

Is the European Union ready for the Roma? *Discussion on E.U. integration policies*

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Abstract

In our increasingly diverse societies, it is essential to ensure harmonious interaction among people and groups with plural, varied and dynamic cultural identities as well as their willingness to live together. Policies for the inclusion and participation of all citizens are guarantees of social cohesion, the vitality of civil society and peace. Thus defined, cultural pluralism gives policy expression to the reality of cultural diversity. Indissociable from a democratic framework, cultural pluralism is conducive to cultural exchange and to the flourishing of creative capacities that sustain public life¹ (UNESCO 2002).

Introduction

The Roma people are thought to have arrived in Europe around 500 years ago in a diaspora that probably started in India. Since then they have settled around Europe and now communities now exist in most European countries. But they have never really integrated European mainstream society, in fact, this trait has become part of their identity and pride and is now regarded as a non-violent struggle – how can European union integrate the Roma, this “stubborn” and marginal community, in a society that has now settled in strict rules of Democracy and Capitalism for all its inhabitants?

At a time when all the other ethnic minorities are being addressed and worked with towards a better life in Europe, why are all the attempts with the Roma failing? What has been done wrong? What still needs to be known about the Roma to right these wrongs?

Have European Union’s policies for integration been keeping the Roma from their own integration? In this essay I will discuss if the European policies for integration have actually been keeping the Roma from their full integration, since they have been involved in criminal and poverty cycles for decades.

But first, what *is* integration? If integration is understood as a means to let a people/ ethnic group develop and participate actively in politics or social life, feeling at home in a host country, feeling free to show and live cultural traditions and religion. More than an institutional change in policies and practices, what appears to be urgent in European Union is to promote a change of mentalities and accept that European countries are now at the “jump-start (towards) their transition to diverse and tolerant societies”², making this a valuable opportunity to accept peoples that could offer the path to this change by bringing breaking new perspectives to established mindsets.

And, when it comes to European integration of the Roma people, maybe the European Council should in fact consider some policies that might look “*non-integration*” at the first sight since “the *integration* ones” seem to be having the opposite effect.

In the first part of this essay, I will discuss the cultural specificities of the Roma, and analyze if they really need or want integration, according to the western understanding of the concept.

¹ UNESCO *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* [article 2] 2002.

² (Goldston 2002: 161)

The second part will analyze how voluntary marginalization and the maintenance of ruled boundaries have been necessary to managing Roma's own ethnic identity, through Barth's theory of ethnic boundaries.

Finally, the last part of this essay will analyze what *integration* means for both parties involved – European policies and minority's claims – and what are the consequences brought by these conflicts in understanding. Further, the deconstruction of European integration aspects helps us understand the differences between cultural claims and citizenship dues and rights, for example, and the consequences are better understood if we have this in mind. Finally this chapter will focus on how current policies might have contributed to the criminal and poverty cycle that now affects most communities of gypsy's around Europe and how these policies needed to change in order to stop the cycle and move towards a more adequate understanding of integration and inclusion of a people whose particularities need special attention.

The particular asset of the Roma – the will to stay marginal to mainstream society – poses questions to European integration policies that are not easy to answer. First, what needs to be revised in these policies in order to include solutions for all different ethnic minorities, always considering their right to cultural traditions and maintenance of their identity traits? Is it possible that the existent policies may have been serving the exact opposite purpose of their intention and kept the Roma from their own development and natural integration forcing them to “integrate” in a society whose moral and lifestyle's acceptance mean losing their own identity and cultural values?

While *The Situation of the Roma in an Enlarged European Union*³, *UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*⁴ and the *European Parliament resolution on the Protection of Minorities and Anti-discrimination policies in an Enlarged Europe*⁵ help us understand what has been agreed on so far when it comes to European policies for the respect of ethnic minority's rights and the attempt to preserve cultural differences around Europe, the work of Fredrik Barth⁶, Zoltan Barany⁷ and Michael Stewart⁸ were of extreme importance on the conceptualization of the Roma's “conflict” with the European Union. Barth's theory on ethnic boundaries and constructivism helps understand how complex a process of integration is for the Roma, although it also shows that because cultures are not static but a constant flow of social interactions⁹, integration in the society minor ethnic communities live in is also possible since these boundaries might be bent and managed in order to facilitate socialization and acceptance of different “rules”. Barany and Stewart's work, for instance, explain detailed theories on Roma's socialization in western society and whilst Barany opts for a description of Roma's choices of living and the consequent reactions from some governments in post-communist regimes, Stewart's article focuses more on the European Union thoughts on “gypsies” communities and analyzes the main criticisms that Roma's way of life has suffered so far. Soysal¹⁰ will be helpful to clarify the definition of citizenship and identity in the last chapter of this essay.

Other authors were also extremely important for the development of this essay, such as Amelie Constant, Martin Kahanec and Klaus Zimmermann¹¹, crucial to understand the specific assets that make the Roma a “different” ethnic minority on an E.U. perspective and why Roma pose a “values threat” to European mainstream society; or James Goldston¹² who analyzes concrete European attempts for Roma integration and theorizes on what has been done wrong; and Iskra Uzunova¹³ who suggests an hypothesis for the successful integration of Roma in Europe – Koh's theory on norm-internalization.

In the development of this essay there were several stages in the process. The first step was to define the subject of study: in this case the Roma people.

³ European Comission 2004.

⁴ UNESCO 2002.

⁵ European Parliament 2005/ 2008 (INI).

⁶ Barth 1969.

⁷ Barany 1994.

⁸ Stewart 1997.

⁹ Barth 1969: 10.

¹⁰ Soysal 2002.

¹¹ Constant, Kahanec & Zimmermann 2008.

¹² Goldston 2002.

¹³ Uzunova 2010.

The next step was to set some objectives: “Finding out why are the Roma so difficult to integrate in the mainstream society in Europe”. The research method that followed was mainly based on course material and library database articles. Aside from the material in the Bibliography, many more articles were read, mainly to situate some study cases in the theory discussed here. If the dissertation was to continue or to be extended, these study cases would have been of maximum importance, allowing a detailed analysis of what is being done and how could these processes change. Given the page restriction, the purpose of this essay ended up relying solely on the theoretical discussion of understanding the social boundaries and processes associated with the Roma and how the aim of policies of integration can change to invest more on changing social norms than continue with practices that even if good in theory, cannot reach their goal in practice.

Roma culture In Europe

“In truth gypsies all over Europe have been remarkably successful in preserving their way of life, adapting to their changed conditions in order to remain the same”¹⁴.

This last sentence resumes very well how, generally, common sense defines the Roma for the past centuries: a people that do not want to change, adapt or mingle with the other European groups. They resemble what the untouchables are to India’s caste system, occupying the least wanted jobs, doing the shadiest activities, being Europe’s social pariah group by excellence. Westernized world has come to consider the gypsies in constant crisis because of their lack of territory and known history (the two basic charters for national integrity) but maybe we should give it some thought.

The Gypsies have never thought of themselves as a diasporas’ people of Europe, being nomad in some cases and quite happy with that situation, but more as a people who share a common language and cultural heritage although not sharing the will for a common territory. This has come to “upset” Europe, as they are seen as “a kind of awful historical mistake, a blot on the parsimonious schema of ‘one people, one state’ with which we try conceptually to order Europe today”¹⁵. In the communist regime in Hungary, this strange and mysterious people were seen more as a sociological problem than just a different people with cultural distinctions. This category empowered them to strengthen three assets: “their communal organization, their attitude to the creation of wealth and most curiously the importance they attach to sharing speech and song”¹⁶. This was because, according to Stewart, the gypsies have always lived in a “state of siege” under which the outside world has always tried to break their cohesive communities and transform their households into individual families, making them fight back and become even more closed and ethno-centred. Gypsies themselves tend to be egalitarian, with no institutional structures nor property arrangements but with important emphasis on individual identity and character. As they see the outside world as a threat or enemy, they rarely leave the settlements alone, and tend to never leave one of their fellow members alone among the *gajos* (word themselves use to call the non-Roma). They also educate their children together, as a community, having a lot of play rituals about elder members kidnapping children as a way to remind their parents of their right to raise them too.

The gypsy way of life, *Romani*, could be regarded as a potential good regime, full of great values that seem to be a bit “forgotten” in our globalized, liberal world. Their differences become more apparent in the post-communist Europe of today, where mainstream society shares the common value of raising social status and community respect by a balanced equation of work and money earned, but “in dealing the gypsy tries to achieve a similar moral elevation, only in his case by making money grow without effort and labour. If the ‘peasant’ ethic amounts to a belief that you can only harvest what you have sown, the Gypsies seem determined to prove that in reality there are always things to harvest which they have not sown”¹⁷. This idea is commonly mistaken in mainstream society and that’s part of the reason gypsies tend to be seen as ‘social pariah’: because they do not have the same cultural nor economical values. So the gypsy’s favourite activity is, in fact, trading. “Earnings from wage-work, although more important economically, are ideologically devalued as being fit only for private accumulation in the household. The money which gypsies ‘win’ in trading, provides a basis, ideologically at least, for cycles of feasting and celebration in which Gypsy brotherhood (and thereby community) is ritually established.

¹⁴ Stewart 1997: 82.

¹⁵ Stewart 1997: 84.

¹⁶ Stewart 1997: 86.

¹⁷ Stewart 1997: 92.

These feasts, generally, are a congregation of all the rituals that bond the gypsy community, including of course singing among brothers, and also the trading of clothing, which accentuates the feeling of belonging and equal status among the “brothers” gypsies.

So why are the Roma different? Constant *et al*¹⁸ tell us that the main divergent point is culture: “Hainmueller and Hiscox (2007) confirm these results and find that negative sentiments are powerfully associated with a cultural threat and perceptions about identity; it is differences in cultural values and beliefs rather than fear of labour market competition and economic well-being that provide the link between education and attitudes towards immigrants”. In other words, even though the gypsies are always accused of criminal acts and marginal lifestyle, it is their cultural behaviour that sparks the differences, the boundaries between mainstream society and their community.

Constructing Roma identity

And how did the Roma build their strong identity and community cohesion, even though without a shared territory?

Their identity was constructed throughout times mainly from the establishment of strict social boundaries and a willing marginalization of their own communities. As Stewart concludes, the gypsies had to create an image of themselves that did not count on a national territory. One source was the trading development, a way to show the *gajos* that they did not need to incorporate them in their economic cycle; the other source, was their political egalitarianism and ethos of sharing. Their pride is to show the “outside world” that it is possible to live self-sufficiently, without the need to cooperate or interact with the *gajos*.

There are strong similarities between Gypsies and Jews, who live amongst host populations with whom they may share more than with other member of their own ethnic group in other communities around Europe but “the feat of the Gypsies is to have done this with neither the ideological device nor the practical power of their host populations”¹⁹.

Maintenance of their identity also needed a process of marginalization, as Barany describes. This marginality “is manifested in a variety of ways: by limitations on political representation, denial of cultural rights, exclusion from certain professions, restrictions on housing, refusal of public and/or private services, etc”²⁰ but does not need to be static or constant. This marginality is more like a flux, or “a result of exclusionary dynamics in several dimensions”²¹. Although the Roma have been “politically, socially, culturally and economically marginalized by the dominant populations of the region, on the other hand, the Roma themselves have cultivated their marginal status by preserving their distinctive identity and resisting recurrent attempts at assimilation and integration by dominant groups in the area”²². Roma specificity is that “comprising a heterogeneous set of communities, their diversity is such that it is not clear what *the* Romani identity is, especially since many Roma do not consider themselves members of a cohesive ethnic group but instead identify with the subgroup to which they belong”²³.

Since Roma identity is stigmatized (meaning: associated with negative prejudices) it is regularly not profitable for them to assume their identity when interacting with non-Roma and that’s why the marginalization process is needed, in order to be possible to maintain strong cultural traditions within the community without the assimilation of different behaviours from the “outside” society. It is thus important to also understand how these boundaries are maintained in this marginalization process, as it seems to be a fairly known and necessary process in their identity construction.

Barth explains this process and helps us understand how is it possible that even living among culturally different societies, the Roma have been able to maintain boundaries and ethnic identity so strongly defined, with little or no change in traditions or values.

¹⁸ Constant, Kahanec & Zimmermann 2008: 3.

¹⁹ Stewart 1997: 95.

²⁰ Barany 1994: 323.

²¹ Barany 1994: 323.

²² Barany 1994: 323.

²³ Barany 1994: 325.

Barth produced two important discoveries: first, that “categorical ethnic distinction does not depend on an absence of mobility, contact and information but do entail social processes of exclusion and incorporation whereby discrete categories are maintained despite changing participation and membership in the course of individual life histories” and secondly that “ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of social interaction and acceptance, but are quite to the contrary often the very foundations on which embracing social systems are built. Interaction in such a social system does not lead to its liquidation through change and acculturation; cultural differences can persist despite inter-ethnic contact and interdependence”²⁴.

Thus, on the first finding, we can see the processes of marginalization that Roma use to maintain their differentiation, although they might be flexible and interactive. And then we also understand how it is that living among non-Roma not only does not damage Roma identity but on the contrary, helps maintaining the interactions that are the basis for identity distinction, meaning, it helps to maintain “the rules of the game”. Barth criticizes the traditional view of “a race = a culture = a language and that a society = a unit which rejects or discriminates against others”²⁵ because this conception does not allow one to understand the “phenomenon of ethnic groups and their place in human society and culture. (...) Most critically, it allows us to assume that boundary maintenance is unproblematic and follows from the isolation (...)”²⁶. Barth later explains how then ethnic groups do not depend on their isolation but marginalization – meaning, social boundaries. “Ethnic boundary canalizes social life. (...) The identification of another person as a fellow member of an ethnic group implies a sharing of criteria for evaluation and judgment. (...) On the other hand, a dichotomization of others as strangers, as members of another ethnic group, implies recognition of limitations on shared understandings, differences in criteria for judgment of value and performance, and a restriction of interaction to sectors of assumed common understanding and mutual interest. This makes it possible to understand one final form of boundary maintenance whereby cultural units and boundaries persist”²⁷.

What Barth mainly argues is that it is not what the boundaries entail, culturally, but the way the boundaries are maintained that makes ethnic identification possible. It is not about “what game you play” but more about “how you play the game”: “Thus the persistence of ethnic groups in contact implies not only criteria and signals for identification but also a structuring of interaction which allows the persistence of cultural differences. The organizational feature which, I would argue, must be general for all inter-ethnic relations is a systematic set of rules governing inter-ethnic social encounters”²⁸. Also, when in a heterogeneous environment, “just as both sexes ridicule the male who is feminine and all classes punish the proletarian who puts on airs, so also can members of all ethnic groups in a poly-ethnic society act to maintain dichotomies and differences. Where social identities are organized and allocated by such principles, there will thus be a tendency towards canalization and standardization of interaction and the emergence of boundaries which maintain and generate ethnic diversity within larger, encompassing social systems”²⁹.

Barth’s theory on ethnic boundaries allows us to understand how Roma’s strong identity can persist in an inter-ethnic and globalized society nowadays, where interactions are permanent and influences in values and morals are at constant test. His theory also helps us understand how their marginalization can persist even if Roma today live in normal neighbourhoods, mingled with other ethnicities, and not in far and closed communities anymore. Roma’s especially, are seen as pariah groups, meaning “groups that were actively rejected by the host population because of behaviour or characteristics positively condemned (...)”³⁰. This means that boundaries are not just maintained by their own willing marginalization and interaction rules but also strongly maintained by the host population exclusion.

²⁴ Barth 1969: 10.

²⁵ Barth 1969: 11.

²⁶ Barth 1969: 11.

²⁷ Barth 1969: 15.

²⁸ Barth 1969: 16.

²⁹ Barth 1969: 18.

³⁰ Barth 1969: 31.

The following chapter, where I will discuss the integration of Roma in the European Union, can be better understood if we first understand that Barth also delineated three main strategies that ethnic minorities follow for their integration³¹ and that Roma have followed none, leading us to believe and understand that in fact they may not want integration as we know it, and our policies might have to be adapted for the Roma case.

European policies: obstacles to integration

When one reads the *Resolution on the protection of minorities and anti-discrimination policies in an Enlarged Europe*³² written by the European Parliament, it seems clear that the concerns are correct, such as better education, providing means for development, housing, health care, etc. But the conflict lays on the way these advices are being applied. The Roma are a main issue in current European discussions since they seem to resist to all the attempts of integration.

But first, what *is* integration? If integration is understood as a means to let a people/ ethnic group develop and participate actively in politics or social life, feeling at home in a host country, feeling free to show and live cultural traditions and religion, and at the same time connecting emotionally to their citizenship dues and rights, then something went wrong with the Roma's integration in the European Union. As we have seen, being a pariah group for almost 700 years now, it seems impossible to keep acting the same way expecting different results. Instead of keep trying to *tame* Roma into adopting a European attitude, the European Union should try to reach a common ground instead, making compromises that would be positive for both sides. Barany suggests some measures³³ that "if sensibly implemented, *may* hold the promise of reducing the Roma's marginalization *and* relieving societal pressures in the short and medium term"³⁴, such as increasing education on both Roma's children and non-Roma's children about each other, the creation of Romani groups to encourage development and growth, the creation of Romani festivals and cultural centres, the creation of Roma's media like a television or radio program and the prohibition of media's maintenance of negative portraits of this ethnic group, training programs for the police forces and employment policies to encourage Roma's inclusion in community politics and contribution, and the investment on the natural ability that the Roma have for business, among others³⁵.

These measures, Barany argues, could only lead to positive outcomes for the Roma, and possibly help reducing the poverty and criminal cycle they have been deeply involved: inadequate education = inferior work opportunities = precarious jobs = crime and social ills. Roma's problems are seen in Europe – mainly Eastern Europe – as "the typical symptoms of an underdeveloped people living within countries of (at least) a medium level of development"³⁶. It appears then that the main preoccupation from European Integration Policies should start at the root of the social illness that is the poor education Romani children have. Starting from being "thrown" into mentally challenged children special classes or punished for not attending some classes (when most of the times it is the parents that do not provide the motivation needed to go to school) and even not learning practical knowledge they can apply in their daily life, has to be turned around and stopped.

³¹ Barth (1969: 33) identifies three strategies: i) an attempt to become incorporated in the pre-established society; ii) the acceptance of a "minority group" status through an accommodation and will to reduce their minority disabilities keeping their cultural specificities in areas where interaction is non-existent while participating in the larger system of society (This is the only strategy that one could argue to be followed by the Roma but, still, gypsy members do not want to actively participate in the wider society system as the host population does, as far as we have concluded so far); iii) an emphasis of their ethnic identity, using it to develop new positions and activities forming new sectors that did not previously existed in the host society (like art forms, some native techniques, etc.).

³² 2005/ 2008(INI).

³³ Barany 1994: 343.

³⁴ Barany 1994: 343.

³⁵ Barany 1994: 343.

³⁶ Barany 1994: 330.

“There is considerable conflict between Romani Gypsy child socialization and education processes and mainstream education practices. In Romani communities children are encouraged to show initiative and independence at an early age. They learn by participating in the communities’ economic activities and observing adult verbal and non-verbal communication skills. In mainstream education, by comparison, they learn in an enclosed classroom where they are rarely able to initiate or create their own learning experiences. Due to the increasing demands of industrialized societies, literacy is vital for Romani people. However, education systems are at present failing to meet the needs of these children. Structural inequalities such as poverty and racism, coupled with differing viewpoints on the benefits of education, continue to contribute to the low participation rates of Romani children in mainstream schools”³⁷.

Besides the lack of education, another conflict that arises between Roma and non-Roma people in host societies is the citizenship concept.

Soysal reflects about the paradoxes of citizenship when talking about Diasporas in Europe: “The first paradox is the increasing decoupling of rights and identity. In the nation-state mode of political community, national belonging constitutes the source of rights and duties of individuals, and citizenship is delimited by national collectivity”³⁸.

The post-war era, however, changed this association, witnessing a recasting of national political rights as human rights. This is why today cultural rights also integrate important human rights and is included in citizenship claims. This “reification of personhood and individual rights expands the boundaries of political community by legitimizing individuals’ participation and claims beyond their membership status in a particular nation-state”³⁹ allowing stateless minorities, just like the Roma, to claim social rights even though they do not integrate political life or do not exercise citizen duties. “As the source and legitimacy of rights shift to the transnational level, paradoxically, identities remain particularistic, and locally defined and organized. (...) this has a lot to do with the work of international organizations (such as the United Nations, including UNESCO, and the Council of Europe, as well as the discipline of anthropology), through which the universal right to “one’s own culture” has gained increasing legitimacy, and collective identity has been redefined as a category of human rights. What are considered particularistic characteristics of collectives – culture, language, and standard ethnic traits – have become variants of the universal core of humanness or selfhood”⁴⁰. This, of course, also permits the prevalence of exclusionary practices as the basis of identity distinctions and ethnic boundaries.

The second paradox that Soysal identifies is the one that “regards collective claims-making and participation in public spheres – in other words, the practice of citizenship by individuals and groups”⁴¹. With the post-war reconfiguration of national status, the old categories become obsolete. “Classical notions of citizenship assume the existence of actors whose rights and identities are grounded within the bounds of national collectives, and these collectives constitute the “authentic” sites for the realization of claims-making and civic participation”⁴². How then can the Roma feel political citizens of a host society in which they are social pariah groups?

These reflections on education and citizenship help us realize that the Roma problem is not one of inadequacy, or of ideology wars, but is mainly about philosophy of life and discussions on rights and duties. Today, the Roma are no longer regarded as just criminals, and good practices have been gradually increased in local policies contributing for their correct integration in communities and proper education, but a lot needs to be done. Education does not need to be only directed to the Roma children. Host societies should also have access to more information on Romani lifestyle and culture because if culture is what identifies “the other” and maintains an intrinsic distance – even if there is interaction in the social sphere – all this should be enlightened. Roma Gypsies have always been “the other” in European society and that is the main change that is crucial to occur.

³⁷ Smith 1997: 243.

³⁸ Soysal 2002: 141.

³⁹ Soysal 2002: 141.

⁴⁰ Soysal 2002: 142.

⁴¹ Soysal 2002: 143.

⁴² Soysal 2002: 143.

Their lack of a common territory, and usually of a common language, and a strikingly different way of life, way of acting, values and morals, make Europeans - who only know their history as thieves and common knowledge of “those who you cannot trust”, being stigmatized with the association with poverty and crime – feel scared when in fact, they might not need to be.

But how can this mindset be reset?

“Roma make up the largest minority in Europe, and throughout their dispersed and isolated communities endure persistent discrimination and poor, even deplorable, socio-economic conditions. How to integrate them into the European community remains an ongoing concern. This Note will argue that the European strategy for Roma integration is inadequate because it fails to address the normative nature of anti-Gypsyism, the isolationist and ethnocentric nature of certain elements of Romani culture and Gypsy law (and especially outsiders’ perception of those), and the profound and mutual mistrust between Roma and non-Roma in European countries. This Note aims to provide enough background to illuminate the dynamics of social interaction between Roma and non-Roma in order to explain one important reason why the European human rights platform is ill-suited to effectively address the profound social, political and cultural challenges the Roma face in Europe. Because socio-ethical norms, the minority rights legal framework will be ineffective unless the nature of the social tension between Roma and non-Roma is first acknowledged and addressed. (...) In simpler words, it is difficult to promote minority rights and non-discrimination when the majority and minority have not even agreed to cooperate with each other”⁴³.

Uzunova reflects in this article on how to approach a problem that has many dimensions, starting with the lack of understanding between Roma and non-Roma and leading to the ineffective strategies followed by the European Union. Uzunova then suggests that this problem should be addressed under the light of Koh’s theory of norm internalization⁴⁴. Social norms are, in practice, much more effective in shaping a community’s behaviour than legal norms. For instance, “Gypsy law is such an oral legal tradition. Anti-Gypsyism is also a social norm, because it has normative nature⁴⁵ and it’s deeply ingrained in society as a justified way to deal with a social phenomenon⁴⁶. Both Gypsy law and anti-Gypsyism, then, can be seen as social norms”⁴⁷.

Since some scholars argue that social norms are not only stronger than legal forms but can also influence the latter, these may be, therefore, a crucial means to address this conflict and develop new forms of integration in European society.

One theory that has been discussed as a possible application to the Roma situation in Europe is Harold Koh’s theory. His theory implies that “compliance is reached via an interrelationship between the transnational and domestic arenas. Koh describes a transnational legal process as a process containing three stages (interaction, interpretation, and internalization) on three levels (social, political and legal). His theory presents both a theoretical explanation of why nations obey and a plan of strategic action for prodding nations to obey”⁴⁸.

Koh’s theory says that a strategy for effective Roma inclusion would be to “cut down through segments of authority and social organization and involve various actors and entities repeatedly interacting, rather than simply concentrate on sanctions for violations on the nation-state level, for instance⁴⁹. (...) If Koh is right that interaction between various actors is a necessary catalyst for norm internalization, the striking observation to be made about the Roma situation is that, for the most part, there is no real or systemic interaction between Roma and non-Roma communities on the domestic level.

⁴³ Uzunova 2010: 286.

⁴⁴ “Norm-internalization is the process by which certain legal norms, such as non-discrimination on the basis of race, for instance, become social norms and, thus, become effective, actual guarantees for members of that society. Because social norms are arguably much more powerful factors in shaping the dynamics of a society than are its written legal rules, this process is extremely important, especially in the area of human rights” (2010: 307).

⁴⁵ Anti-Gypsyism is a kind of moral racism towards Gypsy people.

⁴⁶ Anti-Gypsyism is “seen as justified because of the perceived threat posed by certain elements of Roma culture” (2010: 307).

⁴⁷ Uzunova 2010: 307.

⁴⁸ Uzunova 2010: 310.

⁴⁹ Uzunova 2010: 312.

On the contrary, anti-Gypsyism and Gypsy law both prescribe avoiding interaction⁵⁰. (Or if we take Barth's theory into account, a certain level of interaction may exist but it is so ruled and "rehearsed" that there is no real interconnection and exchange of knowledge, feelings or emotions, but just actions or gestures repeated on a daily basis allowing both parts to feel that they are contributing to a harmonious relationship when they may not even be aware that "real interaction" does not, in fact, exist).

It is this "real" interaction that is needed in order to move forward. A certain degree of understanding and common ground must be found, since it can only be achieved by human values, as cultural ones are all so different.

In conclusion, what Koh's theory affirms is that integration policies should not come from a legal norm but be applied through local practices of governance policies where the vertical transaction can, in fact, exist. Roma members need to participate in decisions regarding their community and this can only start with social norms, from the bottom-up, transforming eventually into legal norms. What has been done so far, and unsuccessfully, has been broad measures of integration, like social housing, or legal benefits, along with strict sanctions for those who do not agree to cooperate with the "great improvements" that governments try to bring to gypsy's communities that, given the normative nature of this people, are not good but only bad, because they feel they have the right to decide where to live, where to go, when, or how. The measures that "allow them to feel they are a part of the mainstream society" are nothing but wrong since Roma do not want to be part of their host societies.

Romani pride is precisely one of self-sustain, of economic independence and own values and traditions that have nothing has to do with European mainstream way of life. This is why the only successful measures have been the ones of self empowerment in their own community, allowing members to grow and develop as they need to. They do not need to *be integrated* in any mainstream society, but they do need means of subsistence. Their claims have now been legitimized by cultural and human claims even though governments feel there is not much more to be done if Gypsy communities continue to not agree to participate in public spheres, and not contributing to substituting their negative stigma to a more positive one by mainstream society. It is a complicated process that cannot be addressed easily or without patience, since change has to start among Roma and non-Roma cooperation in local groups that are yet to be created.

Conclusion

After discussing Roma history, Roma identity, and the obstacles to their European integration, one feels that the answer to this problem is even further away than it seemed at the beginning. As Goldston refers, minority rights are very important for the European project, not only because of Europe's past – Ethnic minorities in Europe have a long and detailed history of being mistreated and suffering, and also because this same past has led to some of the most important treaties such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or the U.N. Charter; Europe's present – Yugoslavia only reminds us of what happens if minority rights are disregarded; and Europe's future – with all we learned from the past and are learning now, there is no excuse for not making a better future, more respectful and tolerant towards minorities, that can maintain peace and harmony among different cultures and races⁵¹.

"As enlargement proceeds, the EU's heterogeneity will only increase with the union becoming more and more an agglomeration of diverse political and linguistic groups"⁵².

This can be understood as the final goal for the European Union: the equal integration of all its ethnic minorities and mainstream majorities, adopting different strategies specifically designed for each one. Of course this can only be achieved through education and interest in learning about each other. Maybe one of the first measures to be taken could in fact be the promotion of interest in discovering "the other" and "the otherness", providing means for all European members to learn about cultures, languages and lifestyles without feeling it as a threat, or an urgent need or demand. Promoting interest and curiosity is the best way of eventually providing the tools for cooperation among poly-ethnic communities in the future.

⁵⁰ Uzunova 2010: 313.

⁵¹ Goldston 2002: 150.

⁵² Goldston 2002: 150.

Hiring specialized scholars and professionals on Roma rights, Roma history and Roma culture to integrate motivated teams, all around Europe, able to work with the Roma to find out what can and needs to be done seems to be the first step to bring them into the main stage and public political spheres. Even if social boundaries always exist, these need to be moved further and further away, towards a utopian Europe, perhaps.

And when it comes to European integration of the Roma people now, maybe the European Council should in fact consider new, innovative approaches. Roma's nature and culture teaches them to be free, to not follow rules and to question the world outside. Just because Europe agreed to live in a stratified, capitalist and democratic society, it doesn't mean that all its inhabitants need to agree on this way of life and more so if Gypsy communities were here before this economic and social model was adopted.

As Goldston states, "Part of the problem is that in the EU, as in the candidate countries⁵³, governments have frequently sought to recast racial discrimination as a social and economic problem. However well intended, such thinking often focuses on the Roma – on their insufficient skills, their purportedly inadequate emphasis on education, or their alleged "inadaptability" to hard work – rather than on discriminatory treatment they receive. Such arguments displace official responsibility and hinder reform by suggesting that the majority need do little to change. Although improved opportunities for adequate jobs, health care, and housing are essential, real progress requires that governments directly confront discriminatory practices and entrenched racist attitudes among their populations"⁵⁴.

Since Roma people are a part of European History, Roma members should be listened to and respected in their way of willingly integrate this society. And if our history is part of our identity, "one cannot help but have identity"⁵⁵.

More than an institutional change in policies and practices, what appears to be urgent in European Union is to promote a change of mentalities and accept that European countries are now at the "jump-start (towards) their transition to diverse and tolerant societies"⁵⁶, making this a valuable opportunity to accept peoples that could offer the path to this change by bringing groundbreaking new perspectives in established mindsets. In particular, the Roma, who have been living in Europe for so long, experiencing what has been done right and what has been done wrong should be acknowledged for their relevance in the building of this new multi-cultural society.

⁵³ Reference to the former candidate countries that wanted to integrate European Union.

⁵⁴ Goldston 2002: 159.

⁵⁵ Soysal 2002: 142.

⁵⁶ Goldston 2002: 161.

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