

Joanna Talewicz-Kwiatkowska

## Europe not for all? Romani Immigrants in Western European Countries

**Summary.** The study aims at an analysis of Romani immigrants' position in Western European countries with a special emphasis on the selected countries' policies. The author focuses on Romani immigrants in Italy and France, noting that as a result of the internal diversification of the Romani community, it is impossible to develop a single strategy and policy. Due to that fact, the author is of the opinion that it is necessary to follow a diversified approach which considers social and cultural contexts, as well as economic, geographic and legal issues.

**Keywords:** Romani immigrants, migration policy, cultural context

Joanna Talewicz-Kwiatkowska, Intercultural Studies Institute, Jagiellonian University, ul. Gronostajowa 3, 30-387 Kraków, Poland; Center for European Studies, Rutgers University 102 Nichol Avenue New Brunswick, NJ 08901, USA, e-mail: joanna.talewicz-kwiatkowska@uj.edu.pl

**D**espite the economic crisis, Western Europe is still recognized as a land with better standards of living, welfare and freedom. Those who decide to leave their countries of origin are sure that the living conditions in Eastern and Central Europe are worse than they are there. We have been witnessing extremely intense migrations in recent years. One of the reasons is the unstable situation in the Middle East and Northern Africa, resulting in the current crisis related to uncontrolled migration and the mass influx of refugees. On the other hand, migration is facilitated both by fast transportation capabilities and the unfavorable conditions in those European coun-

tries that belonged to the former Eastern Bloc. The problem is that Western Europe is not El Dorado. After the economic crisis, the economy in many countries is in a disastrous condition. Not only is the unemployment rate rising, but disappointment and frustration are also intensifying and people are searching for someone to blame for this situation. In the past, Jews and sometimes Romani would be held responsible for all the world's evils. Nowadays, they have been replaced by immigrants in this role, and this is unfortunate for the Romani people who are migrating in large numbers after the recent enlargements of the EU. It is generally noticeable that after Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU in 2007 – in both these countries there are reported to be over 2 million Romani – this community is the most populous and simultaneously the most marginalized ethnic minority in Europe. Upon their arrival in Western Europe, they build temporary settlements, while begging in the streets and even stealing. They arouse disdain and a reluctance to help and consolidate their image as people who are unable to live in "normal" society. Thus, we have to ask the question: what should be done in order to help integrate Romani as a minority group in European societies? How can we find a solution that will include them in social life and not disturb others' feeling of peace and safety, and thus not generate conflicts? Is this at all possible?

In this paper I am going to focus on the aforementioned issues. However, I am going to pay special attention to Romani immigrants in Italy and France, belonging to the group of countries that became destinations with the hope of a better life for Romanian and Bulgarian Romani. However, before I do this, let me introduce the social situation of Romani in the countries they have decided to leave in such large numbers.

## Outside the system

The fall of communism in the former Eastern Bloc countries did not herald a new, splendid start for Romani. Economic transformation and the implementation of the new economic system resulted in a quite rapid loss of jobs for uneducated Romani who were previously employed as an unqualified and cheap labor force. It should be underlined that the ethnic factor did not play a crucial role in this matter. Lack of education and documents confirming their qualifications ruled the Romani out from competition in the labor market in the new capitalist conditions. The services they could provide after establishing their own businesses had also become obsolete. Dynamic economic development and technological innovations facilitating production processes pushed aside old jobs that became completely irrelevant to an innovative market. In communist conditions the situation was completely different. The major-

ity of Romani were employed, which had a natural impact on the social welfare of families and entire societies living in those countries. One of the goals of the communist state was to create monolithic countries, both ethnically and socially. Each citizen should be a part of such a state, thus education and work were compulsory. All people should comply with the binding rules and those who did not meet the requirements of the communist state were suppressed and brutally assimilated. Such was the case with nomadic Romani who were forced to settle, thus depriving them of their economic basis which was integrally bound with the nomadic way of life. The typical inclination of nomadic communities to perform certain jobs that had no significant competitors resulted in relatively good material conditions for these people. Romani who belonged to nomadic groups could provide suitable welfare conditions for their relatives and – something which is crucial in this matter – they were self-reliant and independent of welfare state institutions. The situation changed after forced settlement. As they were not able to travel, the services they used to offer became unpopular. When they were travelling, they could change locations in order to find new customers. After settling down this opportunity ceased to exist. As a result, former nomads became dependent on opportunities created by the state, but they had to adapt to the social and cultural model of that time in order to take advantage of them. They often had to abandon the rules present in Romani culture and this was the reason that many nomadic Romani did not want to take advantage of these opportunities as they found the state's actions to be oppressive and hostile.

At the same time, the situation of permanently settled Romani turned out to be entirely different. They started working, improving the living conditions of their families. They were hired in state-controlled entrepreneurships and luckily for them, qualifications were not crucial to find a job in those times. The situation changed entirely after fall of communism, as without qualifications they had no chance to maintain their jobs and compete in the labor market. The welfare conditions of settled Romani deteriorated disastrously. They became dependent on the state, but this state was operating based on completely new rules and social support was not enough to provide sufficient living conditions. These people did not manage to find a place in the new reality. They are currently living as outlaws from communities, without faith or the hope of any change. Stagnation, feelings of helplessness, passiveness and apathy are passed on to new generations of Romani communities that are currently described as the greatest losers under capitalism, thus underlining their lack of ability to adapt to modern rules valid in the post-communist reality.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> A similar social and economic situation occurred with those employed in former Polish State Agricultural Farms. The similar problems of these people made them live on the margin of the society, as Romani do.

## The situation of Romani in Bulgaria and Romania

There is no explicit answer to the question of how many Romani live in Romania. It is estimated that there are two million of them in the country, however, official statistics mention no more than five hundred thousand Romani inhabitants (European Commission, 2013). These discrepancies have mainly political reasons. The authorities lower this number because they treat Romani as a symbol of social problems. On the other hand, Romani organizations provide larger numbers in order to put pressure on the government. The problem gets even more complicated as there are a variety of ways of defining communities of Romanian Romani, with some Romani groups not identifying themselves as such and declaring themselves as Hungarians or Romanians. As in other European countries, this community is not homogenous, but is divided into a few dozen groups diversified in aspects of culture, ways of life or material status. This variety results mostly from the past, as from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Romani in Romania were officially treated as slaves and this situation had a significant influence on the level of internal diversification. Members of this community belonged to various owners, clergy and nobility, and performed different jobs. Moreover, there were groups of fleeing slaves hiding in woods and mountains and one group consisting of free people. The matter is even more complicated because of differences between Romani from Wallachia and Moldavia and those from Transylvania. The latter were never enslaved, resulting in their sense of superiority over other Romani groups.

The abolition of Romani slavery began in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Unfortunately, freedom was not accompanied by participation in public life, as Romani were still pushed aside to the margins of society. After the abolition of slavery, they mostly took jobs in smithery and trade. Some of them started to work as farmers. After World War I, the Romanian authorities tried to assimilate them. One of the goals of this operation was to make the Romani culture vanish, as it was found to be worthless and backward. Repression of Romani became more severe after World War II had broken out, especially after Romania joined the war against the Soviet Union in 1941 – the climax being reached with the deportation of these people to Transnistria.<sup>2</sup>

The end of the war did not mean that things changed for the better for all Romanian Romani. The authorities returned to nationalist rhetoric, merging it with Marxist

---

<sup>2</sup> Part of the coastal territory of Ukraine, bordering with Bessarabia, a portion of which was granted to Romania as an ally of the Third Reich.

theories. Assimilation activities were resumed and a great effort was made to make Romani culture vanish by applying various acts of repression. At this time, Romani were forced to settle down and were hired in state-controlled metallurgical plants as an unqualified labor force. They were not granted any form of cultural autonomy (like Hungarians or Germans) and were allowed to leave education after graduating from primary school, resulting in a high percentage of illiteracy that is still the case to this day.

In the 1970s, the Romanian authorities started an operation to carry out the dissolution of villages. As a result, their inhabitants were resettled in urban areas. This policy encountered great social protest, however, with no effect as it was continued nonetheless. Oppressive measures were introduced, with support and intimidation provided by police forces. For Romani, resettlement not only meant a complete change in living conditions, it also resulted in growing poverty in this community, as previously used skills turned out to be useless in the new situation.

In the second half of the 1980s, the Ceaușescu government limited social welfare, depriving many families of any livelihood. A great number of Romani were then placed in a very difficult situation, resulting in the marginalization of this group. The fall of the communist regime in 1989 did not change their social situation and it has actually become even worse. State-controlled plants hiring Romani were liquidated and the people who lost their jobs could not apply for social welfare and to this day cannot find a place in the new social reality. The poor level of education resulted in Romani being not competitive in the labor market and thus in their unemployment. This problem implies the occurrence of other social problems. Romani in Romania mostly live in tragic conditions and their settlements and villages are situated in locations remote from towns. They are often not provided with basic facilities, like running water, electricity or gas installations. Thus, it is difficult to provide appropriate conditions for children and teenagers going to school. The result is that despite compulsory education, the greater part of young Romani is pushed outside the educational system. The lack of running water results in Romani using polluted water reservoirs and this is the reason for various illnesses and the high death rate within this community.<sup>3</sup>

According to official statistics, there are ca. four hundred thousand Romani in Bulgaria. Unofficial statistics mention about two million. Bulgarian Romani are also not homogenous. They are divided into groups, they speak different dialects and profess various religions. Some of them cultivate traditions of nomadic life that started to

---

<sup>3</sup> Ł. Ostrowski, *Romowie w Rumunii. Różnorodność i jedność*, in *Romowie o sobie i dla siebie. Nowe problemy i nowe działania w pięciu krajach Europy*, ed. E. Nowicka, Warsaw 2003, p. 153.

be forbidden in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Other kinds of repression were linked to their limited civil rights. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, nomadic and Muslim Romani were deprived of voting rights resulting in the organization of the first Romani Congress in Sofia (1905) and withdrawal from the aforementioned limitation of voting rights.

Compared with the situation of Romani in other countries of occupied Europe, World War II was a relatively calm period for Bulgarian Romani as Bulgaria joined the Berlin Pact. Nevertheless, in 1942, all Romani were obliged to find a job. Those not able to do so were sent to work on the harvest, in road construction, railway-related jobs or in other public utility facilities. Moreover, marriages between non-Romani and Romani were banned and members of the latter community could not use public transportation vehicles in Sofia. After the war, Bulgaria started to be ruled by communists. It was the beginning of the next difficult period for Romani. Repression and discrimination were still prevalent. As in other countries ruled by communists, there were attempts at the forced assimilation of this community. Settlement, finding jobs and destruction of the Romani culture were treated as priorities. In the 1970s ca. 80% of Bulgarian Romani were going to separate schools and over a half of Romani children were living in orphanages. After this policy of the Bulgarian authorities towards this community turned out to be ineffective, they officially announced that there were no people of Romani origin in Bulgaria.

After the fall of communism in 1989, the situation of Romani deteriorated further. Dissolution of state-controlled plants and lack of education resulted in increased numbers of unemployed Romani. Districts inhabited by this community were gradually transformed into ghettos without running water, electricity and access to public transport. Various social problems had an influence on the already difficult relations with the rest of society.

Romani are poorly integrated in the societies of both Bulgaria and Romania. Their social situation is a significant factor in this matter. According to the UNICEF data from recent years for these countries, ca. 90% of the Romani population live in poverty and Romani settlements without running water and electricity are situated on the outskirts of towns and villages in locations completely inappropriate for living (in the proximity of railway embankments and landfills). Poverty, unemployment and discrimination support the tendency to live at the state's expense, apathy and crime. It is more difficult for Romani to join the rest of society than to emigrate to Western Europe. They also leave their countries because of the fear of anti-Romani political organizations. Some Romanian politicians had the idea to settle Romani in penal camps and members of the Romanian parliament want to officially name Romani as Gypsies. The reason is that they are fed up with people associating the

Romani minority with their country. In this context, the words of the former Romanian president, Traian Băsescu, are quite significant – in 2010 he publicly said that Romania had a serious problem with the integration of those Romani who did not want to work and lived off what they had stolen<sup>4</sup> (Dougherty 2013). The perception and expression of the image of the Romani minority in this country has influenced the relations of this minority with non-Romani.<sup>5</sup>

### Migration to Western European countries – the cases of Italy and France

The accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the EU in 2007 started the Romani exodus to Western European countries, especially to Italy, France, Germany and the United Kingdom. Thousands of new Romani immigrants arrived in Western Europe in order to search for a better life, but – as they were unemployed and deprived of social and health care – they settled in newly emerging camps on urban outskirts. The outburst of the economic crisis in 2008 and the clash with Romani immigrants living on the brink of poverty deepened and intensified the anti-Romani climate among societies in these countries and helped to radicalize policy against Romani.

As a result of this climate, the Italian government drastically tightened its anti-immigration policy, aimed mainly at Romani immigrants. On May 21, 2008, taking advantage of strong anti-Romani tendencies in Italian society, the government of Silvio Berlusconi passed numerous legal and policy-related acts, called the “safety package.” Decree no. 92 says that all citizens of both EU and non-EU countries sentenced to imprisonment for more than two years are to be forcibly deported from Italian territory. Moreover, the decree obliged all immigrant staying in Italy for longer than three months to possess “sufficient assets” resulting from legal economic activities to allow them to provide a livelihood for themselves and their families. The Italian government also introduced a procedure for collecting and gathering the fingerprints of Romani immigrants (including children) in order to create a register

---

<sup>4</sup> S. Dougherty, *14 unbelievably racist things European (and Canadian) politicians are saying about the Roma*, 21.11.2013, <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/europe/131118/14-unbelievably-racist-things-politicians-said-about-roma>, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> E. Marushiakova, V. Popov, *Gypsies (Roma) in Bulgaria*, Frankfurt am Main 1997; E. Marushiakova, *Gypsy/Roma Identities in New European Dimension: The case of Eastern Europe*, in *Dynamics of National Identity and Transnational Identities in the Process of European Integration*, ed. E. Marushiakova, Cambridge 2008.

of Romani living in Italy. It should be noted that the creation of population count registers based on ethnic origin is against European Union law.<sup>6</sup>

In 2008 a massive liquidation of Romani camps started. People were resettled in new locations without running water and electricity. After the protests of local communities, Romani were resettled again. Newly established camps are fenced and their inhabitants are under strict surveillance. Since 2009 the so called "plan for nomads" has been implemented in Italy. This is a response to an event that took place in Rome. On Valentine's Day a couple walking in the park was attacked, the girl being brutally raped. The media said that the perpetrators were foreigners and the police accused Romani. As a result, people organized street protests with banners saying "No mercy for you, monsters." After several months of investigation, DNA tests excluded the accused Romani as perpetrators. According to the plan for nomads, invented by the mayor of Rome, liquidation of informal Romani camps and resettlement of their inhabitants to those established by local authorities was planned. Implementation of the plan was appealed against by organizations protecting human rights, for example by Amnesty International. However, the court ruled that the plan was legal. Local politicians have also joined the anti-Romani campaign. At an election rally, Giancarlo Gentilini, the deputy mayor of Treviso, shouted that "Italy has awakened." He also summoned a revolution against illegal immigrants, adding that he wanted to clean the streets and stop Gypsy children stealing from elderly people. Italian protests against the presence of Romani and expressions full of stereotypes and intensifying hatred against them went unpunished.<sup>7</sup>

The policy of Berlusconi's government towards Romani immigrants started the process of open, legal anti-Romani procedures also developed and implemented in other EU countries. A perfect example is the policy executed by the French government. Taking advantage of the Saint-Aignan incident that took place in July 2010 – when Romani threw stones at the police station after local policemen had shot 22-year-old Romani Luigi Duquet<sup>8</sup> – the French authorities decided to liquidate three hundred camps and squats inhabited by Romani immigrants and send them

---

<sup>6</sup> T. Bielecki, *Włosi spierają się o pobieranie odcisków palców od Romów*, [http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114881,5426564,Wlosi\\_spieraja\\_sie\\_o\\_pobieranie\\_odciskow\\_palcow\\_od.html](http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114881,5426564,Wlosi_spieraja_sie_o_pobieranie_odciskow_palcow_od.html) 5.07.2008; idem, *Francjo, zostaw Romów!*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 10.09.2010; *Dzień Walki z Ubóstwem – zatrzymaj przymusowe wysiedlenia Romów we Włoszech*, [http://amnesty.org.pl/no\\_cache/aktualnosci/strona/article/7722.html](http://amnesty.org.pl/no_cache/aktualnosci/strona/article/7722.html) [17.10.2012].

<sup>7</sup> *Al alarmuje: przymusowe wysiedlenia to codzienność*, 2012, <http://www.wprost.pl/ar/350512/Al-alarmuje-przymusowe-wysiedlenia-to-codziennosc> [17.10.2012].

<sup>8</sup> M. Iszток, *Niebezpieczny anachronizm*, <https://stowarzyszenie.romowie.net/index.php/czynnik-aktualnosci/items/marek-iszток-niebezpieczny-anachronizm.68.html> [24.08.2010]; *Kłótnia o Romów na unijnym szczycie*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 16.09.2010.



to the countries they had come from. The mass deportation infringed the rules of the EU directive on the rights of citizens of the European Union and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of the member states, as well as EU anti-discrimination law. Within less than a year over eight thousand Romani were deported from France. At the same time, other countries also realized the policy of deportation of Romani, for example, twenty-three persons of Romani origin from Denmark, fifty from Sweden and over a hundred from Germany were sent to Romania in July 2009.<sup>9</sup>

EU policy-makers, as well as representatives of various international institutions, like the Council of Europe, OSCE or UN, gave a critical response to the actions performed by the French government. However, the most important thing was that the huge scale of the problems related to the integration of Romani as minority groups in the societies they live in, as well as the inefficiency of previously implemented actions, had been uncovered.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, it should be noted that despite the criticisms related to the treatment of Romani, expressed by the governments of European countries, especially EU policy-makers, the French government had not implemented anti-Romani policy in the past, though such opinions were dominant in the mass media. Romani have been living in this country for a long time and there has never been any information on government actions aiming to deport them from French territory. The main factor in the existing conflict was the clash of Western countries with communities coming from Eastern and Central European countries that differ from the Western cultural context. Thus, poverty and the consequent life styles and behavior became the reason for discrimination. The way of living could not be accepted by French society and then the government, whose goal is to keep the country and its citizens in safety, proposed controversial solutions which were inconsistent with human rights. Let us say that these actions did not solve the problem at all. These solutions are short-term, thoughtless and – what is most important – they do not lead to changes in the social situation of immigrants and in their relations with people living in the countries they come to.

Additionally, the problems of Romani immigrants have an indirect negative impact on the Romani who have been living in Western Europe for years and they also become stigmatized. According to the Agency of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (FRA), beside immigrants from Africa, Romani are the most discriminated group among all European national and ethnic minorities. 16% of interviewed Romani confirmed they had recently been discriminated against in various contexts of

---

<sup>9</sup> J. Appleton, *Sarkozy wypowiada wojnę własnym obywatelom*, "Spiked" 15.09.2010; T. Bielecki, *Włosi spierają się...*

<sup>10</sup> *Kłótnia o Romów...*

social life. Their community is exposed to discrimination and threatened with social exclusion in several areas. As has been mentioned, the standard of living of Romani in Eastern and Central Europe is poorer than in Western European countries. Among other things, the reason for this situation was the assimilation policy of minorities under communist rule, as well as the general differences in standards of living of entire societies in both parts of Europe (FRA, 2008). As a result of the accession of post-communist countries to the European Union, the need for policies aiming at improving the social and economic status of Romani living in these countries became an important issue that requires specific initiatives. We should also remember that the EU left issues related to minorities to be solved by the countries aspiring to join EU organizations. Thus, in this aspect, the countries had a free hand when selecting policies to be performed, and none of the EU documents urging them to solve minority issues were binding and still are not. Nevertheless, certain countries implemented policies in order to improve the standard of living of Romani.

With reference to the aforementioned circumstances and pan-European discussions on the policies of Italy and France towards Romani, besides the discussion of the unacceptable actions of these countries, there is a need to debate the still catastrophic social situation of the Romani and their low level of integration as a minority group, for example in Romania and Bulgaria. Romani bring unsolved problems from the countries they used to live in to Western Europe. And it is not easy to expect that socially unacceptable behavior is going to be sanctioned by the inhabitants of Western Europe. Thus, qualitative evaluation of initiatives aiming at improving the situation of Romani in Bulgaria and Romania, and investigation into why they are ineffective despite the huge sums of money dedicated to them, seem to be crucial in this respect. Unfortunately, politicians generally do not talk about effects of their actions, but rather provide information on the number of initiatives and amounts of money spent. In this context, quality does not matter and the discussion of effects is hardly noticeable. The other issue is that in the presence of such intense negativity towards Romani, popularity is gained by those who wish to get rid of them rather than those who wish to help them.

### Entitlement programs – a chance for positive changes?

Regardless of whether politicians show their like or dislike of Romani, each country joining the EU has the right to use financial resources to support various entitlement, educational and other programs. Considering their difficult situation in new

EU countries, large amounts of money have been assigned to activities aimed at equalizing the chances of Romani in labor markets or education. However, before these countries joined the EU, they had the possibility to make use of various forms of pre-accession support. One of the most important funds for these activities was PHARE. A significant proportion of the financial assets from this fund, especially in Romania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, was assigned to support Romani living in these countries. The realized projects mostly involved the equaling of opportunities for members of this minority in labor markets, education and access to medical services and improvement of accommodation conditions. Significant support for Romani could also be found in the budgets of other pre-accession programs. The LIEN program supported the development of non-governmental organizations, civil society and activities on behalf of groups threatened with social exclusion (for example Romani). Projects focused on the development of civil society structures in Central and Eastern Europe were funded from the ACCESS program. It was also possible to support non-governmental organizations acting on behalf of Romani.

When it comes to support for EU countries, we should notice that the financial activity of the EU started to be really intense in the context of support for the Romani community, when Central and Eastern European Countries joined this organization. Though it seems that EU decision makers are unaware of the scale of Romani problems and thus the problems of the countries they live in, and a single program focused on activities related to the Romani community has yet to be developed. The development of such a program is not possible because of diversified contexts and problems, as well as the internal diversification of Romani communities. Nevertheless, it is possible to devote financial resources to comprehensive support for this minority and to adjust this help for certain countries. Until now, such solutions have not been applied and Romani can be the beneficiaries of several EU programs funded from various financial mechanisms of the European Union.

The most important resource supporting the policy of member states with reference to Romani is the European Social Fund (ESF). It is one of the oldest structural funds and its goal is to support activities aimed at equalizing social differences in member states, e.g. in the fields of education and the labor market. Moreover, the ESF gives significant support related to social integration. In this field, help is given to groups that are excluded or threatened with social exclusion, national and ethnic minorities, disabled persons and immigrants. The second EU fund that should be mentioned with reference to support for Romani is the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), being the most important supporting instrument in the member states. The ERDF finances activities focused on equalizing differences related to the development level in certain regions of the Community. After the EU enlargements

in 2004 and 2007, the differences significantly increased, that is why EFRR is the key financial tool helping to reach a balance in this respect. The EFRR supports regional development, economic transformation, increased competitiveness and territorial cooperation in the entire European Union.

Significant help for Romani in the EU comes from the EU program for employment and social solidarity, PROGRESS 2007-2013. This program focuses on activities related to employment policy and social matters with special consideration for equaling opportunities for all citizens. The program consists of five areas in which financial support is accessible. The three following areas are especially important with reference to projects for Romani: employment; social integration; protection against and fighting discrimination.

Other beneficiary programs for Romani – especially in the fields of education and cultural promotion – are also financed from the European Commission budget in member states. Among these programs there are: *The Lifelong Learning Program*, *Youth in Action Program*, *Culture Program 2007-2013*. In some countries governments adopted programs for Romani, while other ones joined the initiative named *Decade of Roma Inclusion*.

It is obvious that the mere implementation of these activities does not guarantee any efficiency, however, those countries who initiated them finally became members of the EU. This happened to Central and Western European countries that became members of the Community in 2004 and 2007, including a few million Romani. As it turned out, the implemented programs have not been a success and Romani problems have become more and more serious in all Europe, as EU citizens have the right to freely move and stay in any country of the Union. As a consequence, the Romani community living on the margins of the society migrates to new countries. The problems of people discriminated against in their countries and living on the brink of poverty has been the reason for the many conflicts that Western European countries cannot cope with.<sup>11</sup>

### Help for Romani – a postcolonial project?

There are opportunities, mostly of the financial kind, that can support the integration of Romani with European societies. These programs have been implemented for years and millions are assigned to them. What is happening then if we are still talking about

---

<sup>11</sup> J. Talewicz-Kwiatkowska, *Wpływ aktywności finansowej Unii Europejskiej na położenie społeczne Romów w Polsce*, Cracow 2013, pp. 119-121.

the catastrophic and even worsening situation of Romani in Europe? When people talk about a lack of success in the initiated activities, the first mentioned argument is almost always the reluctance of Romani themselves to cooperate. Opinions that they are passive and demanding build the image that they are responsible for the lack of success of the activities addressed to help them. Other opinions on the reasons for the lack of success in these programs refer to corruption. Unfortunately, the main beneficiaries of these programs are those who help, i.e. governments, local authorities, companies and social organizations, including Romani ones. Help is not always granted to those who need it and in many cases inhabitants of poor settlements or villages do not even know about support opportunities. Romani refer to legends about the millions to be spent on them, however no one can explain where they will come from, what they should be spent on or who has them. The distance between the two worlds is huge, though reports confirm that everything is in order. The numbers say it all. EU institutions proudly point out the amounts spent on entitlement programs and companies/institutions/organizations perfectly execute and account for their projects. There are more and more specialists/experts on Romani, international networks and supporting institutions. The European Union even organizes summits, at which governments present new strategies for the Romani who have been participating in them in recent years. Then, what happens is that despite so many apparent successes, we can still hear about the bad and even worsening situation of Romani. Why are the reluctance to help this minority and the level of prejudice still growing? Anti-Romani demonstrations, violence, deportations – is this the reality, in which the discussion of human rights and the principle of equality are a superior standard?

After an analysis of initiatives related to Romani and all the entitlement programs, we can find an analogy with the development assistance system<sup>12</sup> for underdeveloped countries. When, in the late 1960s, entitlement programs were evaluated, it turned out that their effects were inadequate for the amount of financial resources spent. Research confirmed the still growing distance between rich and developing countries. Nowadays, it is estimated that the reason for this spectacular failure in the realization of development assistance was the incorrect adjustment of implemented initiatives to local conditions. The assessment of previous activities initiated changes in the understanding of the development idea and in the strategy for the main

---

<sup>12</sup> The development assistance system was established in the 1950s as a remedy for the economic inequality between Western and underdeveloped countries. Among other things, the expansion of entitlement programs was consolidated as the result of decolonization in Africa and Asia, because the majority of newly established states were characterized by low or very low levels of development with poor access to foreign capital and little savings; J. Witkowski, *Ewolucja koncepcji rozwoju od końca II wojny światowej do roku 2000*, "Dialogi o Rozwoju" no. 2, 2008.

development-related organizations. It was then agreed that the solution should be the creation of capabilities in beneficiary countries to support development and its process in a self-reliant way. However, many years passed before it happened, as the first debate to which developing countries were invited took place no earlier than in the 1990s.<sup>13</sup> The change in the way of thinking about entitlement programs was the result of criticisms of development programs and much evidence that, contrary to the declarations of organizations from Western countries, there is still the dominant opinion that Western science and knowledge are inerrant<sup>14</sup>, and that the whole project of development assistance is the next attempt at the westernization of other cultural areas, as it has always been based on the model of the industrialized world and has been negating indigenous knowledge. It was also stated that development practices are formed on the basis of Western ideology and dominated by large development agencies, such as the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund that try to implement their controlling programs on the pretext of assistance.

As in case of assistance for Romani, financial resources spent on development assistance do not ensure that the implemented activities will be successful. Good will has also turned out to be not enough. In both situations the problem was the conviction that the proposed solutions are just and that they will result in positive changes. The dominance over or non-consideration of Romani in the debate resulted in unsuccessful policies. Currently, there is a widespread opinion that they have to participate in the implementation of projects in order to make them successful. The problem is that the presence of Romani is necessary not only in the phase of realization, but also – this is even more important – in the phase of development. Otherwise, it is very probable that the projects will be completed, even with participation of the Romani, but they will not result in any positive changes to their situation. Unfortunately, such situations happen on a day-to-day basis as “living off grants” has become a way to make profits for many institutions and organizations, including Romani ones. The ability to fill in forms for grant funds and to account for projects helps to ensure the correct formal realization of these projects. Thus, projects are completed and their descriptions are included in various EU reports confirming the justification of actions performed by international institutions. The paradox is that the lack of Romani participation in development activities aimed at helping their own communities (as has been already mentioned, the problem is not related to the implementation of projects, rather to the definition of entitlement areas, specifying methods of activity, and criteria of programs within which projects are realized)

<sup>13</sup> J. Witkowski, *Ewolucja koncepcji rozwoju...*

<sup>14</sup> J. Sharp, J. Briggs, *Postcolonialism and Development: New Dialogues?*, “The Geographical Journal” vol. 172, no. 1, 2006.

results in international institutions and Romani-related experts defining the needs of these communities and then determining the activities' level of efficiency. Unfortunately, discussions on the efficiency of these actions generally focuses on failures as there are hardly any successes. Experts throw up their hands and they are simultaneously sure that the proposed solutions are correct. The responsibility for these failures is mostly borne by Romani and their culture. Unfortunately, they generally do not participate in discussions on this topic.

### The role of anthropology

Pointing to the analogy between development assistance and assistance for Romani, the following statement seems to be correct:

one of the main reasons that these actions are unsuccessful is [...] difference in perception of changes. If we seriously consider this difference, wide-world dissemination of this idea of development may become much more complicated than it is assumed by development agencies or simply morally unjustified. Why should we, as representatives of certain culture, force others to adapt our point of view, lifestyle, etc.?<sup>15</sup>

It is easy to agree that in the case of development assistance and assistance for Romani, ways of thinking characteristic of dominant societies force a certain way of life determined by the standards and values binding in these societies. The majority of Romani cannot be included in this model related to the vision of modern reality. Their standard of living is definitely different from current standards and their culture often becomes a buffer protecting members of this minority against external threats, thus their culture is often seen as backward, hermetic or an obstacle to integration. Those who spread such opinions often have no knowledge at all of the culture of Romani groups and the internal diversification of this minority. They think that because Romani culture is a problem, it should be changed. This is according to the concept that a minority is no longer problematic when it becomes the majority. We should notice that such an approach was characteristic for the assimilation policy in communist times and not for integration policy in multicultural Europe. However, reality proves that there are different standards of thinking when it comes to Romani. Thus, anthropology and its methodological background – careful and aware participation and observation – become very crucial in the case of activities

---

<sup>15</sup> A. Hummel, M. Owczarska, T. Wierusz-Walknowski, *Antropologia rozwoju – pomiędzy praktyką a teorią. Czy mamy subdyscyplinę w Polsce?*, "Dialogi o Rozwoju" no. 2, 2008.

on behalf of Romani communities. Anthropology and a relativistic approach allow one to understand the reality of different cultures and this may become crucial, when it comes to the adequacy and appropriateness of the proposed solutions. As has already been mentioned, the lack of a “culturally sensitive” approach and the adjustment of actions to a social and cultural context become the reason these solutions turn out to be unsuccessful. This is why assistance in the integration of Romani communities and entitlement policies require their specifics and cultures to be understood. Thanks to the research and activities of anthropologists, it is possible to know the Romani lifestyle and understand processes occurring in these communities. In order to reach this goal, we should also remember about the political and historical contexts which have a huge influence on the current situation of Romani communities. As we have already mentioned, this is a very diversified minority living in a diaspora. Thus, the current and previous policies of the countries Romani live in have an influence on their social and cultural situation. Field research and further analytical stages, such as comparative studies, can work towards the development of a social change theory, in which cultural values and social and cultural relations play important roles. Moreover, applied anthropology can help to predict the results of social intervention, e.g. various integrating activities and plan them in order to make them successful.

It is also worth mentioning that the activity of anthropologists may have an influence on the solving of problems related to the failed programs and activities that often occur in applied social changes. What is important is to make use of anthropologists’ efforts and the relativistic approach, as they may become serious tools for integrating Romani with majority groups.

## Conclusion

In the presence of growing problems, EU policy makers seem to be more aware that despite Romani – like other minorities – being legally protected and the huge financial resources which have been spent in order to improve their social situation, it is necessary to provide greater support for member states in their implemented activities. Unfortunately, this awareness does not result in the conviction that is necessary to make changes not only related to the forms of assistance, but also to ways of thinking about how to help. International institutions produce numerous reports on activities performed on behalf of this minority. In 2010, in the European Commission statement, it was mentioned that up to 2009, besides sending financial resources to member states as a part of structural funds, most activities were related to the



diagnosis and analysis of the situation of Romani in certain countries. At the same time it was stated that from 2010 practical actions would start as the EU institutions have sufficient knowledge and can apply appropriate legal and financial tools in order to support the integration of Romani in the countries they live in. Additionally, we should mention that the aforementioned tools and knowledge have not been specified and, what is most important in this matter, it cannot be concluded from the documents that any changes are planned, while it seems necessary to implement them, if so many failures did occur in this field.

However, there are some positive aspects and we should pay attention to them. It has been finally noticed that as the result of the internal diversification of the Romani community, it is impossible to develop a single strategy and policy. It is necessary to show a diversified approach considering social and cultural contexts, as well as economic, geographic and legal issues. Unfortunately, for now the result of commonly performed activities – as they used to be in the past – is plenty of documents and initiatives directly related to Romani and not being legally enforced. Thus, at this stage let us hope that the implemented activities are a prelude to some comprehensive initiatives that will have improve the situation of Romani in EU countries.

## Literature

- Appleton J., *Sarkozy wypowiada wojnę własnym obywatelom*, "Spiked" 15.09.2010.
- Bielecki T., *Francjo, zostaw Romów!*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 10.09.2010.
- Bielecki T., *Włosi spierają się o pobieranie odcisków palców od Romów*, [http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114881,5426564,Wlosi\\_spieraja\\_sie\\_o\\_pobieranie\\_odciskow\\_palcow\\_od.html](http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114881,5426564,Wlosi_spieraja_sie_o_pobieranie_odciskow_palcow_od.html) [5.07.2008].
- Dougherty S., *14 unbelievably racist things European (and Canadian) politicians are saying about the Roma*, 21.11.2013, <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/europe/131118/14-unbelievably-racist-things-politicians-said-about-roma>, 2015.
- Hummel A., Owczarska M., Wierusz-Walknowski T., *Antropologia rozwoju – pomiędzy praktyką a teorią. Czy mamy subdyscyplinę w Polsce?*, "Dialogi o Rozwoju" no. 2, 2008.
- Isztok M., *Niebezpieczny anachronizm*, <https://stowarzyszenie.romowie.net/index.php/czytelnik-aktualnosci/items/marek-isztok-niebezpieczny-anachronizm.68.html> [24.08.2010].
- Kłótnia o Romów na unijnym szczycie*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 16.09.2010.
- Marushiakova E., *Gypsy/Roma Identities in New European Dimension: The case of Eastern Europe*, in *Dynamics of National Identity and Transnational Identities in the Process of European Integration*, ed. E. Marushiakova, Cambridge 2008.
- Marushiakova E., Popov V., *Gypsies (Roma) in Bulgaria*, Frankfurt am Main 1997.
- Ostrowski Ł., *Romowie w Rumunii. Różnorodność i jedność*, in *Romowie o sobie i dla siebie. Nowe problemy i nowe działania w pięciu krajach Europy*, ed. E. Nowicka, Warsaw 2003.

Sharp J., Briggs J., *Postcolonialism and Development: New Dialogues?*, "The Geographical Journal" vol. 172, no. 1, 2006.

Talewicz J.-Kwiatkowska, *Wpływ aktywności finansowej Unii Europejskiej na położenie społeczne Romów w Polsce*, Kraków 2013.

Witkowski J., *Ewolucja koncepcji rozwoju od końca II wojny światowej do roku 2000*, "Dialogi o Rozwoju" no. 2, 2008.

*AI alarmuje: przymusowe wysiedlenia to codzienność*, 2012, <http://www.wprost.pl/ar/350512/AI-alarmuje-przymusowe-wysiedlenia-to-codziennosc> [17.10.2012].

*Dzień Walki z Ubóstwem – zatrzymaj przymusowe wysiedlenia Romów we Włoszech*, [http://amnesty.org.pl/no\\_cache/aktualnosci/strona/article/7722.html](http://amnesty.org.pl/no_cache/aktualnosci/strona/article/7722.html) [17.10.2012].