

**The Limits of the State: Political Participation and Representation
of Roma in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia**

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The author analyses the political involvement of Roma in the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary in the 1990s. It is argued that while Romani political participation has developed substantially over the years, political representation has not yet been attained. The author identifies models of involvement in state structures as related to the effectiveness of political participation and influence on policy formation. Romani leaders often put the bulk of the blame on governments for the absence of real political representation of Roma. The author argues that trans-national organizations have formed financial and social incentives to Roma industry that have played a key role as a 'brain drain' in attracting those who might have otherwise been involved in party politics. While political systems and demographics have precluded the possibility for an ethnic Romani political party in the Czech Republic, the Romani leaders in Hungary and Slovakia have yet to fully utilise the electoral potential of the Romani electorate.

I. Introduction

Two models of Roma involvement in politics have emerged after 1989. First, the policy formation model, applicable to the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland; and second, the political representation model, as it has developed in Hungary.¹ While the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993 has lowered the electoral force of Roma, as the group was split between the two emerging states, the electoral potential especially of the Slovak Roma was not fully utilised. However, when looking at other social movements in the 1990s in the Central and Eastern European space, Roma have been one of the most active in political participation, ranging from local or national elections, referendums, campaigning, membership in political parties, pressure groups or advisory bodies to government, demonstrations, civil disobedience, implementation of policies and community action.²

¹ Political representation will be used here in terms of the duty of representing and advancing interests through the process of elections that authorise persons to do so.

² The term participation is used here in the sense of social activity, of taking part with others in some social process.

While there has been some effort from the Czech or Slovak governments to suggest that Roma advisory bodies to the government have constituted an outlet for political representation, I will oppose this premise, arguing that advisory bodies to the government are limited in offering a good channel for political representation. The Czech government has recently adopted a measure that at first glance could improve the representation of the Roma minority, although, policy formation is not a good channel for political mobilization and the question of political representation of Roma remains unanswered. The Hungarian model, which attempts to present itself as a channel for political representation of minorities, has on the other hand acted to stifle influence on policy formation, which has downplayed the effectiveness of political representation of Roma in Hungary.

The state has only limited means to secure representation of minority groups; as in electoral democracy, it is up to the particular group to enter into deals and political negotiations to secure places on electoral lists with mainstream parties. Trans-national advocacy organizations, as well as some academics have suggested that racism and stereotyping of the Romani problem have stood in the way of electoral successes of many Romani politicians (Vermeersch 2001). Here, I argue that throughout the 1990s most of the Romani leaders were attracted by other forms of political participation, mainly civil and trans-national society based, and thus dropped the idea of entering into mainstream politics. However, this form of political participation in civil society networks is unlikely to secure the mainstream form of political representation that the Roma and also Roma rights advocates have been calling for.

II. Citizenship, *polis* and the ‘Empire of Uniformity’

Reflections on political participation and representation lead us directly to the central questions about the nature of government (Birch 2001: 104). Abraham Lincoln described democratic government as a government “of the people by the people and for the people”, presumed to be citizens. According to Aristotle, a citizen is “he who has the power to take part in the deliberative or judicial administration of any state and speaking generally, a state is a body of citizens sufficing for the purposes of life” (cited in Hindess

2001: 91). Thus most of the inhabitants (e.g. women, slaves, foreigners etc.) from the city-states of Sparta or Athens were powerless and remained excluded from citizenship and subsequently from participation in the *polis*.

From the Greek point of view, since the *polis* is the highest form of political life, those who participate without using the *polis* as an organizing principle exist at a substantially lower level of civilization (Hindess 2001: 93). Although the later definitions of citizenship happen to be more egalitarian than earlier, classic ones, both prohibit discrimination of citizens.

Political theorists from Rousseau onwards have either urged or assumed that a proper system of government must provide opportunities for political participation by ordinary citizens (Birch 2001: 104). T. H. Marshall describes citizenship as three sets of rights: civil rights to liberty and equality before the law, the political right to vote and to participate in the political processes, and the social rights to participate fully in the way of life that is shared by the citizens as a whole (Marshall 1950). However, in modern times, the concept of citizenship and thus political participation has remained insensitive to groups with diverse backgrounds (women, children, ethnic minorities etc.).

Roma have been largely excluded from the process of equal participation in public issues (*res publica*) in what James Tully called 'the empire of uniformity', an imaginary social contract between the body of citizens as a whole (Tully 1995). Throughout the 1990s, human rights groups and organizations defending the rights of Roma have presented arguments with reference to the discrimination of Roma in all spheres of life. Indeed, defending the rights of Roma has become one of the main human rights issues in Central and Eastern Europe. Racially motivated attacks, racial discrimination, insufficient political representation, loss of citizenship of numerous Czech Roma have formed a reality that violates the principle of citizenship as it was formulated by the political theorist T. H. Marshall. Thus, Tully's empire of uniformity, a social contract that presumably applies to all citizens equally, leaves out the needs of those who fall out of the ranks of uniformity of

population and continue to demonstrate many historical and continuing injustices (cited in Hindess 2001: 100). Government measures towards the Roma minority have taken place within the limits of uniformity, though since the nature of the provisions are 'special' one wonders to what extent they will truly change the position of Roma within the societies. For example, how will they lead to accepting Romani values and views on what constitutes a good way of life?

III. The policy formation model: Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia

In the early 1990s, political participation as well as representation of the Roma in Czechoslovakia was at a peak in comparison with the rest of Central and East Europe: there were ten Romani MPs in the three representative bodies – the Federal Parliament and the two National Councils. The Romani were represented well, and the government regularly held substantial discussions with the Romani leaders about Romani policy at the federal as well as the national level (Czech Republic 1991). Romani MPs in the Federal Assembly and National Councils were also including in drafting Romani minority policy in so-called 'round tables' focusing on five areas: (1) recognition of Roma as a national minority and promoting respect for human rights of Roma and in general, (2) developing state policy towards Roma; (3) creation of state institutions responsible for policy towards Roma, (4) changing the educational system to increase respect for differences between Romani and non-Romani children and (5) recognising that Roma are the subject and object of interethnic conflict, and creating educational programmes that would minimize the negative stereotypes of Roma and prejudice towards Roma. In October 1991, the federal government approved Resolution No. 619 'Principles on policy towards Roma minority of the government of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic'. The Resolution ordered the Prime Minister of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic government Jan Miklosko and the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs to continue working on the development of institutionalisation of the "problem of the Roma Minority", education in tolerance and human rights and the education of Romani children. Formation of policy and dialogue between the Roma MPs in National Councils and the state administration was

carried out also at the level of National Councils and republican governments. While the Czech government adopted Resolution No. 463/1991, ordering the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs to draft concrete measures, the Slovak government in a similar process adopted Resolution No. 153/1991, entitled 'Principles of Government policy towards Roma' and laid out areas (education, social security, employment, culture and housing) for improving the situation of Roma. However, some of the tasks adopted in Resolution No. 463/1991 were revoked in October 1992 by the adoption of Resolution No. 594/1992 in the context of the disintegration of the Czechoslovak state. In particular, tasks that ordered the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs to draft principles of state policy towards Roma in a report and a necessary systematic research on the relations and the source of conflict in the relations between Roma and the non-Roma were cancelled.

The strategy of roundtables, at which the Roma representatives and the respective Ministers discussed policy formulation in the early 1990s was scarcely an effective tool of policy development, even though it was rooted in the style of what came to be perceived as Romani political participation and representation some years later. Thus, by the end of the 'friendly era' of roundtables in summer 1992, the Roma found themselves declining in political importance, mainly because the cabinet changed and so did the style of Roma policy development. In 1993, four governmental resolutions ordered the Ministries to put forth practical proposals on issues related to Roma. The documents were barely taken seriously and had the effect of generalizing the Romani issue in the spirit of the civic principle. For example, the issue of specific needs of Roma children was shifted to the larger issue of risky children and youth. The document reads: "The Ministry of Education ... will evaluate projects and activities aimed at risky groups of children and youth *including* Romani" [emphasis added]. Moreover, the Romani issue was slowly shifted from the responsibility of the Ministries to the responsibility of advisory bodies such as the Council for Nationalities. While Resolution No. 67/1993 ordered only the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs to submit a 'Report on the problems of Roma community' from the aspect of the social situation of the Roma, including employment and education, the following Resolution No. 210/1993 shifted further research and tasks to complete reports

to an advisory body, the Council for Nationalities. While the earlier Resolution treated the Romani issue as a 'social problem' leaving other Ministries without an obligation to submit reports and proposals, the later Resolution meant a shift within the state administrative structure, leaving the Roma community without any policy-making influence. Thus, the Romani representatives succeeded in developing a dependency on roundtable discussions and the goodwill of ruling cabinets rather than on Parliamentary work and alliance-building in the respective political parties. In this sense, Roma missed their historic chance to fit into the system of forming political parties.

The dissolution of Czechoslovakia can therefore be seen as the end of Romani politics in the sense of Parliamentary representation as well as in the sense of policy formation (author interview with Karel Holomek, May 2001). A real indication of this is the fact that while experts estimate the number of Roma in the Czech Republic to be between 275,000 and 300,000, the number of persons declared to be of Roma nationality in the Czech Republic dropped from 33,000 in the 1991 census to 12,000 in the 2001 census (European Roma Rights Center 1999a; see also Open Society Institute/EU Accession Monitoring Program 2001: 173). In Slovakia, the number of Roma identifying themselves as such has seen a slight increase from 80,949 in 1992 to 89,920 in 2001; however, even the Slovak government estimates the real figure of the Roma population in Slovakia to be approximately 500,000, which is in line with estimates of credible non-governmental organizations as well as of respected international organizations (Open Society Institute/EU Accession Monitoring Program 2001: 488; see also European Roma Rights Center 1999b; see also United Nations 1999: 6).

The inclusiveness of coalitions such as Civic Forum (*Občanské Forum*) and Public Against Violence (*Verejnost proti násiliu*) in Slovakian policy development throughout the 1990s; thus Roma remained on the edge of the political spectrum. The political parties, heavily influenced by the orthodoxy of the 'civic principle' did not offer the extent of inclusiveness similar to the movements mentioned above. The civic principle is derived from the strict interpretation of Article 3 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, that sets down that all people have the right to freely choose their nationality [ethnicity]. This has

led to a refusal to discuss the needs of national minorities, as all these rights ought to have been accommodated on the basis of citizenship. It has to be stressed that to call for a 'civic principle' is only one possible interpretation of the Charter.

When representation of Roma in high politics became difficult, many Romani leaders shifted their activity to the NGO sector, campaigning for a newly emerging concept of Roma rights and conducting community developmental work. Thus, the dependency on roundtable discussions shifted to a certain dependency of the Romani elite on the third sector in the following years. The combined factors of exclusion of minority issues from the agendas of political parties and the flourishing of civil society and trans-national human rights organizations resulted in a *de facto* departure of Romani leaders from mainstream politics.

While some authors have argued that exclusion was caused by growing racism in societies, this argument has to be combined with other significant factors (Vermeersch, 2001). First, one has to look to the important incentives of funding provided for project-oriented civil society based activities that were partially responsible for the Romani departure from the political scene. Second, a newly developing human rights agenda of non-governmental organizations has created a significant distance in mutual understanding. Political parties and governments have adapted to the human rights discourse, largely influenced by the outside mechanism of European Union enlargement towards the end of the 1990s. However, NGOs conducting a campaign of criticism of the situation of Roma left little room for mutual dialogue. The stronger the criticism from the NGO sector towards the direction of the parties and governments, the less the latter could have imagined cooperating openly with its critics. Only after more than ten years of transition to democracy did the mainstream political channels of representation begin to transform, responding not to the criticism from the NGO sector and from human rights advocates but rather to the larger processes of harmonization with principles laid as a criteria for membership in European Union (i.e. Copenhagen criteria). Thus, two mutually exclusive political cultures have grown throughout the 1990s: the NGO culture acting on the basis of human rights advocacy, detached from the government structures and pursuing project

driven work, while the political parties' culture remained rigid and often authoritarian in their inner structures.

In response to criticism of absent Romani policy, the Czech government re-started dialogue with members of Romani community, which ultimately led to the establishment of an advisory body, named the Inter-Ministerial Commission for Romani Community Affairs (IMCRCA) to advise the cabinets on policy formulation towards Roma. A document entitled 'Concept on government policy towards members of Romany community, supporting their integration into society' was approved by the Czech government on 14 June 2000. The Concept was first submitted on the basis of Government decree No. 279 of 7 April 1999, concerning the Concept of the government policy towards members of the Roma community, supporting their integration into society and on the basis of the government decision of 2 February 2000 about returning this document for further elaboration according to the Government's comments. The government approved this Concept in Resolution No. 599 of 14 June 2000.

The political participation of Roma in policy formation, in practice, became an exercise where Roma therefore had 'voice' but no influence in the policy adoption process. Similarly, the frustration of the bureaucrats employed at IMCRCA became apparent when it came to the actual adoption of the Concept by the Cabinet. Although prominent dissenters were in charge of drafting the policy, their good intentions to have the Cabinet adopt a minority protection policy of high standards were met with refusal. In the case of Czech policy towards Roma, Petr Uhl, human rights advocate, was in charge between 1998 and 2001. The Draft Concept submitted to the government proposed two variants for the integration of Roma. Option A proposed the establishment of an Office for Ethnic and Racial Equality and Option B proposed a consultative role for the Inter-Ministerial Commission for Romani Community Affairs. Option A foresaw the establishment of a state institution with the mandate to issue generally binding legal provisions with their own budget. It was proposed to create an institution which would be endowed with sanctioning powers against racial discrimination and which would have a budget of hundreds of millions of crowns to be spent on integration programmes and projects. Option B

proposed to maintain the consultative, advisory status for the already existing Inter-ministerial Commission, and was as a consequence finally adopted. Only four out of seventeen members of the Cabinet voted for Option A.

It has been argued by the Czech government that the model of Roma working in pairs with Deputy Ministers on policy development and response to immediate tasks is an effective tool to involve Roma in policy formulation. Apparently, it assists the state administration in understanding what is happening at the local level of the Romani communities. However, IMCRCA as a commission had the lowest status in the hierarchy of government. It was not a body of state administration and in comparison to local authorities, for example, it had no power to push forward any recommendation by IMCRCA against the will of local authorities. On 19 December 2001, the status of the Commission was changed to Council for Roma Community Affairs and its chairperson became a member of the cabinet. However, because the proposal for establishing the Office for Ethnic and Racial Equality was not adopted, “the Council of the Czech Government remains the main form of institutional organisation for the affairs of Roma communities and their integration” (The Concept of Roma Integration). In addition, Romani representatives were appointed to represent the regions. However, the Concept is not accompanied by new tasks for the Ministries.

The model of Roma advising the state administration in policy development in rather limited bodies as a model has influenced formation of similar bodies in Slovakia and strategies in Poland. The formerly large Romani representation in the Slovak National Council and the Federal Parliament during the last hours of Czechoslovakia naturally diminished after the dissolution of the state. In the 1990 elections, Romani representatives were as follows: in the Federal Assembly from Public Against Violence, Gejza Adam, and Anna Koptova in the National Council. Federal Assembly representatives on the list of the Communist party were Karol Zeman and Vincent Danihel. The elections in 1992 did not result in any seats for the ethnically Romani party Roma Civic Initiative (ROI), although an electoral potential was certainly present, with Roma constituting as much as ten per

cent of the population of the Slovak Republic (United Nations 1999: Para. 10; see also European Roma Rights Center 1999b).

On the other hand, there was no mechanism of political mobilization of Roma in Slovakia, since in the first democratic elections Roma were elected on lists of the Communist party and the movement Public against Violence. In the 1998 national elections, no Romani political parties competed for votes; this may also have been a result of the fact that no joint platform was adopted among the fourteen Romani political parties. In 1999, the Slovak Ministry of Interior registered about fifty-nine Romani associations and fourteen political parties (see also Council of Europe 1999a: 18). While in Slovakia the government throughout the 1990s employed Romani advisors on the issue of policy, the model of an Advisory body to the government was established after the end of the Meciar government in 1998 and followed the model of IMCRCA.

Following the election in autumn 1998, the Dzurinda adopted the ‘Strategy of the government of the Slovak Republic for the Solution of the Problems of the Roma national minority and the set of Measures for its implementation’ – Stage I on 27 September 1999 and Stage II on 3 May 2000. The strategy of the government’s Stage II was adopted as Governmental Resolution No. 294/2000. In Stage I, the government laid down the first necessary steps for the improvement of the situation of Roma and described the general situation of Slovak Roma. Stage I was in particular focused on the areas of education, training, housing, unemployment, regional development, human rights, language and culture, and health. Concrete Measures in Stage II, adopted on 3 May 2000, specified tasks for Ministries and local administration. The tasks in Stage II were divided into three areas of action. First, the government ordered several state research institutions to conduct research into the main areas of concern regarding the situation of the Roma minority. Second, the government called for cooperation between the government and NGOs on the effective use of finance and experience in the “area of solving problems of the Romani national minority”. Third, in several areas, for example, education and the prevention of racial violence, the government emphasized that the future policy will be adopted once the pilot projects prove that the chosen strategy has brought improvements.

In the meantime, Stage II suggests multicultural training for judges, the police and the army as well as prison guards and other state employees.

The four Advisory Councils chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister for Human Rights, National Minorities and Regional Development Pál Csáky deal with the issue of human rights and national minority policy development and implementation and development of regions. The Council for Human Rights provides the government with advice and recommendations on human rights issues. The Council for National Minorities and Ethnic Groups, created by government decree No. 292/1998 has the structure of a multilevel body, incorporating members of national minorities and employees of respective Ministries. The model is in many important ways similar to the model of the Council for Nationalities in the Czech Republic. The office of the Plenipotentiary for Solving the Problems of Roma Minority is chaired by Klara Orgovanova, a former NGO leader and activist (see Resolution No. 127/1999, 10 February 1999; the previous Plenipotentiary, Vincent Danihel, was a former MP from 1990 to 1992). The Plenipotentiary, together with the advisory panel of Roma representatives, drafts and submits recommendations to the government on issues of the Roma minority through the Deputy Prime Minister Csáky (for more, see Slovak Republic Government Office 1999). The Plenipotentiary for Romani issues is also a member of the government Council for combating anti-societal activity. The Council for regional development does not explicitly address the issue of the Roma minority.

In Poland, the exceptionality of the relationship between Poles and Roma stressed by the Polish authorities has formed the heart of Roma minority policies. Polish authorities insist that since the number of Roma in the country is insignificant compared to the rest of Central and East Europe, “the situation of Roma is much better than in the other Central and Eastern European countries” and that “[it] cannot be claimed that there are antagonisms between Roma and Polish society, [because] the incidents occur sporadically [...]” (cited in Poland. Department of Citizenship, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration 2000). The open denial of several pogroms that took place in Poland throughout the 1990s as well as the denial of widespread discrimination against Romani

communities has resulted in an exodus of Polish Roma from Poland. Several pogroms against Roma took place in the newly democratic Poland throughout the 1990s. Pogroms took place in Mława in 1991, in Kielce, Krakow and Zakopane in 1993 and in Słupsk in 1995. Several attacks by angry mobs were reported also in the second half of the 1990s from Zabrze in 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2001, along with attacks on Romani settlements in the south of Poland in Malopolska province. Roma seeking asylum, in particular in Scandinavia, Germany and the United Kingdom, created international pressure which the Polish authorities could not resist. In 2001, the Polish government adopted a package for improvement of the situation of Roma in the south of Poland in Malopolska province (*Wojwodstwo*). The programme detailed here contains a strategy for improvement of the situation in education, living conditions, security, and information about Roma, health and unemployment. While there is no post-1989 tradition of political representation of Roma in the Polish Parliament *Sejm*, it is still correct to include the Polish case of presently forming policies under the model of policy formation and political participation.

IV. Minority self-government representation model

Hungary provides a contrasting model of Romani political participation, namely representation through minority self-governments attached to the local self-governments. As early as 1993, driven most likely by an intention to protect the interests of the Hungarian minorities abroad, the adopted an Act on Minorities, recognizing thirteen national minorities officially. The official minorities of Hungary are: Germans, Roma, Greeks, Ukrainians, Romanians, Serbs, Croatians, Slovenians, Slovaks, Poles, Armenians, Bulgarians and Ruthenians (Council of Europe 1999b: 4). However, the present system of minority self-governments does not allow Roma to participate in the decision-making and policy-making process effectively. Romani needs remain inadequately represented and the Romani leaders remain powerless in responding to those needs. It has been argued that minority self-government is the “biggest lie of the majority society against the biggest minority of the country” (Szalai 2000: 569). The paradox of their close involvement with the state administration, in comparison to the policy model that has been

put into practice in the Czech Republic and Slovakia is evident. A parallel to the Hungarian Romani situation can be found in Franz Kafka's character of land-measurer K in *The Castle* who is very close to those in power and spends his lifetime waiting for an audience; however, he receives only vague and ambiguous messages. With no clear answer from the outside world, he remains powerless and in the end becomes a prisoner to his own destiny (Kafka 1974). According to the Law on Minorities, the means to maintain cultural identity and express cultural difference is provided, even though with the Romani groups it has an effect of an insensitive unifier, similar to the concept of 'empire of uniformity', a *gleichschaltung* of the Romani minority to one inherent and homogenous mass. "Integrating different Gypsy traditions" (Szuhay 1995: 15) has its initial setbacks also at the political level, reducing political participation to the 'Gypsy minority self-government' (*Cigany kisebsegi onkormanyzot*) at the local level and to the Roma Parliament at the national level. In Hungary, there were three representatives in the Hungarian National Assembly in the period 1990-1994, a similar situation to Romani representation in the Czech Republic and Slovakia in the early 1990s. All of the candidates were elected on party lists of mainstream political parties, the liberal party the Alliance of Free Democrats (SzDSz) and the Socialist party (MSzP). The Romani MPs on the list of SzDSz were Antonia Haga and Aladar Horvath. Tamas Peli was elected on the voting list of MSzP. Since then, there has been no Romani MP in the National Assembly. Ethnic Romani parties stood for election in 1990 and 1994 but failed to attract votes.

The Romani self-governments also negatively influence Romani self-mobilization, centring the efforts of Roma on this insufficient system of representation. The Romani in Hungary are thus marked by an inability to react to the real problems of discrimination, and marginalization. Furthermore, this system leaves little space for real political mobilization since it implicitly supports loyal Romani politicians.

V. Explaining the absence of Romani representation

The policy formation model and the self-representation model are mirror images. While non-existent representation of Roma in the Czech Republic and Slovakia cripples Romani politics, in Hungary, the absence of any influence on policy decisions leaves the Roma representatives totally out of the game. Thus, some combination of these two, each being on its own an insufficient measure, could bring improvements to the level of political representation of Roma. The general rule that all channels of political communication tend to become two-way channels could also be seen in the operation of advisory and consultative committees established with the ostensible purpose of representing those in question. The function that the Romani brainstorming advisory committees in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and the minority self-government system in Hungary fulfill is that of creating opportunities for grievances to be ventilated so that critics are able to let off steam instead of building up their frustrations. However, it does not follow that the critics will succeed in bringing about changes. Some years ago, after public criticism of the quality of British radio and television services, a suggestion was made that a new broadcasting council should be established to oversee all the broadcasting media and to deal with complaints from aggrieved members of the public. The London *Daily Telegraph* made the following comment:

Alas this suggestion will not begin to solve the problem. It is our experience generally that boards which are set up to regulate and supervise some activity ... are soon captured by the industry in question and fashioned into its apologists (*Daily Telegraph* 4 January 1971).

It is highly unlikely that this tendency is confined to the media and to Great Britain. As we have observed in the Central European governments attempts to create Romani political participation channels, the observation of the *Daily Telegraph* about advisory bodies is fully applicable. While the Roma remain the most politically active ethnic group, their representation is beyond acceptable scale. It follows from this that when we discuss the role of political representation in the modern democratic state, we should consider the part

that representative arrangements play in maintaining the system as well as the part they play in securing a degree of popular control over the government. As outlined above, the instrument of ‘roundtables’ which the Romani representatives developed in the early 1990s was modeled on the style of dissidents, as opposed to party politics, that was central to the way that democracy and the process of democratization were conceived at the beginning of the 1990s – isolated from the rest of society and in conflict with economic neo-liberals (Kaldor and Kavan: 245).

The loss of a mandate for former dissidents and ‘apolitical politics’ after the election in 1992, meant that the Romani representatives were unable to build coalitions with progressive parties, and that they therefore followed the path of key dissent figures into the sphere of the third sector. The citizens’ participation in the *polis* was purposefully reduced, as was argued by young professional neoliberals led by Prime Minister Klaus, resulting in only a periodic participation in elections. On the other hand, former dissidents, together with President Vaclav Havel, aired the opposite argument. They pointed out that involvement in communal life is to be viewed as an aspect of full citizenship. The Roma who perhaps relied too much on roundtable discussions rather than on orthodox Parliamentary activity in policy formulation and party alliance building, became one of the stream of emerging social movements that flourished out of the fast developing third sector. While most of the world remained impressed by Havel’s charm and were less impressed with the neoliberal hard-liner Prime Minister Vaclav Klaus, significant financial support for the NGO sector came both from Western public institutions, such as the EU Phare programme and private foundations, such as the Open Society Institute, in order to keep alive the argument of vital support to communal life. (George Soros, for instance, typically also fell out with Klaus on details pertaining to philanthropic work.)

While the third sector, was becoming more effective and professional, the emphasis was shifted from being a grassroots social movement to becoming a more expert-based professional organization, and as many have argued, the Romani third sector became distracted from the voluntary civic initiative-based side of its work. According to Mislivetz: “A new world was created by the middle of the 1990s: the world of

professional NGOs, civil organisations and foundations. Most of these NGOs take over some responsibilities of the state and they do not have particularly warm feeling about civil ethos or new forms of cooperation” (Mislivetz 1999: 229). Romani representatives re-routed their activities, and by the middle of the 1990s, each of the figures represented in the Parliament in the early 1990s, in Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia, had headed at least one NGO working in the field of human rights, education or culture.

Relatively well-funded NGOs have also facilitated the dependency of Romani political participation on project-driven work and have formed one further obstacle to re-entering mainstream politics. While human rights advocates claim that the racism of the political parties and governments is the cause of the absence of Roma in politics, one has to consider the wider context of other developments occurring within the decade in order to realize that the incentives of easily accessible funding guided Roma away from the political mainstream. The transnational nature of the Romani political participation that has developed recently in the ambitious International Romani Union has once again entered the world from the background of the NGO sector. Roma will have to depart to a certain degree from the third sector to enter the political parties of mainstream politics. The relationship with the state or some other powerful agency still remains one of the central issues for the democratic development of civil society, though one cannot expect that civil society will become connected with the activities of the political parties. Conceptualization of civil society as a public sphere of civility located between the state, the family and the market prevents a civil society agent from becoming a political party agent overnight.

VI. Conclusion

Even if Marshall’s principles of citizenship, consisting of civil, political and social rights were in place, members of various kinds of minority groups can find themselves excluded from the full enjoyment of citizenship. An acknowledgement of multiculturalism “of people who are stuck with one another” (Young 1990, cited in Hindess 2001: 101) implemented in the political system would secure the representation of Roma in

mainstream politics. A less exclusive understanding of the citizen's way of life and the norms and values expressed by dominant political parties, would be helpful in creating the foundation for Roma to be more effective in achieving political representation. A pluralist redefinition of democracies, which many leading theorists have called for would be constructive in that the state would no longer be seen as an affair of a singular body of citizens but rather constituting a plurality of diverse peoples, groups and associations. According to Hindess, this would also mean that the state would no longer be the central focus but merely one amongst others (Hindess 2001: 103). Vast changes in the constitutions of the countries concerned would presumably have to take place.

However, the proposal for a redefinition of democracies is far from initiated. The Central European states could combine policy formation with representation. In this sense, certainly in Hungary, the inclusiveness of the process of political representation through policy formulation could improve the position of Roma significantly, since it would give them a chance to enter into political negotiations and deals through the medium of a political dialogue within a given locality. In Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland a more complicated shift has to be accomplished. Ethnic parties seem to be feasible in Slovakia, although the arrangements between the Roma leaders must experience a separation from the vicious circle of transplanting the logic of mushrooming NGOs to the sphere of politics. Since the system of political parties does not follow the same logic of civil society, where at least in theory more associations mean more scrutiny of the government or help for the community concerned, the lesson of electoral politics and political mobilization remains a lesson the Roma will have to learn. Finally, as argued by theorists as well as practitioners, multiculturalism reinforces separate identities among citizens (Kymlicka 1995). However, following the longstanding concern over the effects of factions in public life, it has been argued that the representation of sectional interests outside the electoral process leads to the pursuit of those interests to the detriment of the interests of the community as a whole. This has been realized in practice, for example, by the Australian government, which has treated the leaders of Aboriginal organizations as if they were not truly representatives of their communities. The easy support of Romani NGOs has also had this partial effect. While there are some leaders who have been

recruited from the industry of NGOs, their expectations of how they should be treated by the government are not based on support from their communities but follow the principle of advancing interests. However, the main task of transforming them into a politically advanced strategy remains on their shoulders, should they wish to re-route their activities into the political mainstream.

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