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## **The Gypsy Minority in Bulgaria – Policy and Community Development**

### **Historical background**

The first wave of large-scale settlement of Gypsies (endonym *Roma*, exonym *Tsigani*) in Bulgarian lands can be traced back approximately to the period of the 12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries; some earlier settlement may also be possible (some authors are inclined to think that the Gypsy presence in these lands began in the 9<sup>th</sup> century) (Marushiakova and Popov: 1997). Numerous historical sources have records of a Gypsy presence in Byzantium in that period and their entry into Serbia, Wallachia and Moldova (Rochow: 1983; Rochow and Matschke: 1991; Gilsenbach: 1994). Considering the geographical situation of the Bulgarian lands, it is quite logical to suppose that the coming of Gypsies to Bulgaria should be referred to no later than that period.

There is a wealth of historical information about the Gypsy presence in Bulgarian lands during the time of the Ottoman Empire. References to them as “chingene”, “chingane”, “chigan”, or “kibti” are found in many official documents (mainly tax-registers) from that period (Galabov: 1961; Stojanovski: 1974).

Processes of sedentarisation in the towns and villages were active among a part of the Gypsy population in the Ottoman Empire (15<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries), others were still living as nomads and had preserved the old trades. A new type of semi-nomadic lifestyle also emerged at that time

(Gypsies with a winter residence and an active nomadic season within the regional boundaries).

Most certainly, these processes did not include all Gypsies, most of whom were nevertheless very active. Often Gypsies would break away from their traditional crafts and take up farming; usually, however, they still practised some occupations and crafts. The most popular occupations were those of the village blacksmiths and town musicians. Registers from the years 1522–1523 also listed tin-smiths, farriers, goldsmiths, sword-makers, cutlers, shoemakers, curriers, sieve-makers, butchers, guards, servants, and others. It is difficult to define which occupations were traditional and which were newly acquired, but the traditional professional specialization of Gypsy groups seems to have been the case in most instances. The demographic information about Gypsies in Bulgarian lands in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries is incomplete and quite unreliable.

The issue of the civil status of Gypsies in the Ottoman Empire is a rather complicated one as Gypsies had a special position in the overall social and administrative organisation of the Empire. Despite the population division into two main categories – Moslem (the faithful) vs. Raya (gentiles) – Gypsies had their own, rather specific dual status outside these two categories. They were differentiated according to ethnic principles (something quite unusual for the Ottoman Empire) with no sharp distinction between Muslim and Christian Gypsies (for tax and social status purposes). As a whole, Gypsies were actually closer to the subordinated local population, with the exception of some minor privileges for Muslim Gypsies (Gypsies who worked for the army were more privileged). Nevertheless, Gypsies were able to preserve a number of ethno-cultural characteristics such as their nomadic lifestyle and some traditional occupations.

A good example of the civil status of Gypsies in the Ottoman Empire were Gypsy slaves running away from the vassal principalities of Wallachia and Moldova to seek refuge in the Empire. This process increased in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries when a great number of Gypsies made use of the wars between Austria and the Ottoman Empire and the temporary Austrian occupation of parts of Northeastern Serbia, Northwestern Bulgaria and Wallachia (1690–1718) to enter the Ottoman Empire and settle there (the so-called second Gypsy migration wave in Bulgarian lands). The so-called “big Kelderara invasion” from Wallachia and Moldova began after the Crimean war. It led to new waves of Gypsy groups coming to Bulgaria in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (the third Gypsy migration wave in Bulgarian lands). The migration of Gypsies from neighbouring countries (mainly Romania and Greece), as a result of their nomadic lifestyle, continued until the 20<sup>th</sup> century and was usually related to the change of country borders during the wars (the two Balkan wars, World War I and World War II).

Regular population censuses were conducted after the Russian-Turkish war and the re-establishment of the Bulgarian State (1878). The majority of Gypsies in that period (more than two thirds of their total number) lived in the country, nomads with permanent winter settlements were probably considered as belonging to that group as well. Processes of sedentarisation and orientation towards life in *mahali* (ethnic quarters) developed in some nomadic Gypsy groups in the 1920s and 1930s.

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Gypsies in Bulgaria were affected by an important phenomenon: the search for their own place in the social and political structure of the macro-societies where they were living. The centuries of co-existence between Gypsies (this is true

especially for the sedentary ones) and the surrounding population brought about a gradual effacement of their particular ethno-social structures, forms of social life and self-government. Certain patterns of social organisation were borrowed from the dominant society.

Particularly interesting are the amendments to the electoral law of 1901, which deprived Gypsies of the right to vote and the Gypsy response to them, which indicated the trends in the development of social consciousness among Bulgarian Gypsies. The 61st session of the Eleventh Regular National Assembly, held on 31 May 1901, debated on and passed a "law for amendment of the Electoral Law". Conforming to its stipulations (Paragraph 2, Articles 4 and 7 - "Who cannot be a voter") the following text was added: "including the non-Christian Gypsies and also all those Gypsies who cannot establish residence". Thus, the electoral rights of the Muslim Gypsies (the majority at this time) and the nomads were suspended. During the long debates on this law in the presence of all prominent Bulgarian political leaders, no speaker showed concern about these discriminatory and anti-constitutional encroachments upon the rights of Gypsies (Article 86 of the Constitution of Bulgaria stated that, "voters are all Bulgarian citizens who are 21 or more years of age and are in full possession of their civil and political rights.").

The reaction of the Gypsies (or at least of some of them) took Bulgarian society by surprise. The first Gypsy conference was convoked in Vidin, in 1901, immediately after the amendments to the electoral law were passed and a decision was taken to start a campaign in order to revoke them. After lengthy preparations, the *tzari-bashi* of Bulgarian Gypsies, Ramadan Ali, invited the Gypsy leaders from all over the country to Sofia where they drew up a common petition, insisting that Gypsies in Bulgaria should have the

same rights as the rest of the population. The petition was taken to the National Assembly on 1 June 1905. The complete silence and lack of any response to the petition led to the convocation of the first Gypsy Congress in Sofia on 19 December 1905, when a new petition was voted with the same demands and was once again brought to the attention of the National Assembly. Eventually, the Bulgarian National Assembly voted for a new electoral law, in which the restrictions on the voting rights of Gypsies were dropped.

The end of World War I saw the beginning of a new period in the development of Gypsy civic organisations. In 1919, the organisation *Istikbal* (Future) was founded in Sofia, headed by Shakir Mahmudov Pashov (outlawed in 1925 with the Supplements to the Law for Protection of the State). In 1929 *Istikbal* was restored (again headed by Shakir Pashov). In 1931 the organisation started to publish the newspaper *Terbie* ("Education") as an edition of the Mohammedan Cultural Organisation for National Education. In 1932 a conference in the town of Mezdra made efforts to broaden the nation-wide influence of the organisation but after the coup of 19 May 1934, which overthrew the elected government, the organisation was dissolved.

After the communist takeover on 9 September 1944, the Gypsies in Bulgaria became the targets of a carefully elaborated policy carried out by the new regime. Different tools and means were used to secure its success: decisions of the Communist Party, state and administrative ordinances, manipulations of the structures of the different social and political organisations, usually in the guise of the Fatherland Front (a union of all non-fascist parties in Bulgaria, created in 1942, which was later reduced to the status of a totalitarian Communist organisation) and so on. How straightforward this policy was and, more importantly,

how and to what extent it worked in practice is another question.

For a relatively short period (the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s), in unison with the Soviet model, this policy consisted of trying to establish Gypsies as an ethnic community within the structure of the Bulgarian nation, with equal rights and their own identity, to involve them actively in the “building of the new life”. At first Gypsies were defined as a specific nationality, with their own rights, formulated in the so-called Dimitrov Constitution (1947). They were well taken care of and an active Gypsy intelligentsia was organised. Through the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) and the Fatherland Front committees the Gypsy intelligentsia was actively included in the problems of the Gypsy population. At this stage the aim was mainly to make Gypsy living conditions equal to those of Bulgarians (i.e. Gypsies had to become citizens with equal rights and ideological supporters of the communist ideology). An All-Gypsies’ Organisation against Fascism and Racism and for the Promotion of the Cultural Development of the Gypsy Minority in Bulgaria was created on 6 March 1945, headed by Shakir Mahmudov Pashov. The newspaper *Romano essi* (Gypsy voice) made its appearance in 1946, and the Gypsy theatre, Roma, was founded in 1947 in Sofia. The local authorities actively assisted in the creation of local branches of the Gypsy organisation and their integration into the local structures of the Fatherland Front as sections with equal rights. The National Conference of the Gypsies in Bulgaria held on 2 May 1948 confirmed its commitment to the policy of the Fatherland Front (Marushiakova and Popov: 2000).

However, the attitude of the authorities towards the Gypsy organisations changed with time. At the beginning of the 1950s the local branches of the Gypsy organisations

were dissolved and their members joined the sections of the Fatherland Front. The Roma theatre merged with local cultural centers – the reading-rooms – and the All-Gypsies’ Organisation against Fascism and Racism and for the Promotion of the Cultural Development of the Gypsy Minority in Bulgaria ceased to exist. Shakir Pashov (by this time a deputy in the National Assembly) was sent to a concentration camp on the Danubian island of Belene. This marked the end of the Gypsy organisations and the shift to a new policy towards Gypsies, which aimed at ethnic and cultural effacement – the final goal being their complete assimilation into the “Bulgarian socialist nation”.

In accordance with this policy the official mention of Gypsies became very restricted (the census held in 1956 is the last one where the numbers of Gypsies in Bulgaria were officially published). In the mid of 1950s the practice of renaming Muslim Gypsies i.e., substituting Bulgarian names for their original Turkish-Arabic ones, was introduced. Decree 1216 of 8 October 1957 of the Council of Ministers on the resolution of the problem of the Gypsy minority in Bulgaria was followed and supplemented by another, Decree 258 of 17 October 1958 on the settlement of the issue of the Gypsy population in the People’s Republic of Bulgaria. In accordance with the latter, “vagrancy and pan-handling” were prohibited in the People’s Republic of Bulgaria and citizens were obliged “to get involved in labour beneficial to society and to work according to their strength and abilities”. A glance at the explanations attached to the decree reveals that it was intended to solve all issues concerning nomadic Gypsies, who had no permanent residence at that time (they numbered around 14,000): they were to settle in permanent domiciles and acquire permanent jobs.

On 5 April 1962 the Politburo of the Central Committee of the BCP (Bulgarian Communist Party) voted on Decision A 101, the purpose of which was "to curb the negative tendencies ... among Bulgarian Muslims, Gypsies and Tartars to identify with the Turks [...] and to enhance patriotic education." In compliance with the terms of this decision, "they can register themselves and their children as Bulgarians, and change their first, middle and last names without a ruling of the People's Court but simply by a legal request sent to the respective local councils".

The fear of problems which this minority might create was typical for the policy of socialist Bulgaria – on the one hand, because of their Muslim religion, some Gypsies might become bridges for Turkish and Muslim policy and influence; on the other hand they could join the Muslim community in Bulgaria and make it too big and dangerous.

Gypsies were considered a demographic threat as well. An existing popular opinion held that Gypsies had a higher birthrate than Bulgarians and their relative number would grow steadily in relation to the total number of the population, to become in a few generations higher than that of Bulgarians who would then be a minority. This fear produced the new socialist family code. It introduced the system of decreasing per-child allowances in large families – a vestige of the totalitarian regime's encouragement of birthrate only in ethnic Bulgarian families (which averaged fewer than two children per family). Another aspect, which also saw Gypsies as a threat, was the cultural one (this was reflected in the thesis about the vulgarization and 'Gypsy transformation' of Bulgarian culture).

The achievements of the state policy were still quite insignificant and at the end of the 1970s a new strategy was adopted towards Gypsies. The outcome of this new

strategy was Decision 1360 of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the BCP of 9 October 1978: "For further improvement of the work among Bulgarian Gypsies, for more active integration into the building of a developed socialist society". Besides the general directions in the policy towards Gypsies ("The emphasis should be laid on their involvement in labour which benefits society, on advancement in their education, on improvement in their living standards, on an increase in their consciousness and self-confidence as fully-fledged citizens of socialist Bulgaria, on their growing participation in the building of a developed socialist society"), this decision formulated certain specific measures: "to gradually eliminate segregated sections and quarters within the next ten to twelve years, to improve the professional skills of working Gypsies, to construct a vast network of day-care centers and kindergartens to enable the children to learn the Bulgarian language at an early age, to ban all segregated schools and boarding schools, to make special efforts to attract Gypsies to amateur art groups, to reflect and artistically recreate the positive changes in the life and thinking of Bulgarian Gypsies" and so on (Materials of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party). The directives were elaborated in detail in a decree issued by the Council of Ministers on 26 January 1979. The practical realisation of these decisions deserves special mention. In practice the results were meager, even the opposite of what was intended, notwithstanding the excess of formal reporting. For example, only 36 out of the 547 existing Gypsy quarters (mainly urban ones) were closed, but some of them sprang up again a few of years later. Only some families received apartments – many of them after bribing officials. The rest continued to live in their old ghettos or joined their relatives in other Gypsy quarters of the country. Even though

the decision explicitly stated “not to allow the existence of segregated schools” for Gypsies, schools of this kind not only survived but even acquired legal status (from 1966 until 1993) hidden behind the euphemism “schools for children with low living standards and culture”. Their goal was to teach “elementary literacy and some professional skills and discipline”. Thus began the policy of unequal education for Gypsies. These segregated Gypsy schools considerably limited the educational options of Gypsy children from a very early age and prepared a mass of low-skilled labour. The Communist government made a simultaneous effort to prepare a small group of Gypsy intelligentsia through some unofficial privileges to study in “normal” schools and then high schools and universities. Thus an ascendant Gypsy intelligentsia was formed with the goal of creating loyal supporters and instruments for the dispersal of communist ideology among Gypsies.

The last phase in the government’s special policy towards Gypsies coincided with the “Process of Revival” of 1984–1985. At the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s the majority of Muslim Gypsies were renamed. Nearly 180,000 Gypsies with Turkish-Arabic names were directly affected by this process (the figures are from 1981). Those who had preserved their names were forced to take Bulgarian names at the time of the renaming of the Turkish population in Bulgaria during the Process of Revival, the largest of all taking place in the period 1984–1985. As it proved impossible to create a ‘scientific argument’ as an explanation for their Bulgarian origin that had to be ‘recovered’ (‘revived’), the official position was to deny the very existence of Gypsies in Bulgaria. The authorities considered them officially non-existent – there was no mention of Gypsies in the media and academic publications, and in many places Gypsy ghettos were surrounded by high

concrete walls to hide them from foreign observers. It was forbidden to speak Romanes in public, to perform Gypsy music and sing Gypsy songs; Muslim women could not wear traditional clothes; some customs and rituals were declared a dangerous heritage from old times or a cultural vulgarity and were therefore banned, such as male circumcision, the ritual bath of young brides, arranged marriages, and so on.

In connection with the Process of Revival an old practice concerning Gypsies was remembered – an attempt was made to send at least some of the Gypsies to Turkey together with the Turks during the so-called “great excursion” (the forced emigration of Bulgarian Turks to Turkey in 1989).

Of course such a ridiculous policy yielded no results – neither the foreign observers (let alone the Bulgarian population) could be convinced that the Gypsies and their culture were non-existent, nor was there any Gypsy integration into the Bulgarian nation (nation, but rather the opposite). Finally, the failure of the “socialist national model” of attitude towards the Gypsies as a state policy became evident – its basic purposes (apart from the means that were being used) turned out to be unattainable.

The official treatment of Gypsies during socialism was sometimes absurd and controversial. Its main strategic goal was to deprive the Gypsies of their ethnic individuality and gradually assimilate them completely. But at the same time efforts were made (despite their mediocre practical implementation and predominance of paper work) to improve the living conditions and elevate the culture and educational standards of Gypsies in order to make them equal citizens. For the sake of objectivity, we must say that despite its shortcomings this policy had some positive results for the Gypsies. For example, in Bulgaria, as in the

other Eastern European countries, an active, though not very numerous Gypsy intelligentsia emerged (a phenomenon almost unknown and inconceivable in the countries of Western Europe). According to the Bulgarian population census in 1992, there were 464 Gypsies with M.A. degrees and 274 with B.A. degrees, although the actual number was higher (Rezultati ot prebroyavaneto na naselenieto: 1994). Unemployment was unknown to them, racial attacks and open demonstrations of ethnic hatred were impossible (unfortunately all these phenomena exist now and make the present situation of Gypsies different and difficult again).

### **Ethnosocial structure**

Even a superficial acquaintance with the Bulgarian Gypsies gives us some impression of the great variety of Gypsy communities (some of whom do not have a Roma identity) in the country. There are traditional communities (nomads or sedentary) with preserved old trades, language and ethnic and cultural characteristics, as well as communities who have integrated into the surrounding population and are relatively well-educated and socially active. In order to have a better understanding of the present-day situation of the Gypsy minority in Bulgaria we have to consider not only their place in society from a historical point of view but also their basic ethnic and social parameters and ethnic and cultural features (Marushiakova and Popov: 1997). Based on the above, the present-day problems of Bulgarian Gypsies and the main trends of development of the Gypsy community become clear (Marushiakova and Popov: 2001a).

Gypsies are a specific ethnic community, the so-called "intergroup ethnic community" (IGEC) which has no analogue in the other European peoples. Gypsies in Bulgaria, like Gypsies around the world, are not a united and homogeneous community. They are divided into many internal subdivisions – separate groups, metagroup units and subgroup divisions. Gypsies in Bulgaria can be classified on the basis of group self-consciousness reflected in their endonymes. A complete and well-grounded classification must also consider additional criteria such as language, lifestyle, boundaries of endogamy, professional specialization, time of settlement in Bulgaria, and others. All these criteria reflect on their self-consciousness and give the complete picture of the present state of the Gypsy ethnos in Bulgaria. This is by no means a static picture; it used to be different and will yet be different in other periods of history.

The metagroup community of settled Gypsies or Yerlia (a generic name) is the most numerous and varied one. These are the descendants of the first group who more or less gave up nomadism and settled in the Balkans at the time of the Ottoman Empire. They speak different dialects of the 'Balkan' group of Romanes. The so-called Balkan dialects can differ significantly from group to group. Some groups have forgotten the Gypsy language and speak Turkish (or are bilingual). The community of Yerlia is divided into two main subdivisions – Dassikane Roma (Christian or Bulgarian Gypsies) and Horahane Roma (Muslim or Turkish Gypsies). Within the boundaries of these subdivisions there are some well-preserved groups: the awareness of belonging to the group comes first, groups have preserved their traditional functions and are strictly endogamous and differentiate themselves from other Gypsy groups and the surrounding population. These groups have often

preserved their specific endonyms, traditional occupations and sometimes their nomadic way of life.

At the same time there are large communities whose members remember their appellations, the traditional occupations and the respective group division, but no longer practise them, and the boundaries between groups have been obliterated to a great extent and moved to the frame of the bigger community (Dassikane or Horahane Roma). These processes are typical mostly for big city *mahali*. In some instances, especially after several name and religion changes (such as those in Sofia), community awareness may be on a still higher level (Yerlia) while in others the memory of the past religion and the respective differentiation as a separate community may remain – this is the case of Horahane Roma (Turkish Gypsies) who are Christians.

Sometimes the memory of old occupations and group division is completely absent. The ethnic self-consciousness here, as in the above example, lies within the metagroup.

The Agupti (Blacksmiths) in the Rhodope mountains are separate from the other Yerlia. They are of a specific wave of settlement on the Balkans, they observe a strict distance from other Gypsy groups and have a strong urge to blend with the surrounding Turkish or Bulgarian-Muslim population and sometimes also accept the Turkish or Bulgarian language.

There is another big subdivision of the Gypsy community in Bulgaria, which now belongs to the Yerlia framework. This is the community of Vlach, or Vlachichki Gypsies (an appellation used in Western Bulgaria) or Laho (with variants – Lahoria – used in Eastern Bulgaria). They use language belong to the so-called Vlach (or Old Vlach) dialect group of Romanes. Their settlement in Bulgarian

lands can be dated back approximately to the 17th-18th centuries when their ancestors came from Wallachia (mostly runaway slaves within the Ottoman Empire). They used to be nomads with several group divisions, who gradually became settled in the 1920s and 1930s (some of them even later) mostly in town *mahali*, some changed their religion (those in Eastern Bulgaria are now Moslems) and gradually joined the existing metagroup communities (Dassikane and Horahane Roma). Today co-existence and intermarriages are normal, but the different group origin is still remembered. There are also some differences in appearance as well as some cultural and behavioural specifics, which give them a special place in the general metagroup frameworks of the communities they have entered.

Another group in this subdivision are are Gypsies with Turkish self-consciousness who have a preferential ethnic self-consciousness and declare themselves to be Turks. These are Muslim 'Turkish' Gypsies who have lost most of their group specifics and are often bilingual (speaking Turkish and Romani) or entirely monolingual (speaking only Turkish) (Marushiakova: 2001). Similar processes develop with some 'Bulgarian' Gypsies such as the Dzhor-evtsi, the majority of whom are descendants of intermarriages between Bulgarians and Gypsies. Here, communities with new identities, such as e.g. Milliet or Usta Milliet, should also be mentioned (Marushiakova: 2001).

A second major and very distinct metagroup community among Bulgarian Gypsies is the one of Kaldarashi/Kardarashi (also a generalizing name given by the Yerlia). These are former nomads who were forced to become sedentary in 1958 with a special decree of the Council of Ministers. They live mostly in villages and small towns and less often in bigger towns, in small groups scattered among the surrounding population without forming their own *mahali*.

Kardarashi use their own dialects (the so-called New or Northern Vlach dialects). They are descendants of groups who scattered around the world from Wallachia, Moldova and Transylvania during the great Kelderara invasion (in the second half of the 19th century).

There are two major subdivisions, internally divided into differentiated groups and subgroups (according to regional, clan or other features). All Kardarasha Gypsies differ greatly from the rest and are strictly endogamous within the wider boundaries of the community as a whole.

The Thracean Kalaidjii (tinsmiths) occupy a very specific place between the two major metagroup societies (Yerlia and Kardarasha). A number of criteria, such as lifestyle, group preservation, primary role of group self-consciousness, etc. make them similar to the Kardarasha community, while their language belongs to the Old Vlach dialects of Romanes. They are rigorously closed in their own group and keep their distance from the two major subdivisions of the Gypsy community.

Rather a different example is the one of the third major Gypsy community in Bulgaria – Rudara (called Vlachs or Vlach Gypsies by the surrounding population). Its members speak an old dialect of Romanian and have a preferential ethnic self-consciousness, i.e. identify themselves as Vlachs or old Romanians or as a specific Rudara community and distinctly differentiate themselves from Gypsies, although they are aware of a certain relationship (Marushakova: 2001). Like Kardarasha, they scattered around the world during the great Kelderara invasion and are Orthodox Christians. Rudara were nomads until recently and they have preserved the nomadic lifestyle with seasonal travelling, mainly Ursara who travel with their bears and monkeys across the country in the warm seasons. Rudara

representatives can be seen all over the country, they live mostly in villages and small towns, sometimes in their own *mahali*.

A very interesting issue is how to determine the number of Gypsy groups and especially the major subdivisions of the Gypsy community in Bulgaria according to the above classification. Unfortunately, we have to admit that there is no exact information (and it will probably not be available soon), as such indicators have never been part of any census and are not considered in geographical and sociological studies. Given this situation, we can only rely on a general and personal estimation in order to define the number of Gypsies in the major subdivision of the Gypsy ethnic community in Bulgaria. There is no doubt that more than half of the Bulgarian Gypsies belong to the provisionally limited Yerlia community (including the Lahoria who have joined it). Horahane Roma are more numerous than Dassikane Roma, but it is most likely that about one third of them have preferential Turkish self-consciousness. As far as the other communities are concerned, we can say that Rudara are more numerous than Kardarasha, but it is hard to make a more precise internal comparison. While these are only estimates, they can nevertheless give an idea of the current internal distribution within the Gypsy community in Bulgaria.

### **The number of Gypsies and their migrations**

The question of how many Gypsies were in Bulgarian lands in each period of history has never been answered unequivocally, even in official population censuses.

After the liberation from Ottoman rule and the restoration of the Bulgarian State in 1878, the first Bulgarian

government began to carry out regular censuses. Despite shortcomings concerning their statistical principles and methods, these population counts provided a fairly clear (though not an absolutely complete) idea as to the number of Gypsies in Bulgaria, without, however, taking into consideration other parameters of this community (religion, number of wandering Gypsies, if counted at all, group and metagroup divisions, preferential ethnic identity).

The first two censuses were held in 1881 and 1885 in the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia; they were designed to supplement each other with the principal identification criterion of “mother tongue”. The summarised data for 1881/85 show that 37,600 Gypsies or 1.87 percent of the total population lived in the Principality and 26,724 Gypsies or 2.83 percent of the total population in Eastern Rumelia (Sarafov: 1893).

The first general census in united Bulgaria was carried out on 31 December 1887 (the date is only given for the sake of convenience, the census actually lasted several months), and in 1888 50,191 Gypsies were reported (31,986 in the former territory of the Principality and 18,305 in former Eastern Rumelia), i.e. there was a visible drop in their number.

Subsequent censuses in Bulgaria were held in 1892, 1900, 1905, 1910, 1920 and 1926. The data collected are once again unreliable and incomplete (at least as far as Gypsies are concerned) but still deserve some attention:

- In 1905, 99,004 people were listed as Gypsies; 20,545 of them living in the cities and 78,459 in the rural areas. This represents a total of 2.45 percent of the population, with Romanes being the “mother tongue” of 1.67 percent.
- In 1910, 122,296 people were listed as Gypsies; 28,486

living in cities and 93,810 in rural areas. Gypsies represented 2.82 percent of the total population, and for 1.76 percent of them Romanes was their “mother tongue”.

- In 1920, there were 98,451 Gypsies in Bulgaria; 25,486 of them in the cities, 73,401 in rural areas. They represented 2.03 percent of the total population, and Romanes was the “mother tongue” of 1.27 percent of them (the drop in the number of Gypsies in this case can be explained with the territorial changes after World War I: Southern Dobrudzha was lost to Romania, Northeastern Macedonia and parts of the Rhodopes and the Strandzha Mountains were annexed to Bulgaria).
- In 1926, 134,844 people were listed as Gypsies; 32,101 of them living in the cities and 102,743 in the rural areas. They represented 2.46 percent of the total population, while only 1.5 percent of this population claimed Romanes as their “mother tongue” (Chankov: 1935).

The quoted numbers do not allow for any serious conclusions; although two important points should be emphasized. First, the statistical data reject the firmly established and widespread misconception (both past and present) that Gypsies are mostly urban dwellers, settled in the outskirts of cities. In Bulgaria during this period, the majority lived in the countryside (more than two thirds of the total number); they were probably wandering Gypsies, and some of them with permanent winter residence in the villages were also assigned to this group. Second, we can observe a significant discrepancy between the number of people who considered themselves Gypsies and the number of people who claimed Romanes as their “mother tongue”. Gypsies whose maternal language was not Romanes (unfortunately the relative extent of other mother tongues such as Bulgarian, Turkish, and Romanian

was not recorded) amounted to approximately one third of the total number, and the tendency shows a slow but clear increase over the years.

The demographic data on Gypsies in Bulgaria during the last historical period (1944–1989) are no doubt of great interest. Unfortunately, as with the previous period, the numbers are incomplete and unreliable, although for different reasons. The population census of 1946 registered 170,011 Gypsies, and the last officially published census of 1956 quoted 197,865 people identifying themselves as Gypsies (Rezultati ot prebroyavaneto na naselenieto: 1994). Since then, all data have been classified and preserved in the archives of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP). Thus, in 1959, 214,167 Gypsies were counted, 8,103 of them in Sofia; the last census of 1976, according to unpublished sources, registered 373,200 Gypsies. These data, however, did not seem satisfactory to the Central Committee of the BCP and following a special order of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, with the assistance of the organisations of the Fatherland Front, another census, this time classified, was carried out. In this census, not only those who declared themselves to be Gypsies were counted as Gypsies, but also all those who were defined as Gypsies by the surrounding population, according to their appearance, way of life and cultural traits. The numbers from this census, completed in 1980, showed 523,519 Gypsies living in Bulgaria, i.e. there is a substantial discrepancy between the data from the two censuses which were based on different criteria (Materials of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party).

The data collected during the work on the Ethnographic Atlas of Bulgarians of Gypsy origin prepared for the Central Committee of the BCP in 1979 are also of some interest. According to the numbers cited in it, in 1968 37

percent of Gypsies in Bulgaria lived in cities and 63 percent in the countryside, while only four years later, in 1972, the numbers were respectively 50.9 percent in the cities and 49.1 percent in the villages. The change in numbers should not, however, be explained by some sort of mass migration from rural to urban areas (which, of course, did happen), but by the fact that several settlements received the status of towns in this period (Ethnographic Atlas).

The practice of secret, unannounced censuses (especially of Gypsies) carried out by the forces of the Ministry of the Interior continued in the following years. The last one was carried out in January 1989 in order to collect information about the “process of revival”; it showed 576,927 Gypsies (or 6.45 percent of the total population in Bulgaria) and a special note stated that “more than half of the Gypsies tend to identify themselves with the Turks” (i.e. had a preference for Turkish ethnic identity). A similar census of Gypsies organised by the Ministry of the Interior through the regional directorates, corresponding to the former districts, was held in May 1992 but it was incomplete. The figures from the national census of population and housing stock on 4 December 1992 and data from the 2 percent representative sample (taking into account the expected stochastic errors) (Demografska karakteristika na Bulgaria: 1993) allows for comparisons between the figures from these last three censuses concerning the numbers of the Gypsy population in Bulgaria (see the table in the annex – here for comparison we are giving also the results of the most recent census of 2001).

One thing that is clearly visible in this table are the many instances of serious discrepancies between the data provided by the different censuses; the reliability of many numbers is questionable and cannot be accepted without serious reservations. Thus, the first census found only

38 Gypsies in the region of Pernik (the former district) – obviously unreliable information, since the number of Gypsies in only one quarter (the Rudnichar quarter) of the city is far greater, let alone the entire district. The numbers obtained during the second census seem more adequate. In the region of Gabrovo (the former district), the situation is reversed: the figures in the first census seem more reliable than those of the second. It is also obvious that the numbers are too rounded (35,000 in Varna, 50,000 in Pazardzhik), while in other places both censuses carried out by the Ministry of the Interior showed precisely the same figures (for example for Russe and Silistra). Similar errors cast serious doubts about the precision and correctness of this table.

A question which immediately comes to mind concerns the different methodologies used in the censuses: the first two censuses, organised by the Ministry of the Interior, depended on “external” information (data were submitted by the militiaman in charge of the quarter, assisted by a circle of collaborators), i.e. this census showed “who is considered a Gypsy by the surrounding population”. The last nationwide census, in contrast, was based on information contributed personally by the respondents who had to declare themselves and their ethnic identity. When it comes to Gypsies, this second method discloses a whole new set of problems related to the complex hierarchical structure of their ethnic consciousness and to the widespread phenomenon of preferential ethnic identity. Last but not least come a number of ill-suited statistical and sociological methods applied in the study of this ethnic community (or, at the very best, a number of poorly formulated questions). The inappropriateness of these methods becomes evident when we compare the 2 percent representative sample with the final census data (the error margin ranges from 30 to 260 percent in different districts).

In short, we can now say that the total number of Gypsies in Bulgaria given in the last three censuses (and especially the latest one) are low, while the estimate of the Ministry of the Interior, put forward after the census of 1989, “that more than half of the Gypsies in Bulgaria tend to identify with the Turks” is exaggerated. The comparison of these figures with data collected from certain local authorities and personal observations and calculations, made by the authors, allow us to estimate the number of people of Gypsy origin in Bulgaria as being approximately 700-800,000, which makes Bulgaria the country with the highest proportion of Gypsies. Another question altogether is how many of them, for various reasons, would like to declare themselves as Gypsies. This situation is not unknown in Eastern Europe, as became obvious after the censuses in Romania, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. In any case, the data from the last census helpfully illustrate the direction and depth of the ethnic processes taking place among the Gypsies in Bulgaria.

One of the factors, which make it even more difficult to define the number of Gypsies is their mobility both within and outside the country. To understand properly the nature of contemporary Gypsy migrations, we must first look at how these are connected to Gypsy nomadic traditions. One of the primary ethnocultural features of any given community is the predominant way of life and in the case of the Gypsies there is a close relationship between this and the manner in which they make a living – their professional specialisation. In this respect the situation of Gypsies is highly problematic, since it cannot be established with reliability whether their original, “traditional” way of life was settled or nomadic. It is uncertain whether the ancestors of present-day Gypsies in the Indian sub-continent were sedentary or not, or if the nomadic way

of life was adopted during the long journey to Europe. This fundamental doubt was raised at the very outset of Gypsy studies and still remains an open question today. On reflection, it seems quite likely that there is no simple answer, as indeed with so many other queries concerning the origin of the Gypsies. Therefore, it is quite possible that the distinction between “settled” and “nomadic” already existed at the time when these people left India and that some groups within the wider Gypsy community were bound by tradition to one way of living, while others followed another different pattern.

This distinction between a ‘settled’ and ‘nomadic’ way of life has been drawn since the Gypsies first arrived in the Balkans and Europe and still continues to be made today. Even when a process of enforced sedentarisation was backed by law in the 1950s and 1960s (mainly in the countries of Eastern and Central Europe), the former nomads preserve a marked taste for a life on the move. In contrast, sedentary Gypsies retain their preference for permanent settlement, even when they have been forced by circumstances beyond their control to leave home and move elsewhere, as in the recent migrations from the former Yugoslavia to Italy. Of course, the boundaries marking the distinction between “settled” and “nomadic” are very fluid and indeterminate and can often change; for example nomads may settle and adopt the main features of the way of life of sedentary Gypsies. Nevertheless, these distinctions are still relevant. At the same time, the link between a way of life and customary occupation (i.e. professional specialisation) is not rigid, although the practice of certain crafts and occupations definitely requires a nomadic or semi-nomadic way of life. Different variants may emerge and in such situations it is hard to decide which occupations should be associated with nomadic as opposed to

sedentary Gypsies. Indeed, it is not uncommon that particular crafts are practiced reciprocally by both groups.

During the period of state socialist rule in Bulgaria, people were legally required to register their place of residence. This administrative system of controlling residency made it difficult to migrate within the country. Nevertheless, in spite of these restrictions, Gypsies always managed to find their way around existing regulations and continued their travels, albeit in different forms, which for some became a mid-seasonal migration.

The nomadic traditions of the Kardarashi were not lost after the forced sedentarisation in the 1950s. Kardarashi men continued to practice their traditional crafts (making, repairing and tinning of copper utensils, all kinds of trade) in one form or another. They continued to move, too, but over greater distances and only some family members. Recently, when the restrictions imposed by the authorities were suppressed, these traditions were revived, expanded and modified and some parts of the groups returned to their semi-nomadic way of life (seasonal, with a permanent domicile). The modifications in the nomadic tradition among some other subgroups of Kardarashi are stronger. In many instances, they adopted new forms of seasonal activities after sedentarisation (for example, a few families, working together in construction enterprises on contract); at the same time they initiated the specific, familial wandering of women. Recently, a tendency can be observed of expanding this modified wandering abroad.

The wandering of the Ursari (Romanian speaking bear and monkey trainers) for a long time has been in a trans-border manner and of a very specific kind. The scope of Ursari wanderings was gradually scaled down, particularly after World War II. However, they never broke completely away from their traditional occupation, modified

as it was in the new situation. It is interesting to note that they have preserved their penchant for working with animals and have often been hired as seasonal or permanent workers on animal farms; performances with bears and monkeys are transferred to the elderly members of the family. The wandering groups are small, consisting of family members only. Lately, a tendency of the proliferation of this traditional occupation can be discerned (as a possible alternative to the economic crisis and unemployment) and younger participants appear side by side with elderly ones. Most often we can observe a change in the way of travelling – by train to the big cities and resorts (mostly on the Black Sea coast) and temporary campsites with bears and monkeys are built close to train stations. Together with the revival of this traditional occupation new problems appeared – the campaign of NGOs for the Defense of Animal Rights influenced some local authorities to forbid the bear and monkey performances.

A “second” revival of the nomadic way of life in contemporary conditions is not uncommon among other Gypsy groups, too. This trend is most strongly manifested among the Thracian Kalajdžii whose semi-nomadic (seasonal) way of life, bound to a certain region, is typical of Bulgaria and occurs (or has occurred) among other Gypsy groups as well. These Gypsy groups are committed to a certain territory or locality (place of their winter settlements in the past, and of their permanent residence at present), and the entire group meets regularly once a year before and after periodical meetings of the different sub-divisions. Their present-day wanderings are strongly reminiscent of past descriptions: they travel by open horse-drawn carriages and sleep in tents. Their preferential routes ramble through the countryside where they can pick up orders (to make and repair copper utensils) and especially in mountainous

regions. Certainly, this current way of life is not the one and only lifestyle of all representatives of the community, but it can still be observed among large groups of them.

These basic models of nomadic traditions emerged after the forced sedentarisation in the 1950s. Sedentarisation in Bulgaria took place (it is not clear whether deliberately or accidentally) in the winter period when the nomads were in their winter settlements and authorities let them choose their own places of permanent settlement. Thus, each group could settle in specific regions without mixing and could choose the way of sedentarisation within the group – e.g. one or two families of Thracian Kalajdžii settled per village in the whole Thracian plane and from there they covered wide regions. Kardarashi are united in local communities (several extended families in nearby villages and small towns, mainly around big towns and highways), and thus cover greater territories; there is a higher concentration of some groups (e.g. Koshnichari, Burgudžii and others) in some villages, and other settlements.

One should not conceive of the transition from nomadic to sedentary way of life, which in Bulgaria took place in two rounds (first in the 1920s and 1930s, and second in the 1950s) as an automatic and radical change in the way of life and total break with nomadic traditions. On the contrary, this tradition is most often modified and preserved in different forms. The possession of a proper home and a permanent residence opened new opportunities for the development of stable occupations. Certainly, traditional crafts were abandoned in many instances, yet in other instances they survived as a source of supplementary income, or, very often, as the only possible means of subsistence. Except for the already mentioned examples of resumed wanderings, traditional crafts are often organised in the permanent residence, and are combined with short

trips to carry around the merchandise in the villages (in addition to the fairs in the big cities), as do the Lingurari (spoon-makers), Koshnichari (basket-makers), the makers of different kinds of ironware, and others. In addition, the custom of a seasonal family or group (a few families) wandering connected with lumbering, preparation of charcoal, gathering of wild berries and medicinal herbs, etc., which was popular in former times, continues to proliferate. It is interesting that these phenomena are also popular among members of groups who have never had a strong tradition of a nomadic way of life, like the so-called Gradeshki Tsigani (from the village Gradetz, in the Kotel region).

More recently, a new type of travelling abroad has emerged and the numbers involved are rapidly growing. This change began in the autumn of 1989. After the collapse of the former regime one of the first measures taken by the new government was to allow Bulgarian citizens to obtain passports and to abandon visa requirements for foreign travel. However, they were prevented from entering other European countries by conditions such as humiliating visa requirements and various financial stipulations. Those states restricting the free entry of Bulgarian citizens included some former Eastern bloc countries that still did not require visas from them.

Here it must be said that the visa regulations and long lines of visa applicants waiting in front of Western embassies in Sofia did not present a serious obstacle to anyone who really wanted to leave Bulgaria. Many were able to do so, and still can, including large numbers of Gypsies. It is hard to give precise information about how many people left the country because there is no way of differentiating between those who emigrated and those temporarily working abroad. In 1992–1993 the total number of emigrants per year was roughly 60,000–65,000 but what percentage of

these were Gypsies was not specified. In later years these numbers definitely decreased but more specific information would be needed for reliable estimates. Because of increasing economic problems and the deepening desperation, the numbers of emigrants (temporary and long-term ones) has been growing again gradually since 1997. After the last elections in June 2001, after a short-term wave of optimism, the Bulgarian population plunged into despair about the possibilities for a better future in their country. This, together with the abolition of visa requirements for Schengen states in 2001, led to a boom of emigration of all ethnic communities from Bulgaria. According to various estimations, we can speak of about 600,000–800,000 persons (what percentage of these were Gypsies is not clear) who left the country, but it is quite possible that their number is much higher.

The border crossings of Bulgarian Gypsies should not be regarded solely as emigration, since these journeys are very varied in their nature and scale and consist of a range of basic types, which are often interrelated or overlapping.

Firstly, there are Gypsies who migrate from Bulgaria to Western Europe, as well as the US and Canada, with the aim of remaining there for good, although these are comparatively few in number. Formerly, such emigrants sought political asylum, but currently they arrange marriages with citizens of European countries, which are often marriages of convenience. Many European countries recently restricted the possibility of being granted political asylum and nowadays would-be emigrants attempt this strategy only where the anticipated response to applications is not a swift administrative decision and extradition but rather an extended legal process, as in Great Britain, the US and Canada. Precise data are not available and it

should be noted that there are frequent cases of ethnic Bulgarians declaring themselves to be “Gypsy victims of racial discrimination”, who claim to have forgotten their mother tongue because use of the Romani language was banned during the communist period. Among those originally involved in what might be termed the “emigration business” were a number of NGOs from various countries.

Variants of these permanent migrants are those seeking a temporary, though long-term, stay in a foreign country. The Kardarasha were trail-blazers in pioneering this migratory route, even before the changes of 1989. This type of migration can be characterised as ‘invisible’ since it does not appear in official records. Individuals go to another country, investigate the situation and, if it seems promising, they establish a base and arrange for their relatives to join them. Preferential destinations of such emigrants are the Benelux countries, as well as Scandinavia and Germany. During 1999 and 2000, the severe economic situation in Bulgaria brought stagnation to the business activities of some of the Kardarasha community, who opted for more permanent settlement in Western Europe, especially in Belgium, where several hundred Kardarasha families had already established themselves.

In contrast, at the beginning of the 1990s the migration of settled Yerlia Gypsies, especially “Turkish Gypsies” from Northeastern Bulgaria, were much larger in scale and extremely “visible”. Their initial destination was Germany, partly since it was relatively easy to enter via the former socialist countries, which did not require visas, but mainly because of its liberal laws and generous social assistance by Bulgarian standards. These Gypsies travelled in larger groups, usually organised on the basis of kinship or those inhabiting the same territory in Bulgaria, and did not make links with Gypsies from other countries. They

camped near the German frontier in Poland and the Czech Republic and attempted to make illegal border crossing to Germany. On arriving in Germany (and also other Western countries), they mainly employed the strategy of demanding political asylum, usually claiming to be Turks who had suffered from measures to strip them of their ethnic identity as part of the Bulgarian “national revival” process. However, refusal of their asylum claims did not bring them tragic consequences. Due to social assistance payments for their large families, work in the black economy, illegal petty-trading and similar activities, they were able to return to Bulgaria with enough foreign currency and goods to ensure them a decent standard of living.

Data relating to this type of migration reveal that 3,927 claims for political asylum by Bulgarians were lodged in Germany in 1991, of which only 14 were granted. The others were either rejected or settled in some other way. Usually the ‘political refugees’ simply left the country shortly before the review period for their claims ended. Unfortunately, we do not know the proportion of Gypsies among these applicants, but all the indications suggest that it was substantial. In 1992, those termed “political immigrants” from Bulgaria to Germany numbered 31,540 and in 1993 more than 23,000. Subsequently, following changes in German law at the end of 1993 which limited assistance for such ‘refugees’, the flood rapidly subsided in 1994, and present-day Bulgarian Gypsy migrants seek other destinations. Generally speaking there is only a limited number of Bulgarian Gypsies seeking political asylum abroad, mostly as individuals, thus not attracting high attention. During the last 2-3 years the attempts to seek asylum in Great Britain have become more and more frequent because of long-term court procedure for responding to the asylum applications.

The largest case of groups of asylum seekers happened in summer 2001, when groups of Gypsies from the regions of Russe, Razgrad, General Toshevo and Sofia travelled with tourist groups to Norway and, after failing to find jobs there, applied for political asylum. According to mass media information, they were 950 persons, of whom 133 received refusal of asylum and 200 withdrew their applications. In winter 2002 the next group of asylum seekers – 58 Gypsies from Northeastern Bulgaria – came to Norway, but were quickly returned home.

Another relatively common type of migration concerns the seasonal or irregular transborder migration of Bulgarian Gypsies. To a certain extent these journeys are related to the revival of the Gypsies' former nomadic or semi-nomadic way of life, as already mentioned, although they often assume new forms. Sometimes smaller numbers of settled Gypsies are also involved. This pattern is followed by hired workers, usually in the construction industry, as well as by musicians. The latter have often formal contracts to work in countries of the former Soviet Union and/or the Middle East, and at times even in Western Europe. There is widespread interest in this type of migrant work among non-Gypsies and, consequently, Gypsies only occasionally manage to be included as part of a larger group of workers. Musicians, however, form an exception since they compete successfully with other workers, occupying a niche market for a specific style of music.

The most favoured manner of working abroad is doing so without official documents or approval from the country where they work. The undisputed leaders in this type of migration are the Rudari communities, whose preferential destinations are Greece and Cyprus where they work in agriculture, mostly harvesting. At the same time Rudari women are employed as domestic workers and also care

for the sick. In these countries the Rudari sometimes turn to related Gypsy groups for assistance. They usually cross the Bulgarian-Greek border illegally, sometimes through Macedonia, but Greek authorities have adopted a comparatively liberal attitude towards their presence and almost encourage them as a source of cheap labour. Rudari also travel to Italy where they work as unskilled labourers, have odd jobs in farming and only occasionally engage in speculative trading. In Italy their situation is somewhat easier than in Greece as they speak a related language. More recently Spain and Portugal have become the most popular destinations where a relatively substantial Rudari community has become established, working illegally in agriculture. There are no precise details about the extent of this migration, but it is hard to find a Rudari family without a member employed in temporary work abroad. Horahane Roma are also active participants in these foreign journeys, preferring Turkey, Cyprus, and, less frequently, Italy, where they often pass themselves off as Turks. Migrations in search of work are usually made by small groups of men, comprising relatives or neighbours who travel together. Increasingly, whole families take part in these trips including children, at least those capable of working.

After the abolition of visa requirements for Schengen states in 2001 this type of migration increased rapidly and there is a clear tendency towards growing into long-term or permanent emigration. The possibilities for legalisation of residence for long-term undocumented emigrants lead to the creation of colonies of Bulgarian Gypsies in some countries, such as Spain.

A further common type of border crossing made by Bulgarian Gypsies is the regular return trip abroad for trade purposes. This pattern began in 1989 when the frontier

with the former Yugoslavia was opened, allowing the widespread transport of Bulgarian goods and foodstuffs to Yugoslavia to be sold for hard currency. At the same time, the unification of Germany provided the opportunity for travel abroad to speculate in hard currency. These trade routes were later extended to include the markets of Central and Eastern Europe (Romania, Hungary, Poland). The Turkish city of Istanbul provided a plentiful source of cheap goods of mostly Turkish and Middle Eastern origin, which were then sold in Bulgaria. These trips, popularly called 'shopping tours', have become a regular feature of Bulgarian life. Between 1990 and 1995 dozens of tourist companies flourished by meeting the demand for such trips. Among the permanent 'tourists' travelling in buses overflowing with goods throughout the former Eastern bloc are many Gypsies, mostly those settled in urban ghettos. While 'Turkish Gypsies' from Eastern Bulgaria, who usually speak Turkish, mainly choose Turkey as destination for their trips, the Gypsies from Western Bulgaria tend to travel to the countries of the former Yugoslavia and Central and Eastern Europe. This type of activity expanded to wholly new dimensions with the embargo on trade with the former Yugoslavia and the closure of the Greek frontier with Macedonia, when entire border regions would make a living from this kind of trade. In 1996-1997 there was a certain decrease in this sort of commercial activity, but it still exerts a significant influence over the lives of many Gypsies. This is especially true of the 'Turkish Gypsies' from Northeastern Bulgaria who travel regularly to Poland, spending months in the markets of different cities.

In this particular context it is remarkable that the Kardarasha, who had been heavily involved in speculative trading as early as the communist period, swiftly pulled out of this business as soon as such activities became widespread.

Instead, they redirected their cross-border journeys elsewhere in order to pursue their female occupation of pick-pocketing among affluent Western Europe, occasionally in the airports of the Persian Gulf and even as far afield as Singapore.

Over the past few years the Bulgarian media has frequently condemned Gypsy migrations as solely motivated by criminality. However, this accusation is both conjectural and one-sided. Gypsies do not play a significant part in the most lucrative forms of illegal smuggling, such as trafficking in prostitutes, drugs and stolen cars, which are monopolized by non-Gypsy Bulgarian citizens. The extent to which they are involved in these activities is completely marginal - as prostitutes or as petty speculators taking merchandise from Bulgaria to Poland.

Recently, because of an increased number of Bulgarians who migrate in a similar way to Gypsies for a short or long term abroad, the feeling of ethnic dimensions of migration has obviously disappeared in Bulgarian public opinion.

At present, some other Gypsy groups have begun to look for ways of resuming their former transborder nomadic travels. However, so far only a few small-scale attempts have been made, such as a handful of families of Thracian Kalaidjii going to Macedonia where they make household utensils.

All these myriad patterns clearly indicate that the transition from a nomadic to a settled way of life is by no means unidirectional. Depending on the specific social and economic conditions that prevail, new forms of traditional nomadism may emerge and have the effect of 'resuscitating' this way of life.

This possibility raises interesting questions about the future of cross-border Gypsy migrations and whether we can speak of a new great wave of migration following the

Great Kelderara Invasion of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and, subsequently, the Yugoslav Wave of the 1960s. We can certainly speak of a third wave of international Gypsy migration in Europe, particularly in respect of Gypsies from Romania and the former Yugoslavia. However, the extent to which Bulgarian Gypsies actually or possibly participate in this process remains a question that still cannot be answered with any certainty because of the lack of specific statistical data and the invisible character (mostly as illegal workers) of a bigger part of the migrations. Undoubtedly, there is still a great potential for mobility, but the direction this might take will depend both on the development of the Gypsy community in Bulgaria and the assistance it receives from abroad. However, of even greater significance is the overall situation in Bulgaria, which is far from promising.

#### **Policy of the state institutions and local authorities after 1989**

In Bulgaria the collapse of the East European socialist system in 1989 was followed by a long transition period (which is still going on now), accompanied by permanent social, economic and political crises. The general crisis reflected very strongly on many aspects of the situation of the Gypsies in Bulgarian society. In the economic aspect Gypsies were the first to suffer from the upheavals which began in 1989. The majority of them were left unemployed in the cities (after factories had been closed down) and in the villages (after the collapse of the cooperative farms). Unemployment and the lack of social assistance changed their way of life. Gypsies adapted relatively quickly to the new situation, primarily in the sphere of the “grey” (shadow) economy, which is the leading economic sector

in Bulgaria. We would like to emphasise the latter fact because if one believes to official statistics or representative sociological data, Gypsies in Bulgaria should not be able to survive at all since almost all of them are unemployed, with no registered income, and with occasional social assistance for small numbers of them.

At present the Gypsies, as described above, implement various economic strategies. Many Gypsies, mostly in the towns, have become involved in peddling, quite often abroad also (mostly in Turkey and Yugoslavia). Others rely on being hired for occasional unskilled work, such as in construction. Some Gypsies, mostly living in villages, make their living with seasonal agricultural work and gathering of wild herbs and mushrooms. Yet others have gone back to their old traditional crafts, sometimes in a modified version (different kinds of blacksmith services, tinsmith work, weaving of straw mats, baskets and others). Some of these crafts are related to the nomadic lifestyle. There is a large number of transborder labour migrations, especially of the Rudara, who work illegally on farms in Greece, Italy, or Spain. Some Gypsies, mainly Kardarasha, have won relatively good positions in the sphere of grey business (manufacture of alcoholic beverages, building undertakings, buying and selling of metals or agricultural products). The overall picture is rather diversified and it depends on a number of factors, including the internal differentiation of the Gypsy community itself.

Considerable changes have also taken place in the sphere of public relations. The economic crisis and political struggles have caused a tension in society, which often leads to a crisis in inter-ethnic relations. At the beginning of the transition period the Gypsies were a necessary ‘scapegoat’ in the search of people to blame someone for the social crisis, often going as far as pogroms, murders

of Gypsies by skinheads and police violence (Bulgarian Helsinki Committee; Human Rights Project). Gradually, however, the situation became relatively calmer and the relationship gradually entered its age-old framework. The Gypsies are still discriminated against and are still the victims of violence at the level of personal relations and certain everyday situations, as well as at the level of state institutions (mainly the police). However, the predominant pattern in Bulgarian society is the one of despising the Gypsies as an inferior people who have to know their place. Problems usually arise when the Gypsies are no longer willing to remain in this place. Due to their higher civil consciousness the Gypsies now seem to have become more sensitive towards the attitude of discrimination. There are small and unorganised groups of young men who describe themselves as skinheads and are an imitation of similar movements in the West. The attempt to create a popular movement based on a racist ideology and directed against the Gypsies remains at the level of sensations in the media and currently has no real potential for development.

The Gypsy policy implemented by state institutions and local authorities can be summed up most generally as a denial of active politics and an imitation of activities, although the manifestations of this approach differ over the years.

After the changes in 1989, the situation in Bulgaria in regard to different minorities was no longer the same as in the previous socialist period. In 1991 a new constitution was adopted based on the presumption of individual civil rights. The most frequently cited Gypsy-related excerpt from this constitution is Article 6, Paragraph 2 which does not allow for "any limitations of the rights or privileges based on ... ethnic belonging ..." and thus, anytime the

problems of minorities have to be solved, the typical reply is that, according to the Constitution, all Bulgarian citizens are equal and there can be no privileges. In November 1992 the Constitutional Court gave an explanation to the text cited above allowing for "certain socially justified privileges" for "groups of citizens" in "an unfavourable social situation", thus encouraging a certain state policy towards Gypsies, although mostly in a narrow socio-economic context.

The situation remained almost unchanged in the system of executive government despite the change of various cabinets and political powers. For a few years there were discussions about having a special body of the Council of Ministers with representatives of various ministries which should implement a coordinated state policy in respect of Gypsies. Finally, in 1994 an Inter-departmental Council on Ethnic Problems was organised. In 1995, when the new government of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) gained power, this council was transformed into an Inter-administrative Council on Social and Demographic Issues. The intended participation of representatives of the ethnic communities was determined after a complicated procedure, but the council had no activities whatsoever.

The main problem of this period was that authorities are unwilling to perceive the 'Gypsy problem' from a more serious perspective. It would be sufficient to mention only the example with the Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Care (who had been appointed by the former government of the Bulgarian Socialist Party and remained under the rule of the United Democratic Forces), who represented Bulgaria in the Specialist Group on Roma/Gypsies and was a regular participant in the meetings of this group in the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. Bulgaria was one of the few European countries, which officially sent an official

of the state as a representative to this specialist group; however, in Bulgaria this fact has never been officially announced.

The policy of local authorities towards Gypsies and their problems is no better. Local authorities (the basic unit in Bulgaria is the county and its bodies) were actually not obliged to have such a policy. Even if there is a will, it is hard to find a real way for it to come true. Each county depends on the government budget and the opportunities for their own specialised policy (here in respect of Gypsies) are very limited. Despite limited opportunities there are some attempts in this direction, such as appointing local specialists on Gypsy issues (sometimes Gypsies themselves), although no results can be seen as yet.

In this initial period after the changes there have also been a few actual attempts at specialised policy on the part of some state and local authorities. The teaching of the Gypsy language in Bulgarian schools deserves special mention. The study of the Gypsy language (Romanes), defined by the euphemistic terminology of the new constitution as "a mother tongue", is allowed for four hours a week as an optional subject according to Decree 232 of 10 December 1991. The actual implementation of this decision has encountered a lot of problems, the first being the lack of sufficiently trained teaching staff. The Gypsy language is not studied in any higher institution and its introduction in university curricula has been firmly rejected. The attempts to give certificates for "mother tongue" teachers to "irregular" teachers (Gypsies who are high school graduates and have attended special courses) are not welcomed by school principals and teachers in some schools where, as a result, teaching of Romanes is not allowed. The Gypsy communities themselves do not have an unanimous attitude to the teaching of their language at schools, while

the mother tongue of some Bulgarian Gypsies is actually Turkish or Romanian. As a result Romanes is being taught only in some parts of the country thanks to the enthusiasm of Hristo Kyuchukov, a former expert in Romanes at the Ministry of Education, and a few Gypsy teachers. Thus, the perspectives for the future are rather vague. The data confirm this pessimistic conclusion. According to data from the 1995/96 schoolyear only 499 Gypsy children studied Romanes at schools (Izuchavashti: 1996) and in the following years the studying of Romanes at schools ceased absolutely.

Another example of the interest of the state and its attempt to solve a Gypsy issue is the Gypsy quarter Stolipinovo in the town of Plovdiv. In 1993–1994 the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs began a programme for literacy, professional qualification and employment in this quarter (in collaboration with the US Department of Labour). The Ministry had contradictory opinions about this long lasting and expensive programme. On the one hand, it was defined as a pilot programme, which should grow into a future national programme. On the other hand, it was admitted (unofficially) that the programme had not been able to accomplish its ultimate goals. The programme for providing temporary employment (maintenance of public hygiene, gardening and others) included only a few dozen people and did not ensure long-term employment or qualification. Furthermore, participation in the programme, as well as in the qualification training courses, deprived families of unemployment benefits which were actually higher (i.e. there was no stimulus for participation in the programme). The implementation of the project was limited to the qualification programme, which consisted of primary literacy courses and introduction into some professions (most often not related to the chances of finding employ-

ment – for example hairdresser courses for women). The qualification training courses were completed by a few dozen people and workplaces were provided for none of them, i.e. the third and most important part – providing of employment – remained unaccomplished. Considering that the population of Stolipinovo is about 30,000 people and actual unemployment is about 90–95 percent (the Ministry was unable to provide exact data about the number of unemployed), it is obvious that the programme was far from accomplishing its primary goal.

These evaluations about the inefficiency of the programme were also shared by outside experts, particularly in the report of the US Ministry of Labour (Sklar: 1994). The report specifically and more than once emphasised that the programme would lose its meaning if it was not being funded and especially if its final part was not accomplished (providing of new workplaces), and there was no use applying the programme as it was elsewhere. Nevertheless, this was exactly what was planned for 1996 – the beginning of a new programme for professional qualification and employment in Lom and most probably in Sliven as well. In the town of Lom where the Gypsy population is about 25,000–30,000 (their exact number is not known even in the county), almost all of them unemployed, this programme started with initial literacy of 40 Gypsies without providing funding for the further stages of the programme or enlarging it and also without providing new workplaces. This type of programmes can be realised ad infinitum and in nearly every county. No doubt the county officials were very pleased with them (they considerably increased the county's budget), but their effect on Gypsies and their problems would remain insignificant. An evidence of such attitudes is the beginning of a new large-scale programme, Feeding the Poor just after the end

of the above-described programme. It was financed by the British Know How Fund and provided the free distribution of food for all Gypsies in need from the Stolipinovo *mahala* in Plovdiv, meaning it provided charity instead of a real attempt to change the situation of the poor.

A similar (zero or rather negative) effect was that of another programme of the same ministry, related to an agreement signed with Germany in 1992 for the repatriation of emigrants (mostly Gypsies). The agreement brought financial aid in the amount of 50 million German marks, intended for professional qualification centres for the contingent of returned emigrants and potential future emigrants. Long bureaucratic negotiations decided to establish three such centres (in Pazardjik, Stara Zagora and Pleven). Only the Pazardjik centre has already started functioning. The centre, which was meant to provide basic education to Gypsies (as a primary contingent at risk of illegal emigration), is now teaching computer design, and naturally, there are no Gypsies among those attending it.

Very typical of the approach of the authorities is the problem of the separate Gypsy quarters, such as the construction of homes for Gypsies in Radnevo county. It began as a county programme and for a few years consisted only of the preparation of architectural plans. It quickly gained impetus after substantial funding from the Social Development Fund of the Council of Europe. At present the programme has almost completed the construction of a new quarter which provides housing for a few dozen families. Inspired by its implementation, Sofia county declared that it will prepare architectural plans and seek funding from abroad for a similar, even grander programme – the construction of a huge new Gypsy quarter which will house the Gypsies currently living in separate quarters in Sofia. At a first glance it all looks very impressive, probably the

authorities also see it in this way, but the truth is quite different. The authorities clearly prefer new and expensive programmes, instead of doing what is mostly needed (and is much cheaper) – providing the regulation of the existing Gypsy quarters (the majority of which are *de jure* illegal), providing the necessary infrastructure (roads, water pipes, plumbing, telephones), giving legal permission to those who wish to build houses for themselves, and so on. The approach they have chosen not only does not help to solve the existing problems, but makes Gypsies feel that the state is obliged to care of them instead of providing them with equal rights and an equal lifestyle.

Unfortunately, this inefficient approach of state and local authorities is typical of their overall approach to the ‘Gypsy problem’ and continues through the present. As it is, the authorities have proved to be entirely unprepared for solving the problems of the Gypsy population in any way. The measures undertaken so far are partial, incompetent, insufficiently thought over and inefficient, they lead to a waste of funds and reporting of activities, often to corruption of officials and Gypsies involved in the programmes. Finally, this approach is harmful for Gypsies themselves, since it turns them into passive objects of the social patronage of the state, which would suffocate the development of their community. Given the present situation, Bulgarian Gypsies should only be pleased that other government or county programmes are still being discussed and have not yet been implemented.

However, we must not think that only the Bulgarian authorities are to blame here. The funds from abroad and the European institutions also share the responsibility, as they not only finance, but also give high evaluations and noisy publicity to clearly inefficient projects. Suffice it to mention the British policing initiative in Bulgaria, supported

under UK Know How Fund (Groves: 1996; 1997), recent programmes for building of social houses, or teachers assistant trainings supported under the PHARE programme of the European Union.

At the beginning of 1997 the new government of the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) declared a new state approach to the Gypsy issue. A new government body was established – the National Council on Ethnic and Demographic Issues at the Council of Ministers. For a long time this council had no tangible activities and this attitude of the state made the Roma organisations take the lead themselves. A Roma non-governmental organisation called Human Rights Project initialised and organised the preparation of a Framework Programme For Equal Participation of Roma in the Life of Bulgaria by Roma leaders and independent experts (Programme: 1998). The programme turned its back on cheap speculation with specific social and economic problems and paid special attention to the major reason for them – the unequal position of the Gypsies in Bulgarian society. Hence the major directions which the state has to follow in order to implement its Gypsy policy are the establishment of a state body for fighting against discrimination, the desegregation of ‘Gypsy schools’, legalising the existing Gypsy neighbourhoods, as well as enabling of access to the national media, among others.

The Framework Programme was discussed in detail, supplemented and approved by all Roma organisations in the country at a National Round Table in October 1998 and, consequently, proposed to the government as a basis of its future work. In response to the initiative of the Roma organisations and in view of the then approaching local elections, the government adopted the slogan for the integration of the Gypsies through their participation in

local governments. The government also tried to impose, with the collaboration of a well-known international NGO, its own programme prepared by Spanish experts of the Council of Europe. The Roma leaders rejected the government proposal and following long negotiations an agreement was signed between the Roma organisations and the Council of Ministers on 7 April 1999. The Council of Ministers discussed and approved the programme proposed by the Roma with a special decision at its session of 22 April 1999 (The representatives of the Council of Ministers introduced some minor changes into the Framework Programme, such as the addition of the word "integration" and the inclusion of the so-called women's issue). Until the present, however, the Bulgarian government has limited itself to appointing one Gypsy expert (Yosif Nunev) to the National Council and to making a number of statements in the media and at international forums, without implementing any specific activities for the accomplishment of the programme goals.

The situation did not change significantly after the change of government in 2001 and after the process of accession to the European Union for Bulgaria had started. The initiatives taken so far bring only cosmetic changes – with the insistence of the MRF, Mihail Ivanov, a former adviser of President Zhelio Zhelev, was appointed chairman of the National Council on Ethnic and Demographic Issues at the Council of Ministers, and Yosif Nunev changed his position as expert in the National Council to the post of expert in the Ministry of Education. The National Council in this period also continued to receive and redistribute financial grants from the European Union and World Bank to selected NGOs, thus repeating all the failures from the previous period – mock activities, meaningless, expensive and non-effective projects. In many cases such projects also

violate the principles of the Framework Programme. The best example in this respect is the project for the training of teaching assistants for Roma children implemented by a selected NGO, Step by Step, as well as continuity with projects for the building of new houses for the Roma population. Mihail Ivanov also succeeded in creating a satellite Roma umbrella organisation – the Roma Parliament around the National Council.

On the whole, the Gypsy policy of the state in the whole period after the changes can be characterised in brief as a lack of any real desire to change the existing situation. In the instances when, for one or another reason, the Bulgarian State has to have a position on specific problems related to the Gypsies (such as participation in certain programmes of European institutions) it still prefers mock activity instead of making use of the existing potential. This situation is not influenced by the differences between political powers because the attitude towards the Gypsy issue has been predetermined by the underlying stereotypes of and prejudice towards the Gypsies in the Bulgarian society.

### **Gypsies and the non-governmental sector**

The non-governmental sector presents a situation similar to the one in the state and local authorities, although it is much more dynamic and diverse. The non-governmental sector (NGO) in Bulgaria was created after the changes in 1989 and exists due solely to the financial support of different programmes and foundations from abroad (mainly from the US and Western Europe). The non-governmental sector in Bulgaria had a powerful surge of development and now is one of the few successful sectors of business, which follow a Western, and mostly a US pattern of devel-

opment. This, however, was a rather specific development, especially in respect to Gypsies and their problems. The non-governmental sector firmly believed that the problems of minorities (and specifically those of Gypsies) were a basic priority. Almost all of the newly emerged non-governmental organisations rushed to solve the problems of Gypsies, to help them and defend their rights, to build civic education, community development, conflict resolution and others. This simple phraseology has proved to contain the magical words that can provide financial aid from abroad regardless of the actual activities of the organisations and their vague ideas about Gypsies and Gypsy problems. A reference book published in 1995 *Non-governmental Organisations in Bulgaria* (which did not include the whole non-governmental sector) included a total of 467 organisations with more than a quarter of them listing minority rights as their priority (Spravochnik: 1995). According to information from 1997 from the Association of Bulgarian Foundations and Societies, there are now more than 1,200 organisations, which want and intend to work with minorities (i.e. mainly Gypsies).

However, one should not be misled by these figures. Neither Bulgarian society as a whole, nor the Gypsies themselves have a clear idea about the number of people and organisations 'taking care' of them. Often a token Gypsy is included in an organisation or project in order to facilitate funding. The argument is that minority representatives are active in a certain NGO. Another variant is keeping in touch with a Gypsy organisation (often consisting of one or a few people) and presenting a "joint" project of the two NGOs. Most of these organisations work in a semi-public manner – they are registered officially and present their activities to sponsors from abroad while rigorously avoiding presenting their activities in the Bulgarian media.

This "semi-publicity" is maintained deliberately. In 1994 we asked a dozen NGOs with declared Gypsy-oriented activities for their annual reports or information on their Roma projects. The results were so indicative that there is no need for further comment; only two (sic!) NGOs agreed to present their materials to us.

A strange situation has emerged: Bulgarian NGOs working (or at least reporting such an activity) with Gypsies are more numerous than the Gypsies or Gypsy organisations who want or are able to be their partners. This has led to some curious situations, such as having a Western foundation with representation in Bulgaria help a project of a Gypsy NGO through two other non-governmental organisations. Nobody is in a position to explain the purpose of paying office rent, salaries and other expenses to these 'mediators'. There is a Bulgarian proverb: "He is not crazy who eats the spinach pie, but the one who gives it to him". Gypsies have no chance of seeing their problems solved once and for all through such an approach. Moreover, there is a persistent negative opinion of 'the privileged' Gypsies and the non-governmental sector in Bulgarian society. Bulgarian public opinion finds it hard to explain how the salary of a female student associate in the non-governmental sector can be two times higher than the salary of her university professor, or how the budget of a NGO employing five or six persons can be much higher than those of a school, a kindergarten or an academic institution. These only serve to discredit the idea of a non-governmental sector. Another issue, however, is that the salaries of Bulgarian academics are so low that they do not cover their living expenses (let alone work expenses), which is one of the reasons why some of the young and flexible researchers move from universities and academic institutions into the NGO sector. Furthermore, regarding Gypsies

the most pessimistic result of such kind of approach is that in the 15 years since 1989 a whole generation of young and talented Gypsies, which had received scholarships from different foundations to study at universities, have been employed by numerous NGOs and no one finds his/her potential in other spheres. For example there are students who successfully finished law or medicine education, but due to the fact that much higher salaries can be earned with the NGOs, they refuse to work in the professions they have studied for.

In order to illustrate the relevant problems of working with Gypsies, we can analyse some poignant examples which demonstrate the deficiencies of the third sector in Bulgaria (Marushiakova and Popov: 1997). For several years now there have been projects on homeless children in Bulgaria. This issue flourished in the period of 1994–1996. This is a ‘profitable’ problem, which has attracted some state institutions and a number of non-governmental organisations. The result was a multitude of projects, enormous for Bulgarian budgets, advertising campaigns in the press, heartbreaking reports, press conferences, charity balls and cocktails, gift-giving campaigns, associates hired to work with these children, and others. The hypocrisy culminated in the event of dressing a few of these children in theatrical costumes and taking them to the Sofia Sheraton Hotel where they danced for the President of Bulgaria, diplomats and businessmen. Then the children were sent back onto the street.

These activities unfortunately distorted the nature of the whole issue. Various organisations presented the number of homeless children as being incredibly high – scores of thousands of such children – and thus the problem was artificially blown out of proportion and acquired apocalyptic dimensions. The relatively precise data of the

Ministry of the Interior, however, report the number of homeless children as being about 3,000 registered all over country for the period of 1991–1995, although in reality the permanently homeless are about a few hundred (about a few dozen in Sofia in particular). An unpleasant fact was the ethnic definition, i.e. ‘a Gypsy problem’, attached to this social problem (although not all homeless children are Gypsies). Thus, the negative stereotypes about Gypsies were confirmed in Bulgarian society. Mass media described Gypsies as people who did not take care of their children and deliberately sent them out to beg, steal, become prostitutes and take drugs. Nobody, including the non-governmental organisations busily working on their projects, was willing to tell the truth – which is that there are a few dozen homeless Gypsy children in Sofia and also a few thousand other Gypsy children, living with their parents, who have serious problems of a rather different nature.

The activities of the non-governmental organisations were used by the state to distance itself from the problem of homeless children and transfer the responsibility to the non-governmental sector. The official explanation was that the state was powerless since there was no law for child protection, which was actually far from being true. According to current legislature, parents who do not take care of their children are deprived of parental rights and the children are sent to special homes – which practically has not been the case in recent years. A shelter, financed by many sponsors from abroad, was finally built in Sofia and officially opened in the presence of state and diplomatic officials. This is a place where homeless children can come to eat and spend the night, but they cannot stay there for good. Here we do not go so far as to speak of literacy, but merely of the minimal assistance for the physical survival

and an attempt to accomplish state tasks. General opinion, including the opinions of those directly involved in this activity, which started off with great promises and extensive advertising, is that it has proved completely unsuitable and the situation of the 'street children' is still the same. The children spend all their time on the streets and have neither the wish nor the chance for a normal life. This is an example of how impossible it is for the non-governmental sector to assume all state tasks; all it is able to do is undertake palliative measures. Enormous danger stems from the fact that the non-governmental sector not only does not urge the state to perform its functions; on the contrary – it has made it stay away from the problem. At the last round table organised by the former President of Bulgaria, Dr. Zhelyo Zhelev, the main idea was to enlarge the system of similar shelters (funded by sponsors from abroad, of course) for homeless children in the various counties. The contribution of the state was minimised to preparing a special decree of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs to regulate the procedures for the opening and functioning of these shelters.

Another problem attracting the attention of non-governmental organisations is related to the education of Gypsy children. In 1991 the special status of Gypsy schools was cancelled *de jure*, but *de facto* the situation has remained unchanged. The control of the Ministry of Education has decreased, and given the economic problems of Gypsy families, the lack of interest in such an education on the part of Gypsies has become particularly obvious. In their attempt to bring Gypsy children back to school and improve the conditions of schooling, quite a few organisations (including some Gypsy organisations) have worked on projects on the repair of existing schools and the distribution of free food to some of the children who have been

selected as most needy. There is nothing bad about these types of activities, but in the long run they are merely palliative and do not solve the educational problems of Gypsy children. Free food can increase attendance, but the quality of education in these schools does not improve. Parents who appreciate the importance of good education for their children try to enroll them in regular schools to provide them with an equal education. Inter-ethnic oppositions are on the rise in Bulgarian society as a result of this activity – people perceive any aid given to 'Gypsy schools' as special preference for Gypsies.

Far more unsuccessful and with a markedly negative effect are the projects which aim at keeping the children at school by means of changing the curriculum or introducing additional school hours. A typical example is the project Let us Bring the Children Back to School financed by UNESCO through a Bulgarian foundation. The project sounds reasonable; it aims at attracting Gypsy children to the schools by means of additional programmes which pay attention to some of their ethnic and cultural characteristics, such as lessons in music, dance, drawing, traditional Gypsy occupations and others. This project, which was realised as a 'pilot project' (another magic word in the non-governmental sector) at seven schools, provided relatively good results, namely an evident increase in the school attendance of Gypsy children. However, there is another issue here – whether the basic aim of the education of Gypsy children should not be different and directed at increasing their level of education in view of their future professional and social realisation. Schools should attract children with the increase of the practical results of education, which is clearly not possible at segregated schools. People graduating from 'Gypsy schools' are, and will remain, second rate, and their education is insufficient,

no matter how regularly they have attended school. The implementation of this project only confirms the existence of schools based on the segregation principle, instead of being radically reformed and gradually closed down. A ridiculous situation has emerged: Bulgarian human rights activists launched a campaign against the segregation of Gypsy children while the people responsible for the project (who were also high-ranking government officials – obviously a Bulgarian patent for ‘combining’ the non-governmental sector and the state sector) claimed that ‘Gypsy’ schools do not exist in Bulgaria at all (and the subsequent implementation and continuation of the project was transferred to mixed schools in order to avoid all talk of Gypsy schools). Even worse, this project has given the Ministry of Education the necessary argument for offering a return to the near past: an introduction of segregated professional education for Gypsy children from an earlier age which would be at the expense of their general education. In the long run, despite the good intentions of its organisers, the project Let us Bring the Children Back to School has only moved the situation backwards instead of providing Gypsy children with new and equal opportunities. We can only hope that its underlying principles will not become a national programme for the educational development of Gypsy children, as is the intention of its coordinators.

The greater part of Gypsy literacy-related projects implemented in the non-governmental sector do not have any hazardous consequences; they are rather harmless, but with almost no tangible results. It is not clear how the ‘NGO sector experts’ gain such a high level of self-confidence and have the courage to create such conceptual programmes facing an ethnic community which is practically unknown to them. For example, a group of physicians from one NGO conducted “sociological research” among

some Gypsies in three Gypsy quarters, and based on it they proposed a national programme for the sexual education of Gypsy children. This ‘scientific argumentation’ of the problems is not specific to Bulgaria, but is a widespread model of work in the NGO sector worldwide. In order to illustrate this, we should mention an example of a dilettante bibliography on Gypsies prepared by a Romanian lawyer on the basis of his “own research” in American libraries which the Soros Foundation proposed as a basic source for the work with Gypsies for NGOs involved in Eastern Europe (Roma: 1997). For the sake of objectivity we should say that the second edition of this bibliography was improved thanks to the efforts of an invited university professor.

Parallel, “unofficial” NGO research is created, financed and serviced by the NGO sector, which is much lower in quality, but (at least in Eastern Europe) is far better financed and distinctly different from ‘official’ research (for example, it uses only a certain type of quasi-scientific literature). We can cite the examples of the reports on Gypsies in the countries of Eastern Europe, prepared by various human rights organisations, which at best are prepared by young lawyers fresh out of law school, and quite often by people with no professional training and experience. It would not be serious to think that such ‘specialists’ can learn to perceive the strange cultural and historical reality in a few weeks time, to learn the strange legislature, come to know the Gypsy community, its problems in the respective countries, let alone offer an adequate solution to their problems.

The numerous larger-scale projects on civic education, conflict resolution, “open education”, sexual literacy, family planning, protection of Gypsy women from violence and others belong to the same type of projects. They usually

take the guise of endless courses and seminars with an insignificant effect for the development of the Gypsy community. Usually the lecturers are highly qualified and well-meaning Western specialists who are totally unfamiliar with the specifics of the Gypsy community and the overall situation in Bulgaria. Sometimes it is quite curious to see that the lecturers and 'experts' are people who do not know any Gypsies in their own countries, but this does not prevent them from giving generous advice on how to solve the 'Gypsy problem' in Bulgaria. Usually the same people (most often teachers or social workers) and a small circle of Gypsies who have become professional 'seminar attendants' take part in all the projects. The level of similar projects and the honest interest of their participants in Gypsy issues and Gypsy community development became obvious during an international meeting of the 'Step by Step' programme (a programme of the Open Society Foundation network in Eastern Europe aimed at providing an equal start for minority children through specialised kindergartens). The Bulgarian representatives attending the meeting could not even answer the specific question of whether there were separate Gypsy quarters in Bulgaria. There are no opportunities for applying what has been learned, which obviously does not seem to interest the organisers or their sponsors. A project is over, the activities and expenses have been accounted for and then there will be a similar project and its multiple carbon copies.

The evaluation of these numerous projects touches upon another problem - the unwillingness to inform society about ongoing or finished projects. The above-mentioned principle of "semi-publicity" is strictly observed here: information about these projects can be found mainly in the reports of the sponsor foundations from abroad, presentation in the media is most often

avoided, and the greater part of the Gypsy community involved never understands how many people and funds have been used to assist their development.

Yet another problem is the common interest uniting most non-governmental organisations in receiving as much funds as possible without any concern for their proper use. If we look at the reports of big foundations working in Bulgaria, as well as the reports of the European programmes, we will immediately perceive an interesting pattern: Bulgaria is always one of the first countries whose projects on Gypsies have been approved. That is, against the background of the general crisis, the 'Gypsy industry' is one of the few flourishing developments. The increase in funds usually results in more people working for a non-governmental organisation, renting bigger offices and consequently seeking ever more expensive and inefficient projects to support the non-governmental organisation. There is an interesting pattern - the more expensive the project, the smaller the chance of spending money on something specific rather than on office rent and salaries. Quite often we can observe curious situations, such as having a given foundation give priority to the projects of their 'experts', i.e. one and the same people vote approval of their own projects, complete them and then report their success to themselves. The tendency for inflated projects receives outside assistance as well when the projects are evaluated by the organisations which fund them. The macro-project is typical in this respect, evaluated as the most successful so far within the PHARE democracy programme. It consisted of selecting about ten children of different ethnic backgrounds and their repeated education in an isolated group by at least twice as many 'experts' in the spirit of 'intercultural dialogue'. Certainly, such an educational model is not entirely meaningless, but its practical

implementation is hardly possible in the near future; moreover, the economic hardships and the crisis in the educational system in Bulgaria make it ridiculously out of place.

Their common interest stops project participants from criticising other projects for fear of having the funding of the whole non-governmental sector stopped. A relatively small circle of people is formed, all of whom use the simple phraseology of the 'civic society', occupy key positions in the NGO sector and to a great extent control and distribute the funds.

We can observe with increasing clarity a transfusion of the NGO models of work with those of the state institutions, which are often partners in various European programmes and their interests coincide to the detriment of the Gypsies. To give only one example: in spring 1998 in the town of Lom a seminar was held in which the representatives of government, local authorities and the organisers (one well-known international NGO) proclaimed their success in establishing a model of collaboration for solving the social and economic problems of the Gypsies. However, only a few weeks later Roma from Lom who had not received social assistance for more than one year tried to self-ignite themselves publicly (PER: 1998).

In other instances there is a sharp clash of interests of the NGO sector and the Gypsy community, such as in the case of segregated Gypsy schools. Several NGOs implement a number of projects on the education of Gypsy children, which cannot be implemented further if these schools cease to exist. One of the clearest examples for this is the project coordinated by Minority Rights Group (London) for the training of teaching assistants of Gypsy origin (which means a consolidation of the principle of specialized - i.e. segregated - education for Gypsy children,

which presupposes the existence of segregated Gypsy schools or at least of segregated Gypsy classes, instead of general education). It consisted of a short training course in the Nova Skola Foundation (Czech Republic) in 1998 for the training of young Roma teaching assistants for Gypsy pupils. The Ministry of Education has promised to employ these teaching assistants within the system of public education (their salaries will be paid by Council of Europe funds), even though there is no position of teaching assistant, according to Bulgarian legislature. Of course there are no respective projects for the training of teaching assistants for other minorities or for the Bulgarian majority.

In a similar way oriented towards segregational schooling is the project for inter-cultural education within the framework of the PHARE programme, which was implemented in 1995-1998 by the Minority Rights Group (London) and the Foundation, Inter-ethnic Initiative for Human Rights. The basic part of the project is the extensive and expensive printing of special (outside of regular school curriculum) teaching materials on Gypsy history, Gypsy literature and Gypsy music. The project was accomplished and praised highly and will now be continued. Nobody, however, has proposed a more effective and cheap solution - to include the information on Gypsies in regular teaching materials, used by all children at Bulgarian schools.

Actually, we are witnessing an active process in Bulgaria and worldwide, a transformation of the NGO sector into a 'world in itself'. Enormous resources circulate within this 'world' without substantially influencing their targets, which they are supposed to change. However, despite the disadvantages described above and maybe some others, the non-governmental sector still assists some positive changes in Bulgarian society, and contributes actively to

the changes in social consciousness which will eventually lead to a modern civic society.

### **Gypsy movement**

After the changes in autumn 1989, Gypsies in Bulgaria were free to express their ethnic affiliation and organise their respective unions. Gradually, various Gypsy organisations emerged, and in the course of their development they were actively influenced by the overall social and political environment.

At the founding conference on 17 March 1990 in Sofia, it was decided to establish the Democratic Union Roma, whose chairman became Manush Romanov. The initial initiative for this union came from the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), the former Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP). However, in the process of acute political conflicts during the so-called round table, the union changed its course towards the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) – a varied political coalition, formed on an anti-communist basis, with no clear political face, which constantly fell prey to the contradictions of its member parties and organisations, as well as individual leaders and groups. At the initiative of the Bulgarian Socialist Party, on the eve of the elections in spring 1990, alternative local Gypsy organisations began to emerge, such as The Union of Bulgarian Gypsies for Democratic Socialism in Sofia, which became the basis for the Movement for Social and Cultural Development of the Gypsies, including mostly Gypsies from Sliven and Sofia, whose chairman was Assen Zlatev. In Plovdiv and Assenovgrad the Birlik (Unity) union was formed, headed by Assen Kolev and Syuria Yusuf. Later on Assen Kolev left the union and renamed his organisation “Cultural and

Educational Society – Unity. Among others, in Varna the Organisation for Social Development of Gypsies – Ascent emerged, headed by Kiril Bakardzhiev; in Shumen the Cultural and Educational Society of Gypsies headed by Bogdan Petrov; in Haskovo the Unity union was registered in court headed by Acho Yordanov, sometime later in Sofia the Club of Gypsy Intellectuals, headed by Gospodin Kolev was organised. The majority of these associations have a vague status; most of them are not registered in court and actually ceased to function after the parliamentary elections.

For a certain period of time the Gypsy organisations restricted their activities, even though the Parliament at that time had three Gypsy members: Manush Romanov (UDF), Sabi Golemanov and Peter Alexandrov (BSP). The Gypsy organisations stirred again in summer 1991, when the political conflicts in the country were on the increase and new elections were approaching. Manush Romanov failed completely in his attempt to transform the Democratic Union Roma into a political power. In autumn 1991 he left UDF, where he had the unclear status of an “observer”, because he was ignored in the pre-election coalition. The Democratic Union Roma gradually dissolved, Gypsies were no longer represented in Parliament, and after the election the influence of the Movement for Rights and Liberties (uniting mainly the Turkish and Muslim population of Bulgaria) increased considerably, mostly among those Muslim Gypsies who speak Turkish and have a preferential Turkish ethnic awareness.

At the beginning of 1992 the existing Gypsy organisations manifested a certain tendency towards unification, irrespective of their political views. A group of Gypsy leaders from Sofia launched an appeal for the creation of a confederacy. On the other hand, in April 1992 Manush

Romanov launched the idea of founding a Gypsy party independent of the other political powers, which would unite all Gypsies in Bulgaria. This idea did not find a sufficient number of supporters. After a number of preliminary meetings, at the so-called unifying conference on 17 October 1992 in Sofia, the United Roma Union was created with Chairman Vassil Chaprazov and Secretary Georgi Parushev. The supporters of the confederacy refused to join the new leadership and declared at the conference that they would not dissolve their organisations (such as the newly created "Social Foundation Roma" in Plovdiv headed by Anton Karagiozov and Ivan Kotchev). Other Gypsy leaders, such as Manush Romanov and Vassil Danev (Business Association Indi-Roma from the town of Varna), boycotted the conference and publicly declared that they would not dissolve their organisations.

At the beginning of 1993 the leaders of some Gypsy organisations declared a new initiative for the creation of a Confederacy of Roma whose individual organisations would preserve their independence. On 8 May 1993 a new national conference for unification was convened in Sofia. The new organisation was officially named Confederacy of the Roma in Bulgaria. Its leaders were five co-chairmen: Peter Georgiev (Sofia), Assen Zlatev (Sliven), Assen Kolev (Plovdiv), Alexander Kracholov (Stara Zagora); the secretary-in-chief was Alexander Emilov (Sofia), and spokesman Velko Kostov (Sofia). The goal of the confederacy was to "enter the corridors of power", always having in mind the existing reality, i.e. it was still an officially "non-political organisation" which should work for the unity of Gypsies in Bulgaria and their ethnic emancipation in Bulgarian society.

In July 1993 another attempt was made at founding a political party of the Gypsies in Bulgaria. Ramadan Rashid

from the town of Isperrih declared his intention to create the political party Union Roma – Muslims, but made no practical moves in this direction. Acho Yordanov, who presented himself as a leader of the non-existing United Roma Union for Southern Bulgaria, also declared his wish to be politically active. Acho Yordanov shocked Bulgarian public opinion with his loudly proclaimed statements that 2.5 million Gypsies were living in Bulgaria, who would create their own political party or enter into coalition with other political powers. At the end of August 1993, the president of Indi-Roma Vassil Danev, organised a second Gypsy assembly in Varna, where he declared the creation of a new national organisation, the Federation of the United Roma Communities, which was going to seek unity with the other Gypsy organisations. At the same time and at the initiative of Georgi Parushev, former secretary of United Roma Union, who was dismissed from the management of the union, an initiative committee was organised which had to prepare the creation of a Corporation for Economic Development of the Roma in Bulgaria, and later on a Centre for Strategies and Analyses. However, no tangible results were ever attained.

Over a fairly long period of time the Gypsy organisations were less active until the parliamentary elections in autumn 1994 stirred them again. After long pre-election negotiations, during which a part of the United Roma Union was transformed into the Roma Union for Social Democracy, headed by Milcho Russinov, some Gypsy leaders were included in the electoral lists of various political parties and unions. However, their places in these lists made their future election almost impossible. The pre-election agreement of Georgi Parushev with the Movement of Rights and Freedoms (MRF) is especially interesting. It gave Gypsies the right to participate in the elections

as MRF members in more than one third of the electoral districts (in Western Bulgaria where there is no Turkish population and MFR received no votes). However, Gypsies still had no presence in Bulgarian political life after the elections. Only one Gypsy was a member of the new Parliament – Peter Georgiev from the Bulgarian Socialist Party (in 1996 Dimitar Dimitrov from Vidin also entered Parliament as a member of BSP and a substituting deputy).

The political crisis at the end of 1996 and the beginning of 1997, as well as the elections in spring 1997 stirred the Gypsy organisations anew. They had several meetings in order to prepare a joint political line of action and, eventually, joint candidates for Parliament. No agreement was reached, some Gypsy leaders were included in the electoral lists of some parties, again in places where the chance of being elected was almost non-existent; others ran for Parliament as “independent” candidates, but on the whole Gypsies did not have any political representation in the new government.

In the period between 1989 and 1997 some new organisations came into being, all of which pretend to be ‘national’ and to have clear-cut political ambitions. As usual, they are associated with their leaders: the Confederacy of Roma in Bulgaria (Peter Georgiev, Alexander Kracholov), the United Roma Union (Vassil Chaprazov, Georgi Golov), the Democratic Union Roma (Manush Romanov, Vassil Vassilev), the Federation of the United Roma Communities (Vassil Danev), the Roma Union for Social Democracy (Milcho Russinov), as well as some similar regional organisations: the Independent Democratic Union Roma – Varna (Sali Ridvan, Yosif Mihailov, Assen Hristov), the Club Union – Mezdra (Toma Tomov), the Roma Public Council “Kupate” (“Together”) (established in 1997 as a satellite organisation of the UDF led by Zlatko Mladenov and

Simeon Blagoev). We have to emphasise that the aspirations of the so-called ‘national’ organisations are to a great extent unreasonable. They consist mainly of their leaders and at best include a limited number of activists, who are usually concentrated in a few regions; they have almost no organisational activities, no political lobby or representation even in the lowest echelons of power. Their popularity among the Gypsy population in Bulgaria is insignificant on the whole (or rather the majority of the Gypsy population knows nothing about their organisations). A relevant fact is that they do not rely on Gypsy votes to be elected for Parliament, they would rather like to use the lists of the major political powers. Though they often declare that they would like to have a separate Roma party, the discriminating constitutional law banning religious or ethnic parties has turned out to be a convenient alibi for them, in spite of the fact that experience so far has clearly shown that this ban is rather a formal one and could easily be overcome, such as is done by the MRF, as well as by a number of smaller Turkish or Muslim parties.

The disappointment with the “political road of development” gave a powerful impetus to the development and transformation of the Gypsy NGO sector and led to its visible boom. Underlying the NGO sector are the Gypsy organisations (which have the status of NGOs according to Bulgarian law, even though they were initially created with other goals) and their leaders. The road of their transformation in a classical NGO sector most often goes through the ‘mediators’ – NGO organisations attracting Gypsies from the already existing organisations, who later on begin to establish their own organisations or foundations (according to Bulgarian law the smoothest form of registration is the one-man foundation). This process is still very active and far from complete.

The first steps of the “classical” non-governmental organisations were marked with the strong feeling of dependence on non-Gypsies, on the person in power, the mediator in the non-governmental sector. For a long time Gypsies used to think that they were unable to prepare a project and work on it on their own, that they needed special blessings, joint activities with representatives of a higher institution or people close to the wealthy foundations (in Bulgaria these usually coincide; it is considered normal for a state official to be a member of the executive board of a foundation). Experience has taught Gypsies what they could not learn from the numerous courses and seminars on the development of non-governmental Gypsy organisations and project writing. Thus, the individual development of the Gypsy non- governmental sector could no longer be stopped, how inconvenient it might have been to many ‘mediator’ NGOs, whose existence and global perspective are already beginning to lose their meaning.

In Bulgaria at present there is a continuation of the visible boom in the development of the Gypsy NGO sector. Several hundred Gypsy NGOs have already been registered and are now functioning, for example, Social Foundation, Roma, Foundation for Regional Development Roma, Foundation New Life for Bulgarian Roma, Support for Roma Foundation, Women for Charity - Roma Foundation, Association of Roma Women and Children, Association of Roma Women Hope, Independent Women’s Organisation Lachshi Romni, Romani Dai Bulgaria Foundation, Romani Dukh Foundation, Romani Bah Foundation, Roma Foundation, Romi Foundation, Social Roma Bureau Foundation, Roma Social Bureau Foundation - Montana, Social Foundation Stolipinovo, Roma Foundation Iskra, Cebros Foundation, Bahatale Chave Foundation, Zemias Foundation, Hair Foundation, Right

Way Foundation, Balkan Foundation for Cross- cultural Education and Understanding Diversity and many, many others. They implement their projects with financial assistance from various sources, often with incomes, which are many times higher than the average Bulgarian standard of living.

The few attempts to unite or at least coordinate the activities of all gypsy organisations have so far been unsuccessful. The Association of Roma NGOs, established by Peter Kostov (Foundation New Life for Bulgarian Roma) and headed by Toma Tomov (Union Club) failed to attract all the Roma organisations and foundations or develop any activities and has become a NGO without any contribution for the association of the already existing organisations.

A much more promising approach is the Human Rights Project - a Gypsy organisation established in 1992 for Gypsy human rights in Bulgaria. This is an organisation which cooperates actively with other groups in Bulgaria and abroad. In the course of its development it ceased to be a typical human rights organisation and increased the scope of its activities in various directions. Thus it is actually working for the development of the community instead of merely servicing the world of ‘Gypsy industry’ with its materials. In the process of preparation and approval of the Framework Programme, the Human Rights Project succeeded in achieving an informal association of the Roma organisations, which, despite their numerous contradictions, have united behind common principles and positions, which they have to defend against the Bulgarian government.

This also applies to the case of desegregation. Although the Framework Programme was accepted by the Bulgarian government, there has been no indication of any financial support, or indeed any indication how the Ministry of

Education and Sciences has been working on it, if at all. An important step towards desegregation began in September 2000 in the Nov Pat quarter in Vidin. This was a process initiated by the Bulgarian Roma activist Rumyan Russinov, chair of the Roma Participation Programme of the Open Society Institute and a Vidin based Romani NGO, Drom, as part of the Framework Programme. There were many months of preparation, parents and teachers were consulted and an agreement was reached with the school inspectorate. The process of desegregation was closely monitored and proper support was given to the Roma families and children during the transfer process. Around 300 children were transported to a number of mixed schools in Vidin, and after one year it was estimated that three quarters of the school population in this area are participating in the initiative. Although this initiative is part of the Framework Programme, there has been neither government funding nor indeed any support offered of any kind. Instead, external funding and support has come from the Roma Participation Programme of the Open Society Institute. For the next school year 2001/2002, the desegregation was extended to the towns of Montana, Pleven, Stara Zagora, Haskovo, Sliven with financial support from the same source (Marushiakova and Popov: 2001b). Only two years later, in September 2002, the new Ministry of Education, which employed a Roma educational expert, Yosif Nunev, issued Decree No. 10, "For integration of children and pupils from minorities" which announced a policy of the ministry towards the desegregation of Roma schools. Work on a strategy for the implementation of desegregation was announced.

However, the development of the non-governmental sector of Bulgarian Gypsies is not only positive. Influenced by the example of the Bulgarian NGOs working with them,

most Gypsy NGOs rapidly began to repeat their activities, thus repeating their major weaknesses. These negative effects are customary to a great extent – clearly meaningless projects are being offered which have the best chances of being approved. The most cunning Gypsies have even registered several foundations (one in their own names, another 'female' foundation in their wives' names, a third 'youth' one in their sons' names), thus disposing of more opportunities. The work of the non-governmental sector is perceived as a specific type of business, conducted according to certain rules which should be observed (the kind of rules which surround them). It should not be surprising that corruption on many levels and in many guises is another rule of the game (at least for the majority of the non-governmental sector in Bulgaria).

Another important question is how these processes influence the life of the Gypsy community. We can say with certainty that at the moment they concern only a limited part of the Gypsy community and only in some locations. Large subdivisions of the community remain virtually unaffected (such as the Rudara, great parts of Turkish speaking Gypsies, many traditional Gypsy groups, etc.). Most Gypsy communities in Bulgaria stand apart from these processes, many of them still rely on their traditional lifestyles.

Initially the community of Kardarasha also stood apart from these processes. Kardarasha keep well-preserved ethnic and cultural traditions (including internal self-government – the Meshariava or Gypsy court), strong endogamy, and they are relatively affluent. They are always looking for new economic niches and logically they have come to the idea of turning to the new social activities in the attempt to legalise their business partially and tie it up with public

procurement (which is the most profitable type of activity in the present circumstances)...

*Please refer to our forthcoming publication "Migration and Political Intervention. Gypsies in Transition Countries" for the complete text.*

## Summary

At present it is not easy to outline the tendencies of development of the Roma community in Bulgaria. In most general terms the situation may be summarised as being a disappointment in the present patterns of development and a search for new perspectives. Bitter experience has convinced Gypsies that the paths tried so far do not lead to actual results and, moreover, do not have the potential to ensure a real development of their community. The paternalistic approach of 'the good white brothers', which is exactly the same in the activities of the political parties, the state, and the NGO sector, has placed them in a position of being forever taught and guarded, and has destroyed the adaptive mechanisms of the community. A clear-cut example of the above is that fact that whenever there is an opportunity for independent Gypsy movement or initiatives, such as Euro-Roma or the Framework Programme, the state and the NGOs (with a few exceptions) use a very lame excuse to unite unanimously against the Gypsies or refuse to support them. The political parties (and the governments as their derivatives) need the Gypsies as voters, and the NGOs (including those based outside Bulgaria) need a community with problems to care for, protect,

defend its rights, etc. Thus, no one would benefit from the development of a community which will enable to solve (or try to solve) its problems in an independent manner.

Obviously the international institutions cannot solve the problems of the Gypsies in the country, and the numerous instances of the 'Gypsy industry' sector at various levels (both state and NGO) only confirm this belief. Moreover, the patterns proposed by the West are often inadequate to the situation or lead to opposite results (such as in Bosnia and Kosovo). The abolition of restrictions on contacts with Gypsies from abroad shows that the all-Gypsy unity is still only an idea which will take a long time to fulfil and will only become successful if it is based on what the Gypsies have achieved in each country.

It is not easy to say whether the Bulgarian Gypsies will have the strength to take their destiny in their own hands, be it through NGOs or political movements or through religious movements, but it is very clear that the idea of such a development already exists and can hardly be forgotten despite the inevitable disappointments.

The attempts to create a civic society under Bulgarian conditions, e.g. a society with a different type of social stratification and different cultural and historical tradition, actually has led to the formation of a small, closed stratum of paid "professionals of the NGO sector" and "civic society fighters", who have no real interest in the creation of such a society, because this would stultify their "missionary zeal" (and would have a negative effect on their financial situation). There is a serious danger, in particular if the Western approach remains unchanged, that the pseudo-dissident neo-nomenclature will have a firm hold of the non-governmental sector and work primarily for themselves without eventually influencing Gypsy development. This will be

the final compromise of the whole idea of a civic society in Bulgaria.

Based on current experience, we can summarise that the influence of the paternalistic approach of the state and the non-governmental sector is particularly negative for the development of the Gypsy community, whenever development issues have to be faced and solved. A flagrant example of this approach is the attempt to present Gypsies as a destructuralised, marginalised and to a great extent anormed community without their own ethnocultural traditions. This has even been done in some quasi-scientific research (Tomova: 1995; Denkov: 2001), servicing the state and/or the NGO sector in their approaches towards the Gypsies. The argument that it was done with the good intention of attracting public attention to the Gypsies and their problems, is rather suspicious considering the actual effect: funds from abroad coming for the 'good-natured' benefactors of the Gypsies, while the negative attitude of Bulgarian society towards Gypsies becomes permanent.

This paternalistic approach of 'the good white brothers', which is completely the same in the activities of the state and the NGO sectors, has a negative influence on the Gypsies. They are placed in a position of being forever taught and guarded. This destroys the adaptive mechanisms of the community and creates a layer of corrupt individuals who have benefited from the non-governmental sector and have no real influence in the community. A far more efficient alternative with a positive impact are the activities directed towards acquiring real knowledge about the Gypsies and their ethnocultural traditions, towards overcoming the negative stereotypes in Bulgarian society and achieving the real equality of Gypsies' civil rights. All of the above can be successfully implemented only with a change of the overall context, that is, when there is a tangi-

ble change in the economic, social and political situation in Bulgaria.

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Sofia - City	38,000	n.a.	10,797	13,902	17,885
Sofia - District	14,136	17,077	10,812	11,684	16,748
Blagoevgrad	16,100	18,000	7,652	8,216	12,045
Burgas	37,894	38,453	16,365	16,120	19,439
Varna	20,682	35,000	14,313	17,077	15,462
Veliko Târnovo	20,880	n.a.	2,750	7,236	6,064
Vidin	15,115	12,000	6,142	7,965	9,786
Vratsa	22,160	23,715	9,924	11,927	14,899
Gabrovo	5,920	114	2,314	1,585	1,611
Dobrich (Tolbuhin)	23,665	18,000	17,210	18,449	18,649
Kârdzhali	9,024	9,843	1,562	1,899	1,264
Kyustendil	8,463	12,762	6,248	6,057	8,294
Lovech	17,746	12,490	5,581	6,384	6,316
Montana (Mihailovgrad)	28,813	29,480	8,867	19,079	22,784
Pazardzhik	45,705	50,000	22,124	21,810	23,970
Pernik	38	6,600	1,604	2,142	3,035
Pleven	24,870	27,747	6,559	7,111	16,931
Plovdiv	45,333	61,585	24,403	21,139	30,196
Razgrad	5,213	16,468	7,639	7,464	8,733
Russe	16,306	16,306	8,917	11,934	9,703
Silistra	12,826	12,826	4,570	6,519	6,478
Sliven	46,491	40,590	17,170	18,183	26,777
Smolyan	548	1,225	n.a.	514	686
Stara Zagora	28,289	38,000	22,309	24,143	26,804
Târgovishte	17,035	n.a.	6,487	9,474	9,868

Haskovo	13,488	26,100	12,135	14,014	17,089
Shumen	20,128	15,823	15,760	14,727	16,457
Regional Direction of MI <sup>1</sup> (former District)	1989 (MI)	1992 (MI)	1992 (Census) <sup>2</sup>	1992 (Census) <sup>3</sup>	2001 (Census) <sup>4</sup>
Yambol	11,240	12,762	8,515	6,669	9,729
Total Gypsy population	576,927	553,466	287,732	131,396	370,908

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of the Interior

<sup>2</sup> 2% representative sample

<sup>3</sup> Final census data

<sup>4</sup> Final census data from 1 March 2001

*Table: Gypsy Population of Bulgaria  
Total Bulgarian population on 1 March 2001: 7,928,901*





