴⁶ Vykoukal, Litera and Tejchman, *Východ*, 384.

¹⁴⁷ Vykoukal, Litera and Tejchman, *Východ*, 385.

Words] in *Literární listy*, in which he appealed to Czechs and Slovaks to participate in creating politics with the message to renew what postwar (not only leftist) generation wanted to improve on pre-war conditions and to use the space for the liberation opened up space for the fusion of the First Republic tradition with the leftist ethos of the second half of the 1940s; it was an attempt to extract from Stalinist realities what Stalinism had been parasitic on since the end of the war.¹⁴⁸

However, these reforms did not appeal to the opposition representing the conservative communists and during the night from August 20th to the 21st of 1968 this process was discontinued by the Warsaw Pact Invasion of Czechoslovakia, which consisted of the armies from the USSR, Hungarian People's Republic, Polish People's Republic, and the People's Republic of Bulgaria. Through this invasion, the period of Normalization began, and lasted from 1969-1989. In the beginning, the Communist Party made purges and later they created a mechanism of purging via central purge commissions in which were selected reliable cadres from the local party organization up to the regional level. The main criterion to stand the purge was the approach to the military intervention from August 1968.¹⁴⁹ Though the new president of Czechoslovakia, Gustav Husák, did not agree with the invasion, the Committee of the Communist Party revised the approach to the invasion in September of 1969. In the following month, Husák, with the Czechoslovak delegation, thanked for “an act of international normalization”.¹⁵⁰ That is how the narrative of the Prague Spring ideologically changed as “a revival that was a work of imperialist intrigue” and from the reform as a “contrarevolution” and the invasion as a “fraternal aid.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Vykoukal, Litera and Tejchman, *Východ*, 385.

¹⁴⁹ Křen, *Dvě století střední Evropy* [Two Centuries of Central Europe], 867.

¹⁵⁰ Křen, *Dvě století střední Evropy* [Two Centuries of Central Europe], 867.

¹⁵¹ Křen, *Dvě století střední Evropy* [Two Centuries of Central Europe], 867.

Czech historian Jan Křen depicts the purges in numbers, which show a 28% decrease of the membership of the Communist Party of the Czech Republic, which means 474,000 members during 10 months from the overall number from the same year in January, 1,691,000. Of 474,000, about 150,000 resigned their membership. The others who remained did not withstand the screening and consequently were divided into two categories: about 260,000 members were crossed off, and 67,000 were expelled since they were active in 1968. The punishment was depending on the category. Those who were expelled had to perform manual labor, while those who were crossed out were allowed to work as low-ranking clerical staff. Křen adds that there were also other forms of discrimination, like “stopping career advancement with corresponding salary consequences, prohibition of publishing, teaching, public appearances, etc.; among the most disgusting and effective repressions were sanctions against family members, especially preventing children from studying.”¹⁵² These purges were also implemented in the state apparatus and Czech Radio. On the other side, the implementation of the neo-Stalinist regime during Normalization was eased by prosperity in the economy and Slovakia.¹⁵³ In Czechia, during 1971-75 the salaries were increased by 30%.¹⁵⁴

Backward gypsy population to be re-educated!

Prague Spring brought an opportunity as well for the Roma in Czechoslovakia who had been striving for more than two decades to establish organization representing their aims, in particular, react on the assimilatory politics and support the emancipation of the Roma.

Already in the 1950's, the state authorities began to deal with the so-called Gypsy issue, which they wanted to have resolved soon. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia began to

¹⁵² Křen, *Dvě století střední Evropy* [Two Centuries of Central Europe], 868.

¹⁵³ Křen, *Dvě století střední Evropy* [Two Centuries of Central Europe], 870.

¹⁵⁴ Křen, *Dvě století střední Evropy* [Two Centuries of Central Europe], 871.

favour an assimilationist policy towards the Roma, following Stalin's national policy.¹⁵⁵ This approach also targeted cultural identity, particularly by suppressing the use of the Romani language and pressuring Roma to assimilate both linguistically and socially.¹⁵⁶ In 1956, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs produced a 'Situation Report on the Gypsy Question in Czechoslovakia,' in which the Communist Party concluded that Gypsies could not be integrated into the labor force and that measures needed to be taken to address this. In 1958, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia issued a resolution "on work among the Gypsy population in the Czechoslovakia," which decided that "the Roma cannot be considered a distinct national group, but a 'socially and culturally backward' population characterised by distinctive features of their way of life." This directive created a categorisation of the Roma into three groups: the settled Gypsies,¹⁵⁷ semi-settled Gypsies,¹⁵⁸ and nomadic Gypsies.¹⁵⁹ Since March 1, 1959, the new Law No. 74/1958 "On the permanent settlement of travellers" came into force,¹⁶⁰ which made it compulsory for nomads to settle, especially the Olah Roma. Although, according to Petráš, the Roma are not mentioned in the law, the law was issued against them.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁵ Pavelčíková, "Romové v českých zemích" [Roma in the Czech Lands], 57-59.

¹⁵⁶ Jana Horváthová, "Kapitoly z dějin Romů" [Chapters from the History of Roma] (Lidové noviny, 2002), 51.

¹⁵⁷ "Settled Gypsies – they were permanently employed, had stable housing, and had reached the cultural level of the rest of the population. Many of them were exemplary workers and active members of the Communist Party, the National Committees, or National Front organizations. They lived dispersed among the majority population and did not require special care." from Jana Horváthová, "Kapitoly z dějin Romů" [Chapters from the History of Roma], 59.

¹⁵⁸ "Semi-settled Gypsies – they made up the largest group. They frequently changed their place of residence and workplace, had high absenteeism, were mostly illiterate, and lived at a very low level of cultural development."

¹⁵⁹ "Nomadic (wandering) Gypsies – they roamed from place to place, avoided honest work, and mostly made their living through dishonest means. They were largely uncultured and illiterate, and received the highest number of complaints from the public."

¹⁶⁰ Law No. 74/1958 on the permanent settlement of nomads.

¹⁶¹ René Petráš, "Cikánská/romská otázka v Československu na počátku komunistického režimu a návaznost na starší vývoj." [The Roma Question in Czechoslovakia at the Beginning of the Communist Regime] In *Právněhistorické studie* 38 (2007): 19.

At those times, in the first half of the 1960s, cases happened in which children from Roma families were removed into foster family care.¹⁶² Furthermore, Roma women were undergoing coercive sterilisations without explanations from the state.¹⁶³

An acme of assimilatory politics was the Organized dispersion of the Gypsies [organizovaný rozptyl Cikánů], based on resolution 502 of 1965. This resolution brought a new classification of the gypsy population in Czechoslovakia, and it replaced the previous classification that were primarily based on nomadic life. The new classification was dividing Roma into three categories. The Roma belonging to the first category were those who "... do not live in the original gypsy camps, they live scattered throughout the country, they have acquired basic work and hygiene habits. They send their children regularly to school, do not migrate for work or look for new residences, and are recorded in the National Committie (NV) register. Occasionally they experience 'a relapse of the gypsy way of life', ...but they are 'already one step away from complete assimilation'..."¹⁶⁴

Roma families belonging to the second category were defined as follows: "They live, as a rule, in settlements or in places of large concentrations in cities, but they are also trying to get out of this environment, to build a house or get an apartment... They maintain basic hygiene rules, they try to acquire habits typical of the majority way of life, but they often allow themselves to be drawn back to the "gypsy customs." This manifests itself, for example, in absenteeism and turnover at work, for which employers also refuse to hire them, and sometimes in disorganized movements from place to place. Their assimilation is hampered by their remaining in an unsuitable environment, especially in the original Roma settlements, and they are therefore

¹⁶² Pavelčíková, "Romové v českých zemích" [Roma in the Czech Lands], 83.

¹⁶³ Pavelčíková, "Romové v českých zemích" [Roma in the Czech Lands], 116.

¹⁶⁴ Pavelčíková, "Romové v českých zemích" [Roma in the Czech Lands], 89.

"ripe" for planned dispersal, which must, however, be carried out on the basis of a nationwide survey and supervision..."¹⁶⁵

Finally, the third category classified Roma families as: "The most backward group, living in a typical gypsy way, from which thieves, freeloaders, the chronically ill, the disabled pensioners who do not want to be treated are recruited. Men do not want to work or show high absenteeism and turnover, women offer themselves for prostitution, their children miss school, beg, and are often placed in orphanages or educational institutions. The "reproduction of the gypsy way of life" must be prevented at all costs, vagrancy must be prosecuted, the capacity of children's homes and institutions for troubled youth must be increased, and enough qualified teachers must be provided for them. With the help of comprehensive plans for the education of children up to the age of 15, it is necessary to support especially the young people in this category at risk of returning to unacceptable forms of life, in particular to exclude the influence of the original Roma family on the educational process..."¹⁶⁶

Beside the above categorization of the Roma population, the state planned to eliminate and relocate 611 of the overall 1,300 Roma settlements in Slovakia to Czech regions. For example, Bardejov – Přerov, Svitavy, Jičín, Prešov – Havlíčkův Brod, Chrudim, etc.¹⁶⁷ However, the movement was implemented through so-called recommendations, encouraging the Slovak and Czech regions to reach an agreement. According to Pavelčíková, the failure of the initiative can be attributed to institutional unpreparedness and a lack of coordination. In Slovakia, state authorities proceeded with the rapid buyout and demolition of Roma settlements without a

¹⁶⁵ Pavelčíková, "Romové v českých zemích" [Roma in the Czech Lands], 89.

¹⁶⁶ Pavelčíková, "Romové v českých zemích" [Roma in the Czech Lands], 89-90.

¹⁶⁷ Pavelčíková, "Romové v českých zemích" [Roma in the Czech Lands], 91.

unified directive, while the limited timeframe hindered the organized relocation and integration of Roma populations into the Czech regions.¹⁶⁸

The implementation of the organized dispersion during 1967–1968 failed with only 45% of the achieved goals in the plan. Especially since the dispersion of families was triggering the migrations of their relatives and situations became chaotic which the state offices could not manage.¹⁶⁹ This led the Government Committee to cancel the entire plan under Resolution 348 of 1968 which did not entail the end of the solution of the Gypsy question. However, the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the regional and district national committees were delegated with the responsibility to approach the solution with regard to local specifics.¹⁷⁰ In 1970, the politics that dispersed and relocated the Roma communities was invalidated and substituted with a new conception, the social-cultural integration of Gypsies.¹⁷¹

Union of the Gypsies-Roma as a bloom of the Prague Spring

The Roma were not even recognized as a smaller nation in the new constitutional law on nationalities, its goal was to meet the requirement of Slovakia to get their own autonomy, which was not recognised in September of 1986. Unlike the Roma, Lusatian Serbs, and Romanians, the law only recognised Hungarians, Germans, Ukrainians, and Poles as nationality groups, because they were “homogenous, and culturally and ethnically conscious.”¹⁷² The rest could not have their own organizations and the support of their language and culture.¹⁷³ Anton Facuna, a Roma activist from Slovakia, brought the plan to build a Czechoslovak-Roma union. However, it was not approved due to the lack of recognition for

¹⁶⁸ Pavelčíková, “Romové v českých zemích” [Roma in the Czech Lands], 88-91.

¹⁶⁹ Pavelčíková, “Romové v českých zemích” [Roma in the Czech Lands], 88-91.

¹⁷⁰ Eva Davidová, *Romano drom – Cesty Romů 1945-1990* (Univerzita Palackého, 2004), 222.

¹⁷¹ Ctibor Nečas, *Romové v České republice* [The Roma in the Czech Republic Yesterday and Today]. (Univerzita Palackého, 2004), 103.

¹⁷² Celia Donert, *Rights of the Roma*, 185–186.

¹⁷³ Celia Donert, *Rights of the Roma*, 185–186.

Roma as a national minority. It was recommended to divide it by opening by two organizations in Czechia and in Slovakia.¹⁷⁴ In Czechia, the criticism of the approach of the government towards the Roma was also articulated by Miroslav and Tomáš Holomek.¹⁷⁵ Finally, in the spring of 1969, the Union of Gypsies-Roma in Slovakia and Czechia were granted approval to be established as an organization. Czech organization had *Névodrom* [New Road] and Slovak had *Butiker* [Labour].¹⁷⁶ That was how these two organizations employed the method of self-help (svépomoc).¹⁷⁷ In terms of historiography, in which you can find more is written by Lužica, who described the founding of the Slovak organization *Zväz Cigánov-Rómov*.¹⁷⁸ The Czech Union of Gypsies-Roma is described with more detail by Nina Pavelčíková.¹⁷⁹ Since the scope of this thesis is more dealt with the effect of congresses on Roma movement in Czechoslovakia, I am going to focus more on Czech branch.

The preparatory committee of The Union of Gypsies-Roma in Brno, since the end of May 1969, started issuing their own newsletter titled “*Informační zpravodaj*” [Information Bulletin] which was replaced later by the magazine *Romano l'il* [Roma Journal]. The organization *Svaz Cikánů-Romů* [The Union of Gypsies-Roma] was registered by the Ministry of Interior of the Czech Socialistic Republic as a voluntary social organization and in the following month it was accepted into National Front. During this time, organization meetings were held in order to prepare regional committees.

¹⁷⁴ Celia Donert, *Rights of the Roma*, 186.

¹⁷⁵ Celia Donert, *Rights of the Roma*, 186.

¹⁷⁶ Celia Donert, *Rights of the Roma*, 189.

¹⁷⁷ Celia Donert, *Rights of the Roma*, 181-182.

¹⁷⁸ René Lužica. *Zväz Cigánov-Rómov a štátna moc na Slovensku v rokoch 1968–1989*. [The Union of Gypsies-Roma and State Power in Slovakia in 1968-1989.] (Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa v Nitre – Fakulta sociálnych vied a zdravotníctva, 2021).

¹⁷⁹ Pavelčíková, “Romové v českých zemích” [Roma in the Czech Lands]. This needs a page number.

On the 30th of August, 1969, a preparatory committee convened a founding congress in Brno, which was attended by 200 delegates representing various regions of Czechoslovakia.¹⁸⁰ Among them included the leader of Slovak Union of Gypsies-Roma, Dr. Ján Cibula. Dr. Tomáš Holomek from Czech UGR emphasised this event as a historical milestone. It was the first time that the Roma themselves could work on the solution of the Gypsy question.¹⁸¹

Both of these organizations in Slovakia and in Czechia, as Donert describes, started well-organized cultural events, striving to build a cooperative to solve the problem of housing of Roma people and as well the rights, for example, to get compensation for the persecution during the WWII.¹⁸²

Besides other things, this new organization was uniting assimilated Roma who were hiding their origin and intelligentsia which was joining the UGR and could support the topic of Roma identity which was not homogenous. Only in Czech Republic lived Moravian Roma, who were the leaders of the UGR in Brno, majority of Eastern-Slovak Roma who came after WWII, and others group like Hungarian Roma from Hungarian speaking regions of Slovakia, Lax Roma (Lovari) and Czech Roma and Sinti (Lalere). In this period, the UGR was having an opportunity to form the identity of Czechoslovak Roma as socialist citizens with their culture. This is proving mostly the magazine which UGR was publishing “*Romano l'il*”. *Romano l'il* was the first magazine which featured literature in Roma language which was a new thing for many Roma people, especially thanks to Milena Hübschmannová.¹⁸³ Furthermore, the magazine brought the reports to members of the UGR.

¹⁸⁰ Pavelčíková, “Romové v českých zemích” [Roma in the Czech Lands], 105 – 106.

¹⁸¹ Pavelčíková, “Romové v českých zemích” [Roma in the Czech Lands], 104-107.

¹⁸² Donert, *Rights of the Roma*, 182.

¹⁸³ Milena Hübschmannová, of Czech origin, a linguist, Indologist, and later founder of the department of Romani Studies at Charles University in 1991.

In the first very first published issues of *Romano Lil*, we can find articles addressing the Roma, elevating their identity, and appealing them to participate as active citizens. Another aspect of these calls was dedicated especially by Tera Fabiánová, a Roma woman poet, to Roma women who were appealing to emancipation of semi-literate Roma women. Furthermore, in this magazine was the idea to establish a Roma museum.¹⁸⁴

Moreover, there is important to mention the magazine *Romano Lil* became as well a medium via which Roma representatives could demonstrate their opinions towards the state institutions. In 1970, Roma memorandum was published by Společensko-vědní komise [*Social Science Commission of the UGR*] in *Romano Lil*.¹⁸⁵

Additional media also published materials by Roma, such as the journal *Demografie: revue pro výzkum populačního vývoje* [Demografie, Review for Population Research] created by the Federal Statistical Office. Vladimír Srb, a demographer and member of the Social Science Commission of the UGR, presented data on the demographic development of the Roma population, noting an annual increase of approximately 6,000 births.¹⁸⁶ Srb asks the question who the Roma are, whether are they as a nationality and instead of giving the clear answer they only plead ‘that we have not yet researched these questions enough. Let us give the experts some more time. Czechoslovak gypsyology has an open field of freedom.’¹⁸⁷ and then he criticized the law on sedentarization no. 74/1958 and the organized dispersions implemented on the basis of government resolution no. 502/1965.¹⁸⁸ Among the other

¹⁸⁴ Kristýna Frydrýšková, “Romové pod vlivem komunismu” [Roma under Communism], *Romano vod'ori*, May 11, 2011, <http://www.romanovodori.cz/etno/romove-pod-vlivem-komunismu/> Accessed August 10, 2019.

¹⁸⁵ Pavelčíková, “Romové v českých zemích” [Roma in the Czech Lands], 107 - 109. “Memorandum k základním otázkám cikánské problematiky a vymezení společenského postavení Cikánů-Romů” [Memorandum to fundamental questions of the Roma (Gypsy) problematic and the specification of the social status of the Roma (Gypsies)]. in *Romano Lil*, no. 2 (1970), 11-15.

¹⁸⁶ Vladimír Srb, “Cikáni v Československu.” [The Gypsies in Czechoslovakia], *Demografie – revue pro výzkum populačního vývoje* [Demography - Review for Population Research], volume 11, no. 3 (1969), 194.

¹⁸⁷ Vladimír Srb, “Cikáni v Československu.” [The Gypsies in Czechoslovakia], 194.

¹⁸⁸ Vladimír Srb, “Cikáni v Československu.” [The Gypsies in Czechoslovakia], 195.

published authors included Eva Davidová–Turčinová who provided historical and ethnographic background of Roma to underpin her recommendation to reassess the current concept and method of solving the gypsy issue from the state side.¹⁸⁹

Miroslav Holomek also criticized state assimilation policies and instead proposed policies that favored the integration of Roma.¹⁹⁰ In his article, Tomáš Holomek takes into account the law 117/1927 “Law on Wandering Gypsies” and the Law No 74/1958 on “Permanent Settling of Nomadic Persons” which banned the nomadic way of life. Tomáš Holomek’s article was concluded by recommendations to recognize the Roma as a nationality in the constitutional law about the nationalities.¹⁹¹

In the following year 1970, Milena Hübschmannová published her article “*What Is This So-Called Gypsy Question?*” in which she criticized the assimilatory politics implemented towards the Roma, and she described the real impact of these policies in daily life. For example, breaking the family ties of Romani people by relocating them to Czech lands, complicating their ability to get out of poverty in Romani settlements, and disintegrating their traditional culture. Furthermore, she set a mirror to society so that they would realize that the assimilation of Romani people into a society that is racist and has strong prejudices against them cannot function.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ Eva Davidová, “Turčinová. Původ a historický vývoj cikánů v Československu.” [The Origin and Historical Development of Gypsies in Czechoslovakia] *Demografie – revue pro výzkum populačního vývoje* 11, no. 3 (1969), 196-202.

¹⁹⁰ Miroslav Holomek, “Současné problémy Cikánů v ČSSR a jejich řešení.” [Current problems of Gypsies in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and their solution] *Demografie – revue pro výzkum populačního vývoje* 11, no. 3 (1969), 203-209.

¹⁹¹ Tomáš Holomek, “Problematika Cikánů ve světle zákonné úpravy.” [The issue of Gypsies in the light of legal regulation.] *Demografie – revue pro výzkum populačního vývoje* 11, no. 3 (1969), 210-213.

¹⁹² Milena Hübschmannová, “Co je tzv. cikánská otázka?” [What Is This So-Called Gypsy Question?] *Sociologický časopis*, 6, no. 2 (1970), 106-120.

At this time, in May of 1970, the representatives of the Czech UGR participated in the meeting in France where they got in touch with the Roma abroad, forming a transnational Roma movement. This was how they got the invitation to participate at the First World Roma Congress. All goals which were articulated at the First World Roma Congress to be implemented by participating countries, were not implemented in Czechoslovakia.

By this time, the processes of Normalization were progressing and for the Roma it was also becoming more difficult. In this way, the Union of Gypsies-Roma was the only lasting remnant of the years between 1968-1969, despite the founding of many organizations. On the other hand, the work of UGR was decelerated by its inner drawbacks, for instance, common incredulity and conflicts between officials, not adequate knowledge in law.¹⁹³

These problems were enough arguments for the regime to use them as the pretext to gradually abolish the activities of the UGR in Slovakia and Czechia. Anton Facuna, who unlike the Czech UGR, was more passionate about the fight for Romani rights against the regime, was dismissed from his post in the very next year in the spring of 1970, allegedly for defalcating funds.¹⁹⁴ His colleague physician of Roma origin Dr. Ján Cibul'a emigrated to Switzerland. Furthermore, there were problems with corruption and other problems in both enterprises, in Czech Nevodrom and Slovak Butiker. In the end, the regime criticised the organizations "for misusing National Front funds—supposed to support traditional gypsy crafts (coppersmiths, blacksmiths, pottery)—to conduct entrepreneurial activities for socialist economic organizations, frequently "by selling labour force"—in other words, hiring out Roma construction workers on

¹⁹³ Pavelčíková, "Romové v českých zemích" [Roma in the Czech Lands], 111.

¹⁹⁴ Donert, *Rights of the Roma*, 211.

an informal basis for short-term work in state companies.¹⁹⁵ In 1973, both Unions of Gypsies-Roma in Slovakia and Czechia were disbanded.¹⁹⁶

No organization, no emancipation

The closure of the Unions of Gypsy-Roma did not stop only their magazine *Romano Lil*, which provided a space for the nascent Romani literature in Czechoslovakia in general but also hindered Roma organizing. By stopping the organization, the Roma in Czechoslovakia lost their representatives defending their rights on the local, national, and international level.

Though, the government accepted a resolution inspired by the Roma Memorandum by the UGR no. 279/1970, which was in force only in Czech lands, refused to amend the Law No 74/1958 on Permanent Settling of Nomadic Persons and its task was to create the so-called commission of the government for questions solution of the gypsy population led by the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs, Emilian Hamerník. This commission was attended by the ministers' deputies instead of the ministers themselves. The only Roma in this commission was the leader of the UGR, Miroslav Holomek, until 1973, otherwise the commission worked until 1988.¹⁹⁷

Another resolution to which the UGR also contributed was resolution no. 231/1972, which was focusing on "... so-called all-round cultural and social integration of Romani people, which was to be based on the gradual equalisation of the average standard of living of the Romani population with that of the majority."¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ Donert, *Rights of the Roma*, 213.

¹⁹⁶ Donert, *Rights of the Roma*, 213.

¹⁹⁷ Pavelčíková, "Romové v českých zemích" [Roma in the Czech Lands], 112-113.

¹⁹⁸ Pavelčíková, "Romové v českých zemích" [Roma in the Czech Lands], 113.

After the closure of the UGR, the two above-mentioned resolutions became only a proposal for a model statute for commissions on the gypsy population. On its bases, the social work with the Roma was established by the National Committees in towns with higher Roma populations. These social workers could not be successful since the Roma did not trust them and they did not understand the mentality of Roma, and as well they were not accepted by the Roma especially in the time of Normalization.¹⁹⁹ In this way, the participation of Roma on the local and national level was thwarted and the situation of Roma became a topic solved formally on paper. The biggest symbol of suppressing Roma emancipation, and of the systemic erasure and societal neglect of Roma history and suffering, was the construction of a large-capacity pig farm by the Unified Agricultural Cooperative (Jednotné zemědělské družstvo, JZD).²⁰⁰ Funds and state subsidies on the site of the concentration camp at Lety u Písku, where the UGR was still planning to build a memorial to the victims of the Romani Holocaust, in which Czech gendarmes under the direction of the Czech Protectorate government had a role.²⁰¹

Regarding the Czechoslovak Roma and their connections with Roma movement on the international level, Milena Hübschmannová, former UGR chairperson Miroslav Holomek, and Slovak Roma representatives were in touch with the Roma abroad, including Ján Cibul'a in Switzerland. In 1977, Czechoslovak organizations learned that Milena Hübschmannová shared information with experts on Romani studies in Hungary about preparations to declare Roma symbols and efforts to standardize Romani language.²⁰²

Pavelčíková provides information not found elsewhere, namely that Miroslav Holomek was due to participate in the Second World Roma Congress but was prevented from doing so

¹⁹⁹ Pavelčíková, "Romové v českých zemích" [Roma in the Czech Lands], 114.

²⁰⁰ Jednotné zemědělské družstvo [Unified Agricultural Cooperatives] were administering nationalised agricultural companies and farms.

²⁰¹ Pavelčíková, "Romové v českých zemích" [Roma in the Czech Lands], 115.

²⁰² Pavelčíková, "Romové v českých zemích" [Roma in the Czech Lands], 125.

by the socialist regime.²⁰³ This insight helps to shed light on the political constraints faced by Roma activists in Czechoslovakia and suggests that Ján Cibul'a's later leadership in organizing the subsequent Congress may have been motivated by a desire to support his compatriots under Normalization.

In the end, Milena Hübschmannová, Miroslav Holomek, and Anton Facuna (who even participated in the preparation of Second World Roma congress materials) did not receive a foreign currency pledge and did not participate in the Second World Romani Congress, which took place from the 8th to the 11th of April, 1978. Unlike them, Anna Klempárová, a young Roma journalist from Eastern Slovakia, who got a private invitation by Dr. Ján Cibul'a, was the only person of Roma origin from Czechoslovakia that participated in the Second World Roma Congress.²⁰⁴

The Second World Roma Congress was a larger event than the first one and even supported by Indian politicians. However, the Roma from Czechoslovakia could not participate. The regime managed to sever all collaboration of the Czechoslovak Roma with the other Roma intelligentsia and activists forming a transnational Roma movement.

²⁰³ Pavelčíková, "Romové v českých zemích" [Roma in the Czech Lands], 125.

²⁰⁴ Pavelčíková, "Romové v českých zemích" [Roma in the Czech Lands], 125.

4. THIRD WORLD ROMA CONGRESS IN GÖTTINGEN

“Sisters, brothers, Romale. Let’s wake each other up!
The day has come for which our predecessors have
waited many long years. That day is now here. The
Romani people living in this country can, for the first
time, take their fate into their own hands. Now it is up
to us to agree how to stick together and what we will
do for our children. Let’s join forces with the people
who are willing to listen to us. That is Civic Forum (OF).
...”

One of the leaflets written by Milena
Hübschmannová, Emil Ščuka, Vojtěch Žiga and Jan
Rusenko during the Velvet Revolution in Prague.
(Pečínka, Pavel: Romea.cz, 17.11.2014)

One of the leaflets written by Milena
Hübschmannová, Emil Ščuka, Vojtěch Žiga and Jan
Rusenko during the Velvet Revolution in Prague.

(Pečínka, Pavel: Romea.cz, 17.11.2014)

Congress in Göttingen

The First World Roma Congress managed to unite the Roma from different Roma ethnic subgroups and as well from different countries on an international level for the first time ever in our history to articulate challenges and to declare symbols of the Roma nation. The Second World Roma congress advanced with newly founded organization International Romani Union (IRU), strengthened relations with Indian representatives, and achieved to become a member of the U.N.

The Third World Romani Congress was held during the days from May 16th to May 20th, 1983, in Göttingen, Western Germany. This congress brings further developments not

only in the way as a representation of the transnational Roma movement and its outreach in global society, but also within Romani groups, with Sinti from Germany joining them. Marushiakova and Popov write that it was the only World Roma Congress that Sinti in such a number participated in.²⁰⁵ Main topic of this congress was to get full recognition of the Roma Holocaust by West Germany and to negotiate reparations.²⁰⁶ According to Hancock, the organizer of the congress was the German Sinti League with the partial support of a non-governmental Association for the Threatened Peoples [Gessellschaft für Bedrohte Völker]. In total, 300 delegates from over twenty countries took place in this congress.²⁰⁷ Unlike Hancock, Marushiakova and Popov state that the organizer of the Third World Roma Congress was only the Association for the Threatened Peoples.²⁰⁸

The lack of written relevant literature about this and the following congresses made me depend on Hancock who brings more details about the congress. The next president became Sait Balić, an engineer from Yugoslavia. Romani Rose, a Sinto from West Germany, was elected as a Vice-President and Rajko Djurić as a Secretary. The former President Ján Cibul'a was elected by ballot on a position as a Head of the U.N. to be responsible for co-ordinating all activities between the International Romani Union and the United Nations.²⁰⁹

I have not managed to find a description of the outcomes of the Third World Roma Congress in relevant literature either in the archive. On the other hand, the events in Germany

²⁰⁵ Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov, "Roma Labelling: Policy and Academia," *Slovenský národopis* 66, no. 4 (2018), 395.

²⁰⁶ Hancock, "The East European Roots of Romani Nationalism," 263.

²⁰⁷ Hancock, "The East European Roots of Romani Nationalism," 263.

²⁰⁸ Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov, "The Roma – a Nation without a State? Historical Background and Contemporary Tendencies" (2013) in Burszta, Wojciech, Tomasz Kamusella and Sebastian Wojciechowski, eds. *Nationalismus Across the Globe: An Overview of the Nationalism of State-endowed and Stateless Nations*. (School of Humanities and Journalism), 433-455. For additional context, see the website of the German organisation Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker, which translates its name into English as *Society for Threatened Peoples*, <https://www.gfbv.de/en/>

²⁰⁹ Hancock, "The East European Roots of Romani Nationalism," 263.

happening over the following years, in my view, are the results as well thanks to the 3rd World Roma Congress.

Roma Transnational movement as a power of the brothers and sisters abroad
for the Sinti in Germany

The fight for the recognition of *Porajmos*, Roma Holocaust, started already in the end of the 1940's. Oskar and Vinzenz Rose founded *Interest group of racially persecuted people of non-Jewish faith* [Interessengemeinschaft rasisch Verfolgter nicht jüdisch Glaubens]. However, the society recognizing the reparations for the Jewish Holocaust survivors did not add the Roma and Sinti as the others among the victims of the Holocaust. Furthermore, physicians and policemen, who were persecuting the Roma and Sinti during the War II, were not punished and could pursue their careers. The Federal Court of Justice issued a verdict that thwarted the compensations for the Roma and Sinti.²¹⁰

The First World Roma Congress, which among its goals articulated the recognition of the Roma and Sinti murdered by Nazi Germany as well as reparations for survivors, also had a significant influence on the self-organization of Roma and Sinti in West Germany. Romani Rose, the descendant of a *Porajmos* survivor, and his uncle Vinzenz Rose, inspired by the demonstrations in Yugoslavia and Central Europe, placed hope in Federal Chancellor Willy Brandt, who promoted a social-liberal agenda. As a result, they established the organizations Zentral-Komitee der Cinti and the Verband Deutscher Sinti. In 1973, following the fatal police shooting of Anton Lehmann, a Sinti man, in Heidelberg, the Verband Deutscher Sinti organized the first demonstration against antigypsyism in Germany. Later, in 1979, the organization launched a campaign for the recognition of the Holocaust of European Roma, with the support

²¹⁰ Daniela Gress, "Sinti and Roma in the Federal Republic of Germany," *RomArchive*, <https://www.romarchive.eu/en/roma-civil-rights-movement/sinti-and-roma-federal-republic-germany/> accessed September 10, 2024.

of the Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker. On October 27th, 1979, they organized the first international commemoration event at the Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp Memorial, which was attended by approximately 2,000 people, including 500 Roma from 12 European countries.²¹¹

During the Easter of 1980, 12 Roma and Sinti were on a hunger strike at Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial for a week. In September 1981, 18 Sinti seized the basement at the University of Tübingen's Archive where they pleaded for documents that the Office for Racial Hygiene Research collected. These documents secured arguments for the genocide of the Roma and Sinti. The documents were transferred to the Federal Archive. However, the 20,000 so-called race assessment reports compiled by the Office for Racial Hygiene — which formed the core evidence of Nazi racial policies — were not included and remain missing.²¹²

The year after the Third World Roma Congress, in 1982, Romani Rose became a director of the new established organization Central Council of German Sinti and Roma [Zentralrat Deutscher Sinti und Roma], which was an umbrella organization for 9 active associations. This is how the Roma and Sinti in Germany managed to create their own representation to become partners with the Federal government. Shortly after this, the Roma and Sinti were recognised by Chancellor Helmut Schmidt as victims of the Holocaust perpetrated by Nazi Germany. In addition, he highlighted the compensations for victims. In my view, there is no mention of the punishment of people who participated in the persecution of the Roma and Sinti during WWII.²¹³

The Third World Roma Congress's intention was to unite an organization Central Council of German Sinti and Roma [Zentralrat Deutscher Sinti und Roma] led by Sinto Romani

²¹¹ Gress, "Sinti and Roma in the Federal Republic of Germany."

²¹² Gress, "Sinti and Roma in the Federal Republic of Germany."

²¹³ Gress, "Sinti and Roma in the Federal Republic of Germany."

Rose. VDSR received the support of the German government in the form of the constant funding of its welfare programmes.²¹⁴ This development marked the beginning of a new relationship between the Federal Government and German Roma and Sinti. As German historian Daniela Gress notes, this relationship later contributed, in 1995, to the recognition of Roma and Sinti as a national minority (*Volksgruppe*), and in 1997, to the founding of the Documentation and Cultural Centre of German Sinti and Roma in Heidelberg.²¹⁵

Despite the success of institutional support in Germany, the German Sinti eventually distanced themselves from the International Romani Union (IRU).²¹⁶ According to Acton and Klímová, there were three reasons for the detachment of the Sinti from the IRU. First, the *IRU Constitutions* were ideologically corresponding to the ideas of Communism. Though they had their representative Romani Rose in the position of Vice-President, it was difficult to agree on the common ideas while the other representatives were coming from socialist Yugoslavia.²¹⁷

Secondly, questions of identity played a significant role. The Sinti speak their dialect of Romani language. However, they do not declare themselves as Roma, but as Sinti. Similarly, in France, speakers of a similar dialect of Romani language do not call themselves Roma, but Manush (Manouche).²¹⁸

Finally, there was a clash of interests between the German Sinti and immigrant Roma. The Sinti had been living in Germany for more than 600 years and they were German citizens. On the other hand, the immigrant Roma represented by Rudko Kawczynski, who had different

²¹⁴ Acton and Klímová, "International Romani Union," 161.

²¹⁵ Gress, "Sinti and Roma in the Federal Republic of Germany."

²¹⁶ Acton and Klímová, "International Romani Union," 161.

²¹⁷ Acton and Klímová, "International Romani Union," 161.

²¹⁸ Acton and Klímová, "International Romani Union," 161. Manush means human in Romani language. Django Reinhardt was the most popular French Manush.

needs and agendas, were supporting the IRU. Later, both groups shared the scepticism towards the IRU, similarly as the Sinti themselves.²¹⁹

The rest of the transnational Roma movement

In addition to emancipation in Germany, which I have discussed above, it is also necessary to mention here what is happening in other parts of Europe and in the United States. The topic of the recognition of the Roma as the victims of the Holocaust was one of the main topics (see, chapter 2). This need was shared by Roma not only in European states, but also in the United States of America where the Roma started organizing themselves since the 1970s, which proves the spreading of the ideas through the various Roma World Congresses.

The topic of the Holocaust, though after several decades, remained underrepresented in academia, and in political commemoration for the Holocaust in general. For example, in 1987, President Reagan approved William A. Duna as the first member of the Holocaust Memorial Council.²²⁰ As a result, it was not until 1989 that a subcommittee of the new member organization Sa-Roma,INc. [All Roma] organized a memorial service for all Roma at St. Adolphus Church in Chicago. This organization was developed from the initial organization of the Bashaldo²²¹ Roma community in Minneapolis. Of course, the very first event of this nature was the subject of media interest, with over a hundred people in attendance.²²² This event was crucial for the emancipation of the Roma in the United States, as it brought together leaders

²¹⁹ Acton and Klímová, "International Romani Union," 160-161.

²²⁰ Ian Hancock said in the interview that Alica Heráková and I conducted for the Museum of Romani Culture that almost all American national minorities were represented by the Holocaust Memorial Council, except for the Roma. He added that for the leadership there was not a strong enough argument to let the Roma community be represented. See the interview by Michal Mižigár and Alica Heráková, *Museum of Romani Culture*, June 2023, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JLS0H0c15Zg>.

²²¹ The Bashalde Roma were immigrants from the region of present-day Košice in Eastern Slovakia who migrated to the United States at the end of the 19th century. Their group name Bashalde, is derived from the Romani verb *te bašavel*, meaning "to play a musical instrument." They may also be known by the term Romungro, an appellation traditionally used for Roma originating from the territory of present-day Hungary.

²²² Hancock, "The East European Roots of Romani Nationalism," 263.

from across the country. Ion Cioabă, a Bulibasha of the National Union of Romanian Roma, accepted an invitation from the Romani Union in Texas. In collaboration with Ian Hancock and Witold Lakatosz, a leader of the Polish Lovari Roma community in the U.S., he organized meetings in California, Texas, New York, and Illinois to engage local Roma communities and elect their representatives to the Romani Union of the United States.²²³

Unlike the German and United States examples, the emancipation processes for Roma in Eastern Europe are not as plentiful in the relevant literature. The Roma from Czechoslovakia were no longer represented in the IRU leadership as they had been at previous congresses, reflecting the regime's influence on their involvement. The questions of why and how the regime controlled the emancipation of Roma in Czechoslovakia, I am trying to answer in the following sub-chapter.

Situation in Czechoslovakia

The participation of Czechoslovak Roma at the 3rd World Roma Congress was significantly shaped by the post-1968 Normalization period following the Warsaw Pact invasion led by the Soviet Union. Roma who had previously represented their community publicly were pushed into the shadows during the Normalization era. They became hidden activists, operating in seclusion and no longer granted the same opportunities for engagement and advocacy as in the earlier years.

Gradually, the Normalization affected all spheres of public life. Those opposing the regime, became enemies of the socialist social and state system. One of these activities was as well the Roma emancipation. The Roma as an unrecognised national minority could not get any support for promoting their culture and minority rights. It entailed that after disbanding the

²²³ Hancock, "The East European Roots of Romani Nationalism," 264.

Unions of Gypsies-Roma in Czech Socialist Republic and Slovak Socialist Republic in 1973, those Roma minority representatives being part of the National Front became invisible activists from one day to the next. Therefore, none of them participated in the Second World Roma Congress in Geneva. However, only Anna Klempárová, who got a personal invitation from Ján Cibul'a from Switzerland, attended the Second World Roma congress.

Anna Klempárová described it: "There I met Roma from all over the world for the first time. For the first time I saw a Roma flag there, the Roma were singing the Roma anthem, and I was surprised that something like that existed, and you know, when you're a journalist in Slovakia and you come abroad... We lacked, first of all, information sources and we didn't know what was being done in the world..." In her answer for the interview, she confirms that the emancipation of Roma especially after disbanding the Roma organizations was a topic of Roma intellectuals and the rest of Roma population did not know about it.

She discovered a new perspective on Czechoslovakia of which she was not aware of it whatsoever, as she remembers herself, "... I remember that in Zurich, Mr Cibul'a was still telling me: "Don't go home, don't go home, because if you go home, you will be in trouble," and I could not imagine what kind of trouble I could expect in Slovakia, unless I had the idea that I was an editor." ²²⁴

Two weeks after her return to Slovakia, she was visited by ŠtB²²⁵: "... I did not even know there was such a thing. I walked into that office of theirs, and they started talking to me and asking me a lot of questions that I didn't even know how to answer. And in the end, they actually told me that by being at the congress I had met people who were hostile to socialism

²²⁴ "... pamätám sa, že v Zürichu mi ešte pán Cibul'a hovoril: "Nechod' domov, nechod' domov, lebo keď pôjdeš domov, budeš mať problémy," a ja som si nevedela predstaviť, aké problémy by mi mohli na Slovensku čakať, lebo mala predstavu, že som redaktorka" - Kristína Mojžišová, "Rómovia 30 rokov po..." [The Roma 30 years after ...]. *Košice: Rozhlas a televízia Slovenska* [Radio and Television of Slovakia], 2000, 187.

²²⁵ ŠtB is abbreviation for Štátna bezpečnosť - State Security in Slovakia.

and socialist ideology, and so on, and so forth, and so on. They put it in such a political class conflict, and they actually put me in that conflict. They told me that I, too, was an enemy of the Czechoslovak people. I just didn't know what that was... They asked me about the charter."²²⁶ Obviously, we can see that Roma emancipation was considered as “a political class conflict” which reflects the perception of Roma question by the regime.

Klempárová was considered a danger to the regime, especially for her profession as a journalist. She could have published the information she had found out about the Congress and the transnational Roma movement. The regime had fears of the collaboration with the dissidents gathered under the initiative of Charter 77.

Charter 77 – Czechoslovak dissent

In 1976, a year after Czechoslovakia as the other Eastern-European state regimes pledged to abide in human rights, the StB arrested an underground music band the Plastic People of the Universe.²²⁷ In reaction to this, several groups gathered to establish an initiative to criticize the regime that represses people for their disagreement with the regime. On January 1, 1977, the spokespersons philosophers Jan Patočka, a former Minister of Foreign Affairs in times of Prague Spring Jiří Hájek, and playwright Václav Havel presented declaration Charter 77 (Charta 77), similarly titled as the initiative gathering dissidents.²²⁸

242 people signed the Charter 77 in 1977. In November 1989, almost 2,000 people signed it from Czechia (mostly Prague and Brno) and Slovakia. Among the signatories were

²²⁶ “... Ani som nevedela, že niečo také existuje. Prišla som do tej ich kancelárie, a oni sa so mnou začali rozprávať a vypytovať na veľa vecí, na ktoré som nevedela ani odpovedať. A v závere mi vlastne povedali, že tým, že som bola na kongrese, že som sa tam stretla s ľuďmi, ktorí sú nepriateľsky orientovaní voči socializmu a socialistickej ideológii, a tak ďalej, a tak ďalej. Dostali to do takého politického triedneho konfliktu, a mňa vlastne postavili do toho konfliktu. Povedali mi, že aj ja som nepriateľ československého ľudu. Lenže som nevedela, čo to je... Pýtali sa ma na chartu,” - Mojžíšová, “Rómovia 30 rokov po...,” 187.

²²⁷ Křen, *Dvě století střední Evropy* [Two Centuries of Central Europe], 877.

²²⁸ Vykoukal, Litera and Teichman, *Východ*, 583.

various opinion groups such as reformed socialists, Christians without regard of the confession and liberal democratic writers.²²⁹

In reaction to this, an article titled *Ztroskotanci a samozvanci* [The Wayward and the Self-Righteous] to defame the Charter 77 was published in daily Rudé Právo newspaper immediately within two weeks.²³⁰ On January 28, 1977, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia organized a gathering in the National Theatre in Prague in which summoned artists to sign *Anticharta* [Anticharter].²³¹

Besides these instances of propaganda, the regimes started to repress the Charter 77 signatories. They were facing harassment, for example, house searches, seizure of the phones and driving licences, losing of the jobs, and more. Moreover, meetings were summoned up in the workplaces to condemn Charter 77 and to ask for the punishment of its signatories without letting anyone else read the document of Charter 77 led to harder interrogation of the signatories. During the interrogation, philosopher Professor Patočka died.²³²

Charter 77 was irritating the regime already in its purpose, which was to observe civil rights violations. However, the situation demanded to produce about 500 analyses of current societal problems and suggestions for the solution which were published by radio abroad, in the meantime the regime was totally disregarding them.²³³

Do Czechoslovak Roma to be assimilated have the same rights as the other Czechoslovaks?

Document no. 23 *Dokument o postavení romských spoluobčanů předložený jako podklad k veřejné diskuzi* [On the position of Romani fellow citizens submitted as a basis for public discussion] was published on the 14th of December, 1978.²³⁴ In the following week, the

²²⁹ Křen, *Dvě století střední Evropy* [Two Centuries of Central Europe], 877.

²³⁰ “Ztroskotanci a samozvanci” [The Wayward and the Self-Righteous], *Rudé právo*, January 12, 1977, <https://archiv.ucl.cas.cz/index.php?path=RudePravo/1977/1/12/2.png>.

²³¹ Vykoukal, Litera and Tejchman, *Východ*, 583-584.

²³² Křen, *Dvě století střední Evropy* [Two Centuries of Central Europe], 877.

²³³ Křen, *Dvě století střední Evropy* [Two Centuries of Central Europe], 878.

²³⁴ “Dokument o postavení romských spoluobčanů předložený jako podklad k veřejné diskuzi. Dokument č. 23,” [“Document on the Status of Romani Fellow Citizens Submitted as a Basis for Public Discussion. Document No.

petition was published by Radio Free Europe, the BBC and in the form of text also published by Le Monde, Labour Focus on Eastern Europe.

The essay provides in the beginning the historical background and describes the implications of the implementation of paternalistic and strict state policies without any regards on their subethnic group origin. For example, Government Resolution No. 502 of 1965 led to the destruction of the culture of the Roma and severed ties of the individuals with their families and communities which entailed negative consequences in future.

Furthermore, in the essay other topics I am below summarising with quotations were as well discussed.

Housing

“The level of housing for Romani families is the most significant obstacle to the cultural development of this minority and condemns them to the hereditary role of unskilled labour for the foreseeable future.”²³⁵

Education

A longer part of the essay reflecting grave problems is dedicated to the topic of the education of Roma children in the education which determined them to work in unqualified working positions.

“Approximately 30 % of Romani people are illiterate, and 17 % of those in the 15-29 age group are still illiterate. Of the 30-year-old male Romani people, more than 10 % did not attend school at all, 50 % completed only five grades, and only 15 % finished primary school. Less than half a percent of Roma with a university education have reached secondary school, and the percentage of Roma with a university degree is 50 percent across Czechoslovakia”.²³⁶

23.] in *Charta 77*, ed. Alena Císařovská and Vilém Prečan (Praha: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 2007), 198–206.

²³⁵ “Úroveň bydlení romských rodin je přitom nejpodstatnější překážkou kulturního vývoje této menšiny a odsuzuje ji na nedohlednou dobu k dědičné roli nekvalifikované pracovní síly.” Ibid., 202.

²³⁶ “Přibližně 30 % Romů jsou analfabeti a ještě ve věkové skupině od 15 do 29 let je analfabetů 17 %. z třicetiletých Romů mužského pohlaví více než 10 % vůbec do školy nechodilo, 50 % vychodilo jen pět tříd a pouze 15 % ukončilo základní devítiletou školu. Středoškolského vzdělání dosáhla necelá polovina procenta Romů s vysokoškolským vzděláním je v celém Československu 50.” Císařovská, Prečan. *Charta 77*, 203.

“The failure of Romani schoolchildren in Czech and Slovak schools is often solved by reassigning them to schools designed for children of below-average intelligence. In the 1970-71 school year, a full 20% of Roma children in the Czech Republic attended these schools, compared to 3% of children from the majority population. According to the Detailed Psychological Examinations, most of these Roma children do not belong in special schools. The lump-sum placement of Roma children in special schools, which is practised in many places, reinforces the professional qualifications of the entire Roma population.”²³⁷

"Specifically gypsy crime"

They were aware of the disintegration of the Roma community and its values “Romipen” (Romahood). In new industrial cities, new growing generations of Roma coming from Eastern Slovakia had no education and subsequent success in the society. The institutions were criminalising the Roma with their “specifically gypsy crime” [Specificky cikánská kriminalita].²³⁸

Removal of children to children's homes

“The most mournful chapter, however, is the biased court decisions on the placement of Romani children in orphanages against the will of parents capable of raising the children. In such cases, the Roma who cling to their children resist the removal of their children. There has also been a case in which the VB searched for a Romani child under the bed with the help of a trained dog, which pulled the child out of hiding before their eyes.”²³⁹

Sterilisation

“... The consent of Romani women to be sterilised is obtained through influence, the objectivity of which is not guaranteed. In some districts, sterilisation is carried out as a planned administrative practice, and the success of the staff is

²³⁷ “Neúspěšnost romských školáků v českých a slovenských školách se často řeší tím, že jsou přerazováni do škol, určených pro děti s podprůměrnou inteligencí. Ve školním roce 1970-71 chodilo v Čechách do těchto škol celých 20 % romských dětí proti 3 % dětí z většinové populace. Podle Podrobných psychologických vyšetření většina těchto romských dětí do zvláštních škol nepatří. Paušální zařazování romských dětí do zvláštních škol, které se mnohde praktikuje, utvrzuje profesní kvalifikaci celé romské populace.” “Dokument o postavení romských spoluobčanů předložený jako podklad k veřejné diskusi. Dokument č. 23,” [“Document on the Status of Romani Fellow Citizens Submitted as a Basis for Public Discussion. Document No. 23.”] in *Charta 77*, ed. Alena Císařovská and Vilém Prečan (Praha: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 2007), 198–206.
., 203.

²³⁸ Ibid., 204.

²³⁹ “Nejtruchlivější kapitolou jsou však předpojatá soudní rozhodnutí o umísťování romských dětí v dětských domovech proti vůli rodičů schopných dítě vychovávat. Romové, kteří na svých dětech lpějí, se v takových případech odebrání dětí brání. Došlo i k případu kdy VB vyhledala romské dítě pod postelí, a to pomocí vycvičeného psa, který dítě před očima z úkrytu vytáhl.” Císařovská, Prečan. *Charta 77*, 204.

evaluated at internal meetings by the number of Roma women who have managed to consent to sterilisation.”²⁴⁰

SCR – minority right

The Union of the Gypsies-Roma created a space for the nascent Roma literature in Roma language thanks to the work of Milena Hübschmannová. These authors, who could contribute to uplifting of the culture of Roma during the time of the disintegration of Roma communities, unfortunately, remained isolated without possibilities to publish. Charter 77 also mentioned this situation of the Union of the Gypsies-Roma which was disbanded in 1973. Roma intelligentsia in Czechoslovakia was suppressed in their work in the field of Roma emancipation by the regime.

“ ... During the procedures leading to the dissolution of the Gypsy-Roma Union, the members of the leadership of this organization were subjected to rude pressure and unconcealed threats, but they showed a perseverance and bravery unparalleled in the union and association activities in Czechoslovakia in the 1970s. The Roma with university degrees who were active in the activities and leadership of the Gypsy-Roma Union are now in many cases living in unskilled labour.”²⁴¹

In the end of the recommendation to reinvestigate all interventions against the Roma and ministries to publish information about the current situation with the aid of Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences.²⁴²

This document was elaborated by Milena Hübschmannová and Zdeněk Pinc in collaboration with a group of a few social workers working with Roma families in Prague.

²⁴⁰ “... Souhlas romských žen ke sterilizaci je získáván ovlivňováním, jehož objektivita není zaručena. V některých obvodech se sterilizace provádí jako plánovaná administrativní praxe a úspěšnost pracovníků je na interních schůzích hodnocena podle počtu romských žen, jež se jim podařilo k souhlasu se sterilizací.” Ibid. 204.

²⁴¹ “... Při procedurách vedoucích k rozpuštění Svazu Cikánů-Romů byli členové vedení této organizace vystaveni neomalenému nátlaku a nepokrytým výhrůžkám, projevíli však vytrvalost a statečnost, jaká ve svazových a spolkových činnostech v Československu 70. let nemá obdoby. Romové s vysokoškolským vzděláním, kteří se na činnosti a vedení Svazu Cikánů-Romů aktivně podíleli, se v současné době v mnoha případech žijí nekvalifikovanou prací.” Ibid., 204-205.

²⁴² Císařovská, Přečan. *Charta 77*, 206.

They managed to get the document to the representatives of Charter 77.²⁴³ Václav Havel, who signed the document with Ladislav Hejdránek as spokespersons of Charter 77 at that time, made the last check of the document.²⁴⁴ In my view, at those times, this essay addresses a very progressive approach towards the question of Roma integration. The authors were not only appealing the nomenclature to change their approach towards the Roma citizens in general, but as well accentuating that the minority rights are an essential factor for Roma emancipation. It is important as well for rising Roma culture especially in times of disintegration of the values of the Roma communities. Furthermore, it must be added that the Roma were in the essay called as the Roma which is progressive since at that time the regime was talking about Roma as the “citizens of the Gypsy origin” [občan cikánského původu]. Obviously, it proves that the regime genuinely contributed to disintegration of the Roma communities, values, and the Roma language. The regime’s assimilatory policies led to the disintegration of Roma communities, values, and especially the loss of the Roma language.

Are Roma activists a part of the dissent in Czechoslovakia?

The efforts and activities of Roma in Czechoslovakia reveal that their intelligentsia opposed the regime. They were dissidents trying to achieve their human rights as the other dissent groups. However, traditional Czech historiography does not reflect this fact whatsoever. Even the foreigner historians writing about the Charter 77 at those times were not including the Roma in the Czechoslovak narrative, for example, Janusz Bugajski.²⁴⁵ Will Guy is one of the few scholars who emphasizes Romani resistance in Czechoslovakia before 1980, particularly in his dissertation at the University of Bristol.²⁴⁶ We should not be surprised that Czech historians are not incorporating Roma dissent as a part of that one of Czechoslovak,

²⁴³ Donert, *Rights of the Roma*, 230.

²⁴⁴ Císařovská, Přečan. *Charta 77*, 207.

²⁴⁵ Janusz Bugajski, *Czechoslovakia, Charter 77's Decade of Dissent*, (Bloomsbury Publishing, 1987).

²⁴⁶ Will Guy, “The Attempt of Socialist Czechoslovakia to Assimilate Its Gypsy Population” (Unpublished PhD diss., University of Bristol, 1977).

even after November 1989. No wonder, it did not happen until recently. Ctibor Nečas in his book *Romové v České republice včera a dnes*²⁴⁷ had a few chapters about the Roma during the period 1945–1989 in the Czech Republic without pointing out on being part of Czechoslovak dissent. Furthermore, Nina Pavelčíková brings a solid history of Roma during the totality in Czech lands.²⁴⁸ The real revolution in historiography seems to start after the publishing of the works of the British historian Celia Donert, who published an article that dealt with Charter 77, and released the essay about the situation of the Roma as the citizens of Czechoslovakia without rights in 2010.²⁴⁹ Two years later, the question of Roma citizens in Czechoslovakia during Normalization appears in a footnote in the article of Michal Kopeček.²⁵⁰ Furthermore, in the same article, Kopeček mentions that the issues regarding the situation of Roma population were the issues among the other social and religious groups and persecution which infringed on human and civil rights by the Communist Party.²⁵¹ In another article, Kopeček mentions the situation of the Roma during Normalization in comparison with the Roma in Hungary.²⁵² It is obvious that this article is published two years after Donert published an elaborated book, *The Rights of the Roma: The Struggle for Citizenship in Postwar Czechoslovakia*.²⁵³

Though Roma activists are not mentioned as a part of Czechoslovak dissent, we can find evidence of a few individuals, for example, Anna Klempárová, whom I mentioned in the beginning of this subchapter. Klempárová, 25 years old in 1978, was perceived by the regime

²⁴⁷ Ctibor Nečas, *Romové v České republice včera a dnes*. [The Roma in the Czech Republic Yesterday and Today]. (Univerzita Palackého, 2004).

²⁴⁸ Though I am mentioning her book as a valuable source that Czech historians dealing with the topics of Normalization or Dissent could read, I am still remaining alert since she is showing stereotypes against the Roma herself, in particular, in the introduction to her book.

²⁴⁹ Celia Donert, “Charter 77 and the Roma: Human Rights and Dissent in Socialist Czechoslovakia,” in *Human Rights in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 191-212.

²⁵⁰ Michal Kopeček, “Human Rights Facing a National Past. Dissident ‘Civic Patriotism’ and the Return of History in East Central Europe 1968-1989,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 38, no. 4 (2012), 573-602.

²⁵¹ Kopeček, “Human Rights,” 573-602.

²⁵² Michal Kopeček, “The Socialist Conception of Human Rights and Its Dissident Critique: Hungary and Czechoslovakia, 1960s–1980s,” *East Central Europe* 46, no. 2-3 (2019), 261-289.

²⁵³ Donert, *Rights of the Roma*.

as a danger. However, she was released from her employment and continued as a journalist in technical journalism. After interrogations and worries that she could contact other Roma activists in 1981, Klempárová's case was dropped by the State Security on the ground, as Donert states, "... she had learned her lesson and that as a 'young person' she deserved to have her file closed."²⁵⁴ Anton Facuna in the Slovak branch was dismissed. Later, similar problems started as well in the Czech branch of Union of the Gypsies-Roma which led to dissolving of it in 1973. Not only Roma people were prevented from the work on the Roma question, but as well non-Roma friends of active Roma. Milena Hübschmannová, an initiator of the Roma Memorandum, was also subjected to interrogation by the State Security where she, according to Donert, negated having any contacts with activists and chartists.²⁵⁵ Moreover, Will Guy, who accompanied the Czechoslovak delegation to the First World Roma Congress and translated for them, received the invitation for an interview at Czechoslovak Embassy in London.

"I was seen as a friend of socialism and a friend of Czechoslovakia. And so I got invited to the Czech Embassy National Day or something like that in London. And I couldn't understand why I was there. I was invited to the Embassy as a friend of the Czechoslovak embassy, don't know why. Never before... And I was very nervous about this because I didn't know what this was about. And I was interviewed by some official who was saying, who did I know? And later I discovered that they were trying to recruit people in universities to be friends of socialism and to be spies".²⁵⁶

During his next visit of Slovakia for his research among Roma people in Eastern Slovakia for his dissertation, he was kept under surveillance in the hostel and even the bus driver was assigned to spy on him: "... the bus driver, because he got drunk he came up to me and started

²⁵⁴ Donert, *Rights of the Roma*, 238.

²⁵⁵ See more in Donert, *Rights of the Roma*, 241.

²⁵⁶ Will Guy recorded interview in Bristol, July 16, 2019.

saying: “You know, why don't you go home and leave. Why are you meddling with these Gypsies and they're nothing to do with you? And I have to write down every time you get on the bus and report this and this is, you know, I'm fed up with doing this.”²⁵⁷

As I quoted above, not only the members of the Union of Gypsies-Roma leadership were exposed to threats and duress, though they were not united or closely supported by the mainstream dissent. There is obvious a barrier between “us” - elite club²⁵⁸ and “them” - Roma activists. In this way, Hübschmannová was a crucial person who, in collaboration with Pinc and other social workers from Prague working with Roma families in Prague, could bring the topic of Roma question in public. Charter 77 the essay only accepted and supported.

The Third World Roma Congress in 1981 as an opportunity

According to Donert, a Slovak Roma member of the KSS²⁵⁹ party from Lučenec, a manual worker pointed to himself with the request of help with preparing the speech about the lives of his Roma fellow-citizens in his district to be delivered at the Third World Roma Congress. This was a forewarning from the regime.²⁶⁰

In consequence of this, in the following days, the police found out that there were 30 Roma people in Czechoslovakia who had got the invitations to the congress.²⁶¹ The regime considered the congress in West Germany as a danger – the Roma activists could be “... used against the ČSSR by centres of emigration in the capitalist lands as a means of exerting pressure and ideological-diversionary defamation”.²⁶² Therefore, persons planning to participate in the

²⁵⁷ Will Guy recorded interview in Bristol, July 16, 2019.

²⁵⁸ The dissent included groups from a broad spectrum, ranging from Christians of various denominations to intellectuals, artists, and others.

²⁵⁹ The Communist Party of Slovakia [Komunistická strana Slovenska, abbreviated as KSS].

²⁶⁰ Donert, *Rights of the Roma*, 239.

²⁶¹ Donert, *Rights of the Roma*, 240.

²⁶² Donert, *Rights of the Roma*, 239.

Congress were under stricter surveillance and immediately subjected to a security screening by a secret police force.²⁶³

As for the communication between Grattan Puxon and Roma from the Czech Socialist Republic, I managed to find in the recently made available archive of Grattan Puxon where I found letters confirming that the regime genuinely considered congress as a menace in the case of the “Gypsy Question.”

In February 1981, Tomáš Holomek asked for train tickets and official invitation letters for himself, Zigmund Vágai (a former member of the UGR), and four other people among them. Furthermore, he also in this letter informs Puxon about the death of Anton Facuna.²⁶⁴ In the following month, Holomek urged Puxon with the request to send the invitation letter for a person that was accompanying him.²⁶⁵ Among the others, Emil Ščuka, a law student, wrote for the request of the official invitations and described the situation in Czechoslovakia:

“Our work is proceeding very slowly, we are living in a state in which we cannot do much. ... You know, brother, the Roma here are not financially disadvantaged, they have jobs, but there is great discrimination and genocide against our Roma here, and we need to do something to make things better for the Roma here. We still have a lot of work to do.”²⁶⁶

Dezider Oláh's letters show us the approach of the police in Slovakia. In a letter from February 20th, 1981, he wrote to Puxon that all should work out and they only needed an official

²⁶³ Donert, *Rights of the Roma*, 240.

²⁶⁴ Tomáš Holomek to Grattan Puxon, February 23, 1981, folder “Puxon/176 Miscellaneous papers and correspondence written in Romani and other foreign languages,” Grattan Puxon Papers, Bishopsgate Institute, London, UK.

²⁶⁵ Tomáš Holomek to Grattan Puxon, March 16, 1981, folder “Puxon/294 World Romani Congresses and Other GRT Events (1964–1986),” Grattan Puxon Papers, Bishopsgate Institute, London, UK.

²⁶⁶ “Amari buti džal igen poľikes, dživas andre kajso them, kaj peske naši but kheras. ... Džanes phrala, le Romenge nane phujes adaj le lovenca, hin len but buti, kajča bari diskriminacia the genocida hin adaj pro Roma, the vaš oda kampil vareso the kerel hoj the avel adaj le Romenge feder. Užarel amen mek but buti.” - Emil Ščuka to Grattan Puxon, November 31, 1980, folder “Puxon/294 World Romani Congresses and Other GRT Events (1964–1986),” Grattan Puxon Papers, Bishopsgate Institute, London, UK.

invitation letter to be permitted to attend the congress.²⁶⁷ However, on 23rd April, he wrote to Puxon:

“My good brother, I am writing you a letter to say that we will not be going to Göttingen for the Roma Congress because the Ministry of the Interior, the Passport and Visa Department, will not let us go. They told us that the Roma are well off here, everyone is working, the children are in school. All the Roma live in new houses /That we do not need a Roma Union/ No one from our state will come to you... I also write to tell you that we have sent your letters to the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Prague. Write me a letter asking if I should send you back the train tickets you sent us.”²⁶⁸

The regime as well was obstructing with financial hindrances. Elena Lacková, who evidently had an entry visa, wrote to Puxon a month before the congress:

“... The Federal Department has not written us anything yet. We can't check into a hotel because our bank has given us little foreign currency. Arrange for us to stay with the Roma because we will not be able to talk to the Gadže because we do not speak German.”²⁶⁹

Financial problems were also an obstacle for historian Bartoloměj Daniel: “... I am a poor Roma man and I can't afford to pay for a hotel. Send me a train ticket.”²⁷⁰ Similarly, Ernest Berky, a

²⁶⁷ Dezider Oláh to Grattan Puxon, February 20, 1981, folder “Puxon/176 Miscellaneous papers and correspondence written in Romani and other foreign languages,” Grattan Puxon Papers, Bishopsgate Institute, London, UK.

²⁶⁸ “Míre lačhe phrala, čhinav Tumenge lil hod ando Gottingeno pro Romano kongresi na džaha mer amen namuken o Ministerstvo Vnútra odd. Pasov a víz phende amenge hod le Romenge kamende hi te láčhe savore buti keren, čhavore ande škola phiren savore roma bešen ando neve khera. /Hot amenge nakampel Romano Union/ Andaro amáro álamo nadžala niko ke tumenge. ... Meg čhinav tumenge hod bičhadam o tumare lila le Federálnému Ministerstvu práce a soc. Vecí, Praha. Čhinen mange lil te kampav pále te bičhavel o lístky pro vonato so amenge bičhadan.” - Dezider Oláh to Grattan Puxon, April 23, 1981, folder “Puxon/176 Miscellaneous papers and correspondence written in Romani and other foreign languages,” Grattan Puxon Papers, Bishopsgate Institute, London, UK.

²⁶⁹ “O federálno ministerstvos amenge mek nič napisindža. Andre hotelis našči bešas bo amári banka amenge diňa čine devizy. Ker amenge hoj te bešas ko Roma, bo le gadženca nadžanaha tevakerel bo germanika na džanas.” - Lacková and Kačová to Grattan Puxon, April 3, 1981, folder “Puxon/176 Miscellaneous papers and correspondence written in Romani and other foreign languages,” Grattan Puxon Papers, Bishopsgate Institute, London, UK.

²⁷⁰ “Me som čoro Rom the naši a mange pocinav o hotelis. Bičav mange e vozno karta.” - Bartoloměj Daniel to Grattan Puxon, March 4, 1981, folder “Puxon/294 World Romani Congresses and Other GRT Events (1964–1986),” Grattan Puxon Papers, Bishopsgate Institute, London, UK.

Roma activist from Slovakia, was asking Puxon to find accommodations for them that weren't in hotels since they would not have foreign exchange.²⁷¹

From the above citations it is obvious that Roma from Czechoslovakia were facing various obstacles hindering their participation in the congress. According to Puxon, many of them managed to attend congress.²⁷² However, in my research archive I have not found it. Emil Ščuka confirmed that he did not know about anyone who could participate from Czechoslovakia.²⁷³ Likewise, Jana Horváthová²⁷⁴ said that her grandfather Tomáš Holomek did not attend the congress in Göttingen either.²⁷⁵

On the other hand, Puxon states that unlike those prominent active Romani people, who were not allowed by the regime to attend the Third World Romani Congress in Göttingen, other Romani participants from Czechoslovakia were present at the congress.²⁷⁶ After congress, Tomáš Holomek wrote to Puxon in the end of the year:

“Our Roma people are working in our country, it is good, children are going to school, Romani people are doctors and engineers in our country. Officials; people are well off in our country. I don't know how it is in your country. Thank you, write to me and tell me how things are in your country. It would be better if the next congress were held in a socialist state, so that we could still meet there.”²⁷⁷

²⁷¹ Ernest Berky to Grattan Puxon, March 5, 1981, folder “Puxon/294 World Romani Congresses and Other GRT Events (1964–1986),” Grattan Puxon Papers, Bishopsgate Institute, London, UK.

²⁷² Grattan Puxon, personal e-mail communication, July 31, 2024.

²⁷³ Emil Ščuka, personal phone call, Spring 2022.

²⁷⁴ Jana Horváthová, née Holomková, is a historian, ethnographer and museologist and director of the Museum of Romani Culture in Brno, Czech Republic. Tomáš Holomek was Horvátová's grandfather.

²⁷⁵ Jana Horváthová, personal e-mail communication with the author, August 23, 2023.

²⁷⁶ Puxon, personal e-mail communication with the author, July 31, 2024.

²⁷⁷ “Kamende o amáre Roma keren búfa, hi lače, o čávore phiren andre školy (school), hi kamende o doktory, inženýry. Oficíry; hi adaj kamende amare manuŝenge láčes. Me nažánav, har hi odoj ke Tumenge. Parikerav, bičav mange lil, har san odoj ke Tumenge. Avlas by feder, te by o áver kongresos avela andre státos socialistickos, kajte mek amen odoj pales šaj džas.” - Tomáš Holomek to Grattan Puxon, December 15, 1981, folder “Puxon/176 Miscellaneous papers and ...,” Grattan Puxon Papers, Bishopsgate Institute, London, UK.

This excerpt from the letter should be read with caution. I assume that Holomek is aware that letters can be monitored and therefore is not critical, as the above-mentioned student Emil Ščuka. However, he expresses the need and wish that the next congress be held in a socialist country so that they can participate and continue to cooperate with the international Roma movement.

Yugoslav Roma's emancipation as an example of citizens in another socialist country

Prior to concluding this chapter, let me digress from this story and offer you another perspective of having another possibility to have Roma emancipation in another Socialist country. The best example for comparison is Yugoslavia since Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia officially sent their Roma delegation to the First World Roma Congress in England in 1971 as the only socialist countries. Roma in Yugoslavia after WWII had similar problems as their Roma fellows in other parts of Europe. Already in mid-1945, [Cigansko kulturno-prosvetno društvo] Gypsy cultural and educational society was founded. Two years later, writing and reading courses for illiterate people started being organized by the society.²⁷⁸ In addition, the society tried to qualify young Roma from families whose fathers had been killed by the fascists in handicraft production to become breadwinners.²⁷⁹

Later in 1960, Action for the political emancipation of the Roma [Akcija za političku emancipaciju Roma] () was organized by Yugoslav people and Roma activists.²⁸⁰ Dragoljub Acković considered, a Roma Serbian historian, this event crucial to wake up the national

²⁷⁸ Dragoljub Acković, *Romi u Beogradu: istorija, kultura i tradicija Roma u Beogradu od naseljavanja do kraja XX veka*. [The Roma in Belgrade: history, culture and traditions of the Roma from settlement to the end of 20th century] (Rominterpres, 2009), 301.

²⁷⁹ Acković, *Romi u Beogradu: istorija, kultura i tradicija Roma u Beogradu od naseljavanja do kraja XX veka*. [The Roma in Belgrade: history, culture and traditions of the Roma from settlement to the end of 20th century] 302.

²⁸⁰ Acković, *Romi u Beogradu: istorija, kultura i tradicija Roma u Beogradu od naseljavanja do kraja XX veka*. [The Roma in Belgrade: history, culture and traditions of the Roma from settlement to the end of 20th century] 303.

consciousness of the Roma people and to resist the assimilation. Though it was two decades after WWII, they still did not have the number of Roma victims to Holocaust. However, at that time the Roma were facing grave problems and even the new generations born in postwar times. Acković described it as a nation without home and grave [narod bez doma i groba] (nation without home and grave).²⁸¹ This led to questioning in the society “The Gypsies also want to have their state?”²⁸² Young and inexperienced Roma activists did not manage to face such pressure and gave it up. They were persecuted as Roma nationalists which entailed bullying at workplaces or exclusion from the political party.²⁸³

In the beginning of June 1969, President Tito²⁸⁴ got a letter from representatives of the Association Rom – Belgrade [društvo Rom Beograd] () in which they informed him that there was held a founding assembly with an aim to establish Rom Belgrade. This association’s goal was to support education, science, culture, and social issues on the basis of self-governing socialism. Furthermore, they wanted to affirm the Roma nation through public education and to support cultural values in order “to get out of the state of backwardness, to achieve full economic, political, social cultural emancipation...”²⁸⁵ In addition, this association aimed to build a monument in memory of Roma killed by the Nazis during WWII and start publishing the newspaper *Romano Lil* (Roma letter).²⁸⁶

²⁸¹ Acković, *Romi u Beogradu: istorija, kultura i tradicija Roma u Beogradu od naseljavanja do kraja XX veka*. [The Roma in Belgrade: history, culture and traditions of the Roma from settlement to the end of 20th century] 304.

²⁸² Acković, *Romi u Beogradu: istorija, kultura i tradicija Roma u Beogradu od naseljavanja do kraja XX veka*. [The Roma in Belgrade: history, culture and traditions of the Roma from settlement to the end of 20th century] 217.

²⁸³ Acković, *Romi u Beogradu: istorija, kultura i tradicija Roma u Beogradu od naseljavanja do kraja XX veka*. [The Roma in Belgrade: history, culture and traditions of the Roma from settlement to the end of 20th century] 306.

²⁸⁴ Josip Broz Tito (1892–1980) was the President of Yugoslavia from 1953 to 1980.

²⁸⁵ Acković, *Romi u Beogradu: istorija, kultura i tradicija Roma u Beogradu od naseljavanja do kraja XX veka*. [The Roma in Belgrade: history, culture and traditions of the Roma from settlement to the end of 20th century] 306.

²⁸⁶ Acković, *Romi u Beogradu: istorija, kultura i tradicija Roma u Beogradu od naseljavanja do kraja XX veka*. [The Roma in Belgrade: history, culture and traditions of the Roma from settlement to the end of 20th century] 307.

Unlike the Roma in Czechoslovakia facing assimilatory policies, the Roma in the multi-nation state of Yugoslavia had still kept memory and sense of organizing themselves. Among the Yugoslav Roma, the structures of self-organizing since times of Ottoman's rule were still kept.²⁸⁷ Yugoslav Roma were having more connections with Roma in Western Europe thanks to Yugoslav reforms of decentralization starting in 1965 which opened their borders. Therefore, the participation of the Yugoslav Roma delegation at the First World Roma Congress in England was crucial since it changed their situation.

Interestingly, Roma in Yugoslavia from activists are in the same moment becoming representatives of the transnational Roma movement and Yugoslavia alongside. It is missing in the literature what was the border between and to which extent Roma were not considered nationalists in clash with the ideas of the Yugoslav Socialism.

In my view, the international politics of Yugoslavia, especially the Non-Aligned Movement and good relations with India endorsed the Roma movement in Yugoslavia, see the invitations of International Romani Union from India, where the International Roma Festival was held. At this occasion, Esma Redžepova, a Macedonian Roma singer, was declared as Queen of Roma music.²⁸⁸

Although the Roma nationality in Yugoslavia was not recognised on the same level as the Turkish or Albanian nationalities, Roma were nonetheless granted certain cultural rights. The Romani language began to receive institutional support, including publication in books and broadcasts on radio and television. The autonym *Rom* was used publicly instead of *Cigan*

²⁸⁷ For example, the mention of the first Roma organization according to Marushiakova and Popov in the Balkans in Bulgarian Vidin was founded in 1910. See more in the first part of Chapter 1.

²⁸⁸ See Chapter 3.

(Gypsy), and the use of the Romani flag was also permitted.²⁸⁹ These developments stand in contrast to the more limited cultural recognition experienced by Roma in Czechoslovakia.

Unlike Czechoslovakia during Normalization, the Roma in Macedonia were recognized as an ethnic group in a constitutional amendment and this also occurred at the same time in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro, where Roma were an included nationality in those constitutions.²⁹⁰

This all was as well reflected in the number of Roma members in the Communist Party. In 1973, two years after the First World Roma Congress, 174 Roma people joined the Serbian Communist Party. In fact, 614 Roma were members of the party.²⁹¹ This was the path leading to recognition of Roma nationality in Yugoslavia in 1981.²⁹² However, at the same time, the subsequent political turmoil after Tito's death (1980) led to the events that resulted in the break-up of Yugoslavia which completely halted the development of the process of self-determination of the Roma minority in Yugoslavia. Another reason why the rights of the Roma minority were not successfully enforced in public was that, according to David Crowe, an American historian, Muslim religious leaders and Albanian nationalists forced the Roma to declare Albanian identity in the census.²⁹³

The Gypsy question and Socialism forever?

While in Yugoslavia the Roma got the recognition of the nationality, the Roma in Czechoslovakia were remaining as unadaptable social group having no cultural rights.

²⁸⁹ David M. Crowe, *A History of the Gypsies of Eastern Europe and Russia* (New York:St Martin's Griffin, 1996), 226.

²⁹⁰ Crowe, *A History*, 226.

²⁹¹ Crowe, *A History*, 226.

²⁹² Crowe, *A History*, 227.

²⁹³ Crowe, *A History*, 228.

After the Third World Roma Congress, which according to Donert, requested Czechoslovakia to stop the genocide on Roma.²⁹⁴ It is meant to stop coercive sterilisation of Roma women which sometimes happened without consent, informing them. Roma women, who did not know how to read, just signed documents. Otherwise, they were threatened by social workers that their children could be removed to orphanages and husbands imprisoned.²⁹⁵ Later in 1989, the women were even offered financial incentives to be persuaded.²⁹⁶

The StB, a state security police, kept eye on activities of Milena Hübschmannová who was interrogated regarding her connections with the Roma abroad, being part of organizing Roma in the country and being in touch with the Charter 77. All of that she negated.²⁹⁷ Karel Holomek, a son of Tomáš Holomek, had direct connections with chartists. He also offered his *chata* (cottage) to dissidents to meet.²⁹⁸ Among them were dissidents and writers such as Ivan Klíma, Jan Trefulka, Milan Uhde, Milan Šimečka, Jaroslav Šabata, and others.²⁹⁹ Unfortunately, in 1981, the lorry transporting illegal literature to be separated in Czechoslovakia was revealed. Karel Holomek's address was mentioned in the list among the distributors of the literature. Therefore, he was interrogated which proves his daughter Jana Horávéthová: “But unfortunately, he was then tortured psychologically by the State Security officers, they called him, they demanded his cooperation, so he was then led as a witness to cooperate, fortunately he signed himself on, but they tortured him psychologically a lot. I remember that they used to call him even at night on the phone, and he used to be very bad

²⁹⁴ Donert, *Rights of the Roma*, 241.

²⁹⁵ See more in this report: European Roma Rights Centre, *Coercive and Cruel: Sterilisation and its Consequences for Romani Women in the Czech Republic (1966-2016)*, (European Roma Rights Centre, 2016), https://www.errc.org/uploads/upload_en/file/coercive-and-cruel-28-november-2016.pdf

²⁹⁶ Donert, *Rights of the Roma*, 233.

²⁹⁷ Donert, *Rights of the Roma*, 241.

²⁹⁸ Karel Holomek was a brother-in-law of Milan Šimečka, Slovak dissident and writer.

²⁹⁹ Jana Šustová, “Ve věku 86 let zemřel romský aktivista a politik Karel Holomek” [Romani Activist and Politician Karel Holomek died at the age of 86], *Czech Radio: O Roma vakeren*, September 2, 2023, <https://radiozurnal.rozhlas.cz/ve-veku-86-let-zemrel-romsky-aktivista-a-politik-karel-holomek-9075485>.

about it. So, then he even had himself hospitalised by a doctor he knew outside Brno with some psychiatric diagnosis. He had a really hard time...”³⁰⁰

Above two cases prove us that people active in the Roma question without regard to their ethnicity and as well that there were individuals with Roma origin who members of dissent circles were. However, unfortunately, we do not know more about them. Czech historiography fails in incorporating them into its broader narrative.

In this way, Romani Studies and Roma literature can be very helpful. Therefore, we need Romani Studies experts to contribute with knowledge from the Roma communities, to whom they have access as an auxiliary tool. The method of oral history as an auxiliary tool can give us hints as well what to focus on while exploring the archives. According to Charta 77, we know that former members of the Union of the Gypsies-Roma having university degrees were doing unskilled work.³⁰¹ As a result, we have limited sources produced by Roma themselves who could not publish their literature and Roma culture had not given space to be presented. In this way, I want to emphasise the work of Romani Studies experts and Roma literature can be a solid source for us. For example, Karolína Ryvolová described and presented to us Andrej Giňa, a famous Roma musician and writer, in another light as a former member of the Union of Gypsies-Roma for the town of Rokycany in Western Bohemia. Hübschmannová with the Union of the Gypsies-Roma was planning to publish his Giňa’s book. However, Normalization made this idea impossible. Andrej Giňa could genuinely publish his prose after 1989.³⁰² Such stories are needed to be recorded for reconstruction of Roma dissent

³⁰⁰ “Ale bohužel ho potom dost estébáci týrali psychicky, volali ho, chtěli po něm spolupráci, takže on byl potom vedený jako svědek ke spolupráci, nikdy se naštěstí neupsal, ale hodně ho drtili psychicky. Já si na to pamatuju, že mu volávali i v nočních hodinách na telefon a on z toho potom býval hodně špatný. Takže pak se nechal i hospitalizovat někde u známého doktora mimo Brno s nějakou psychiatrickou diagnózou. Opravdu to prožíval velmi těžce. ... “- Jana Horváthová, interview by Jana Šustová, *Czech Radio: O Roma vakeren*, September 2, 2023, <https://radiozurnal.rozhlas.cz/ve-veku-86-let-zemrel-romsky-aktivista-a-politik-karel-holomek-9075485>

³⁰¹ Císařovská, Přechan. *Charta 77*, 204-205.

³⁰² Karolína Ryvolová, introduction to *Pařiv: Ještě víme, co je úcta* [Pařiv: We still know what respect is], by Andrej Giňa (Triáda, 2013), 8.

in Czechoslovakia and in other countries to be incorporated into mainstream state dissent narratives as the one group of those various others.

From my point of view based on the case of Andrej Giňa, Karel Holomek, and Milena Hübschmannová, I see the Czechoslovak Romani population in Czechoslovakia like a separated world within the Czechoslovak state. Even among the Roma I can find two different worlds resembling mainstream society. Similarly like in Czech society, there are the Roma intelligentsia, who had been part of the dissolved Union of the Gypsies-Roma contrasted by the rest of their Roma fellows facing lack of access to minority, cultural and language rights in all spheres of their life. However, they did not react to this. That is why the state repression in the 1980s was not as strong as in previous decades, except for the forced sterilisation of Roma women and segregation of Roma children in so-called special schools. Nevertheless, 1980s were the peak of the living conditions among the Roma apart from those living in marginalized and segregated settlements in Slovakia.³⁰³

In my view, they were satisfied with the level of the quality of life at those times, still not comparable with the standards of the rest of society, and that was adequate for them. That is why there is still a sentiment of nostalgia for those times among Husák's children of Romani origin. Therefore, I see this as an example of my own world within Czechoslovakia since a similar situation was in the society between the dissidents and the rest of the society. However, in fact, Roma dissidents were as the other dissidents in Czechoslovakia. Moreover, unlike the mainstream Czechoslovak dissidents, Roma dissidents had no foundation, network, support and any base where to meet as had Czechoslovak non-Roma dissidents in frame of meeting in the home universities and other own events. Therefore, in my view, the Third World Roma Congress could be the only single one opportunity to be heard by the world.

³⁰³ Pavelčíková, “Romové v českých zemích” [Roma in the Czech Lands], 129.

As far as the evolution of Romani people's efforts to gain rights is concerned, there are generational changes, the postwar generation were ageing and dying. In the end of the 1980s Tomáš Holomek and Miroslav Holomek, two main key players in negotiating with the state in the case of the Roma question, passed away. In 1982, Emil Ščuka founded theatre ensemble *Romen* in Sokolov³⁰⁴ and published two issues of Roma magazine *Lil-List* [Leter] in 1985.³⁰⁵ The group of new generation activists started gathering to organize themselves to debate on the topic of the recognition of Roma nationality.

During the times of changes of Perestroika, in 1987, the Central Committee of the Communist Party declined meeting and request to re-add the Union of Gypsies-Roma among the other organizations in frame of the National Front by Vlado Oláh and other two Slovak Roma activists sent in April 1986.³⁰⁶

A secretary at the Central Committee, Karel Hoffmann organized a meeting with 20 Roma activists who were selected by both Government Commissions for the Gypsy Population in November 1988 and January 1989. In February, a critical report, which was produced as the result of the meetings, was sent to the party Presidium. In this report, the autoethnonym *Romové* was used instead of the exonym *Cigáni*.³⁰⁷

In November of the same year, the Velvet Revolution was held and the situation was changed. Jan Rusenko, director of Roma folklore ensemble Perumos, and Emil Ščuka, at that time prosecutor in Prague, jointly delivered a speech in front of crowds supporting Civic Forum in the Park of Letná, Prague.³⁰⁸ In the following two days, the committee for the Roma Civic Initiative (Romská občanská iniciativa - ROI) was established by these two persons and lawyer

³⁰⁴ Donert, *Rights of the Roma*, 244.

³⁰⁵ Pavelčíková, "Romové v českých zemích" [Roma in the Czech Lands], 127.

³⁰⁶ Donert, *Rights of the Roma*, 244.

³⁰⁷ Donert, *Rights of the Roma*, 244.

³⁰⁸ Donert, *Rights of the Roma*, 247.

of Roma origin Vojtěch Žiga. During these hasty revolutionary days joined activist Ondřej Giňa and Christian Roma intellectual Vlado Oláh who started the negotiation between Roma minority and democratic opposition.³⁰⁹

Political Scientist Pečínka describes these days that the above-mentioned group together with Milena Hübschmannová wrote together leaflets in the flats of Žiga and Rusenko in Prague. These leaflets written in Slovak and Roma language were addressing the Roma to use the chance and to join the ROI.³¹⁰

In the Laterna Magika theatre, on the 23rd of December, 1989, Ščuka participated in the first plenary session of the Civic Forum. Furthermore, they as well dismissed the approach of the regime towards the Roma question and called for adding Roma nationality in the new Constitution.³¹¹ Having been given the opportunity by the OF, the leaders of ROI rejected the continuation of the idea of the Union of the Gypsies-Roma as a legacy of the Communism in the new magazine of ROI, *Romano lav* (Roma Word) in which blamed the former union leaders for corruption and careerism with the usage of the words of the Husák regime.³¹²

In March 1990, Ščuka became a leader of the ROI Central Committee. After all, in 1990 during the first free elections, in the Czech Republic Roma representatives had the opportunity to candidate for the party OF in the Czech Republic and Public against Violence (Verejnosť proti násiliu - VPN) which brought for ROI 8 seats. As a result of these opportunities given by the Civic Forum in collaboration with ROI, in 1990, 11 Roma became Members of Parliament in Czechia and Slovakia, which lasted till 1992. Out of this, 8 MPs were elected from the ROI party. Out of them 6 MPs in the Czech Republic, Klára Samková, an activist of Non-Roma

³⁰⁹ Pavel Pečínka, "Romani Politicians as Part of the November 1989 Velvet Revolution," *Romea.cz*, November 17, 2014, <https://romea.cz/en/czech-republic/romani-politicians-as-part-of-the-november-1989-velvet-revolution>.

³¹⁰ Pečínka, "Romani Politicians as Part of the November 1989 Velvet Revolution."

³¹¹ Pečínka, "Romani Politicians as Part of the November 1989 Velvet Revolution."

³¹² Donert, *Rights of the Roma*, 250-251.

origin, was elected into Federal Assembly (Federální Shromáždění - FS) and the rest of 5 Dezider Balog, Zdeněk Guži, Ondřej Giňa, Karel Holomek and Milan Tatár became MPS in the Czech National Council (Česká národní rada - ČNR). In Slovakia, ROI was represented by Gejza Adam in the FS and Anna Koptová in Slovak National Council (Slovenská národní rada – SNR). Besides this, there were also other politicians of Roma origin for other parties. In Bohemia, MP Ladislav Body for the Communist Party and in Slovakia Vincent Danihel and Karol Seman within the Democratic Left (Strana demokratické levice –SLS).³¹³

Though the Union of the Gypsies-Roma was rejected by a new generation of Roma activists, who might have misrepresented information influenced by Husák's regime propaganda, it still remains a fundamental organization. Moreover, the founding of Union of Gypsies-Roma was a genuine historical moment in the case of the Roma emancipation movement that laid the foundation of the activism, network, Roma literature publication and ideas which still were realized after November 1989. For example, in 1991, the founding of the Museum of Roma Culture in Brno or establishing the Department of Romani Studies at the Faculty of Arts at Charles University in Prague.

By founding the ROI party, the Czech Roma movement became again part of the transnational movement. In the next decade, Emil Ščuka became a president of the International Romani Union at the Fifth World Roma Congress that happened in Prague in 2000.³¹⁴

³¹³ Pečínka, "Romani Politicians as Part of the November 1989 Velvet Revolution."

³¹⁴ Donert, *Rights of the Roma*, 270.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I juxtapose the transnational Roma movement with the Czechoslovak case during the first three World Roma Congresses held in 1971, 1978, and 1981. This comparison highlights how the movement of Roma in the countries on both sides either supported or hindered the Roma movements.

The first chapter focuses on presenting the efforts of Roma people in Europe prior to the Second World War. It is important to note that the efforts of Roma for their emancipation started already in the Ottoman Empire. In the 1920s, similar initiatives emerged in the Soviet Union and 1930s a congress was held in Romania, and the coronation of the Roma king from the Kwiek family among the Lovari Roma in Poland took place. However, Hitler's rise to power and subsequent WWII halted any progress toward Roma emancipation. At the same time, the Holocaust of Roma became a powerful reason for the community to self-organize. After WWII, Roma Holocaust survivors received neither recognition nor compensation. This lack of justice became a key issue, alongside other demands such as support of Roma culture, history, language, traditions and the pursuit of minority rights in their countries.

In contrast to the Roma in Europe, the Roma in Czechoslovakia, who were persecuted during Masaryk's first Czechoslovak Republic on base of the Law 117 of the year 1927, did not have any formal established organization. The efforts of Czechoslovak Roma are dated during the postwar times till 1969 when the Union of Gypsies-Roma (Svaz Cikánů Romů) was allowed to be founded.

In the **Second Chapter**, I focused on the reconstruction of the First World Roma Congress in England including the preparations and the presentation of the commissions with their goals. This also involved the adoption of symbols which were important for uniting the

Roma. From the perspective of Czechoslovakia, I analyze the report written by members of the Czechoslovak Roma delegation from the Union of Gypsies-Roma. This report is a valuable source that allows us to examine the influence of state propaganda which reflected the circumstances the Roma leaders in Czechoslovakia had to accept to have their own organization for their own representation.

Third chapter is dedicated to the Second World Roma Congress in Switzerland. The transnational Roma movement grew stronger. A major milestone was the founding of the organization *International Romani Union* which gained consultative status at the United Nations, and established connections with Indian representatives.

On the other hand, the situation in Czechoslovakia was getting difficult, especially after the invasion of Warsaw Pact armies led by the Soviet Union in 1968. State authorities became alert and suppressed all the activities of both branches of the Union of Gypsies Roma in Czech and Slovak Socialist Republics in 1973. From Czechoslovakia, Anna Klemárová, a journalist from Slovakia, participated in the congress in Geneva thanks to personal invitation from Ján Cibul'a. The others former representatives of the Union of Gypsies-Roma were not allowed to travel to Switzerland.

The fourth chapter allows us to explore a wide gap between the Roma in Europe and in Czechoslovakia. The Transnational movement was joined by the Roma in the United States and most importantly the German Sinti. They managed to win the recognition of the Roma Holocaust by West Germany and the recognition of the Roma and Sinti minority with the aid of the International Roma Union. However, the transnational Roma movement was immediately fractured by separation of Sinti from the International Romani Union.

In Czechoslovakia, the Roma were not only segregated from the rest of the transnational movement, but also deprived of minority, cultural, and political rights. Therefore, I used the

case of Roma emancipation in Yugoslavia, as both Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia were approved by socialist states to send delegations to the First World Roma Congress in England in 1971. Unlike Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia was successful in pushing through. They managed even to get a nationality statute whereas the Roma in Czechoslovakia became one of the most legally unprotected. In this chapter, I focus on analysis of the Document about the Roma minority in Czechoslovakia released by Charter 77. Notably, the issue of Roma and their relationship to the dissent emerges, although they were not with it. The only possibility to be heard was the collaboration with the International Roma Union. Therefore, Roma activists were striving to get to Göttingen for the congress, but the regime did not allow them to travel.

However, an interesting shift occurred in Roma activism in Czechoslovakia during the Velvet Revolution, when Roma activists became part of Civic Forum and also founded their own Roma Civic Initiative, a political party that was successful in the 1990 Parliament. The Roma in Czechoslovakia were represented by 11 Members of Parliament. This was a milestone, and nothing like it has been repeated since.

From the above-mentioned summary, it is evident that the Roma movement in Czechoslovakia did not intertwine with the transnational Roma movement. The was largely due to the period of Normalization, during which the regime was tightened following the 1968 invasion by the Warsaw Pact Armies led by the Soviet Union, which brought an end to the Prague Spring. The Union of the Gypsies-Roma continued to operate until 1973, when it was disbanded. The dissolution of the UGR not only deprived the Roma people in Czechoslovakia of support for their emancipation, the preservation of their culture and the development of their language, but – above all- destroyed the Romani intelligentsia.

In my view, the regime began to realize that that the Czechoslovak delegation, along with the Yugoslav delegation, was one of the strongest and most influential at the First World

Roma Congress. At this point, fostering connections between Czechoslovak Roma and the Roma in other European countries was no longer considered desirable. Here, we can observe a clash between the ideological frameworks: socialist Czechoslovakia regarded the Roma as a social group to be assimilated. This approach to the so called “Gypsy question” involved the implementation of assimilationist policies, which led to the disintegration of traditional cultural values and erosion of Roma identity especially as they were not accepted by the mainstream society.

Conversely, the transnational Roma movement sought to organize itself and to cultivate a sense of historical consciousness and collective memory. This was reflected in the adoption of key symbols at the First World Roma Congress, such as the flag, the anthem, the acceptance auto-ethnonymum Rom as part of the pursuit of recognition as national minority. In my opinion, this led the regime to grow vigilant, perceiving a potential threat in the possibility Roma could become more organized, which during the Cold War could have been seen as subversive.

Secondly, the Roma were not perceived as a nationality but as a social problem. Therefore, the efforts to participate in following congresses were thwarted. Czechoslovak Roma tried to communicate with Ján Cibul’a and Grattan Puxon, however, they were not permitted to travel abroad.

Puxon states that, unlike those prominent active Roma individuals I have presented in my thesis, who were not allowed by the regime to attend the Third World Romani Congress in Göttingen, other Roma participants from Czechoslovakia were present at the congress.³¹⁵ How many were there? Under what conditions did they manage get to West Germany? Who were

³¹⁵ Puxon, personal e-mail communication with the author, July 31, 2024.

they, how active were they in the Roma question at home and what kind of threat might they have posed to the Czechoslovak regime? To answer these questions, further archival research is still required.

A genuine connection between Czechoslovak Roma and the Roma in the rest of Europe only emerged after 1989.

When I was working on this thesis, it began to reflect on how the concepts of institutionalisation and dissent relate to the emancipation of Roma. Viewed through these lenses, the picture shifts considerably. First, Roma emancipation is, by some *gadžo* (non-Roma) scholars perceived as a form of Roma nationalism. In my view, it resembles the nationalism of the Czechs during their National Revival, a period when Czech language was disappearing under the influence of German language, without any immediate aspiration for statehood. (The idea of creating “Romanestan” was proposed by Vaida Voevod and the Kwiek dynasty in Poland, however, this idea was rejected during the congress).

Second, emancipation or the efforts of Roma activists and intellectuals in Czechoslovakia to organize themselves was a reaction on the institutionalisation of the Roma question through the assimilationist policies, which led to the persecution of the Roma in their everyday lives, particularly during the 1950s and 1960s in Czechoslovakia (e.g. forced dispersion, sterilisations of Roma women, placement of Roma children in special schools, and denial of Roma cultural identity). Interestingly, the juxtaposition of local and transnational movements revealed that the issues faced by Roma were more or less similar, regardless of where they lived with the exception of Yugoslavia, where Roma emancipation received state support.

Third, dissent emerged as opposition to the regime during the period of Normalization. Roma activists and intellectuals who became dissidents were not, and still not, considered as a

part of the mainstream dissent in Czechoslovakia. During the writing of this thesis, I found that the Roma were not included in mainstream dissent, which was represented by intellectuals, clergy, and artists. Yet the persecution of the dissidents and the Roma was similar. However, the Roma faced more complex and intersecting problems, for example, cultural identity denial, paternalism, and racism. That is why Roma activists and intellectuals appear as distinct dissenting group.

However, they were part of Czechoslovak dissent, as shown by the story of Anna Klempářová who was persecuted for participation at the Second World Roma Congress; Karel Holomek, was in touch with dissidents, and Milena Hübschmannová, who acted as a bridge between Roma and Non-Roma communities. Both Holomek and Hübschmannová were also persecuted for their activities. Sadly, this is not reflected in traditional Czech historiography, which is focusing solely on Charta 77 and their immediate circles. However, the dissidents were in contact with the Roma. Further evidence of this is collaboration between Roman Roma with Havel's Civic Forum during the Velvet Revolution, which resulted in 11 Roma being elected as Members of Parliament in Czechoslovakia.

What does this imply? Did Czech historians have to wait for a professor based at a globally respected university to point out the Roma movement in Czechoslovakia? Do Czech historians have to wait for the new generation of historians who collaborate with Western scholars? Or is it just simply a case of overlooking and neglecting a less popular topic concerning a minority perceived as insignificant? Similar questions I can ask from more perspectives. However, still I have not been able to determine whether Roma activists were considered part of Czechoslovak dissent or not.

Though this work has a limited scope of research, I faced obstacles from the very beginning, for example, in relation to archival research. The archive of Grattan Puxon, which

provided me with materials for the First World Roma Congress, was made accessible to the public in London during pandemic years. To work on Roma history still nowadays means to work with materials that are not produced by the Roma themselves and therefore in academia, this perspective is missing, which reflects the underrepresentation of Roma which is crucial factor for creating the narrative about the Roma themselves.

It is necessary to put together information on the archives of the various congresses and more things. In this way, I find Romani Studies as a great auxiliary tool for creating history.

I realized that to have enough sources and opportunity to work with histories elaborated in concepts and reflected in historical debates is a privilege which Roma history still cannot afford. The Roma, as people who were in the past persecuted and marginalised, never had institutionally taught culture, language, and created their own historical narrative.³¹⁶ Nota bene, let us realize that only in the last decade has the Roma Holocaust been scrutinized, and only now we can say that some progress has been made in research on Romani emancipation, both from an international perspective and from the perspective of local national movements. However, it is still only a matter of creating or reconstructing the Romani narrative, but not of mainstream historians incorporating it into national narratives.

To sum it up, this thesis affirmed that the Socialist Czechoslovakia suppressed Roma emancipation while striving to improve living standards at the cost of implementing its own assimilationist policies, which ultimately led to discontinuation of the movement. Its results are still remaining, and even today democratic state of Czech Republic has not solved the majority of them.

³¹⁶ Milena Hübschmannová founded the Department of Romani Studies at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, in 1991. Emil Ščuka established the first Roma high school in Kolín (*Romská střední škola v Kolíně*) in 1998.

A stark example is the removal of a pig farm in Lety near Písek at the site of former concentration camp for the Roma during the WWII. The memorial was only opened with dignity to the victims in Spring 2024 - 30 years after continuous downplaying and denial of the Roma Holocaust perpetrated by Czech politicians. This delay happened because the topic, despite being one of the darkest chapters in modern Czech history, was treated as a marginal history. It is still a current topic.

Furthermore, there is currently a postponed deadline for Roma women to receive compensation for sterilisation that lasted from 1966 to 2012!

The state authorities, with their anti-gypsyism and paternalism, are actively hindering the process. The situation is so alarming that non-Romani NGOs are addressing it and trying to help. I believe this is because it is considered a "Roma issue" one that much of the majority population is unaware of or chooses to ignore.

On the other hand, there are also positive things, for example, the relationship of Roma and former President Václav Havel. Having met Roma people in the prison where he could learn from them their perspective, Havel was supportive of the Roma minority. He attended Roma festivals, over which he gave his patronage, and offered moral support to Roma artists and activists, whom he invited to Villa Amálie in Lány.

Perhaps most importantly, he supported the collaboration between Civic Forum with the political Roma party Roma Civic Initiative. Unfortunately, this fact is mentioned only in Roma media whereas in the books written by Czech authors about Havel, it is barely acknowledged.

The research shows that this is because it is considered a "Roma issue" that the majority of society is not sufficiently aware of and therefore does not consider as important. Of course,

the Roma continue to face right issues today, as the injustices committed against them under the previous regime have not been adequately addressed in mainstream historiography. Therefore, these matters are once again seen as relevant only to the Roma themselves.

It is precisely such challenges and injustices that lead the Roma to organize and unite around a common purpose – to obtain redress and equal human rights, on par with their fellow citizens. In this respect, history and other social sciences play a crucial role. Another important task of these disciplines is to demonstrate that there is no such thing as a separate Roma history; rather, from the perspective of this thesis, it is both a regional and an international history.

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