A Dual Challenge for the Year of Equal Opportunities for All: Roms in the Western Balkans

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Abstract

The primary aim of this article is to place the current situation of Roms in the Western Balkans in the broader historical context of Roms' experiences since their arrival in the region. A subsidiary aim is to examine some of the ways in which the work of the European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI) has taken steps to address this situation. Beginning with a discussion of Roms' origins and ethnogenesis, the article provides a broad overview of Roms' experiences in the Western Balkans from their arrival in the region through the post-communist period. Also offered is a brief examination of some of the difficulties encountered in measuring the size of Romani populations in the region. Presenting in more detail the situation of Roms in Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia, the article moves next to an examination of ECMI's novel approach to assessing Roms' needs and to the action-oriented follow-on initiatives designed on the basis of the needs assessments. The conclusion of the article is that lasting change in Roms' status is likely to depend in large part on the integration of the countries of the Western Balkans into the European Union.

I. Introduction

Since their arrival in Europe roughly 1,000 years ago, Roms have almost always (if not always) lived worse off than the surrounding non-Romani population. Notwithstanding considerable variation in the degree to which Roms are integrated in individual states, Roms' overall situation throughout the region suggests broad continuity with their past. Since the mid-1990s, there has been a substantial increase in the number of initiatives for the ostensible purpose of integrating Romani populations in Central and Eastern Europe. Whereas in much of the region anti-discrimination policies in general and strategies for the integration of Roms in particular were drafted in response to the prospect of integration into the European Union, the EU seems thus far to have played a less important role in this regard in the Western Balkans (i.e., Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia), where accession often seems at best a distant beacon.

The primary aim of this article is to place the current situation of Roms in the Western Balkans in the broader historical context of Roms' experiences since their arrival in the

region. A subsidiary aim is to examine some of the ways in which the work of the European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI) has taken steps to address this situation. If realization of the article's first aim sets the stage for pursuing the subsidiary aim, laying the groundwork for the former requires first taking a brief look at Roms' origins and ethnogenesis, as well as at some of the difficulties encountered in measuring the size of Romani populations in the region.

II. Origins and Ethnogenesis

Although the nature and timing of the event that resulted in the genesis of the group now called Roms are the subject of some controversy, there is general agreement among scholars from various disciplines that the Roms originated somewhere (or in multiple areas) in the region of present-day northwestern India and Pakistan.[1] On the basis of linguistic evidence, it is also generally agreed that the group of people displaced from this region traveled west through Persia, Armenia and the Byzantine Empire, probably arriving in the Balkans approximately 1,000 years ago.[2]

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[1] See, for instance, Samuel Augustini ab Hortis, *Cigáni v Uhorsku* (Štúdio dd, Bratislava, 1995); Ivan Bernasovský and Jarmila Bernasovská, *Anthropology of Romanies (Gypsies): Auxological and Anthropogenetical Study* (NAUMA/Universitas Masarykiana, Brno, 1999); Angus Fraser, *The Gypsies* (Blackwell, Cambridge, 1995); Heinrich Moritz Gottlieb Grellmann, *Historischer Versuch über die Zigeuner betreffend die Lebensart und Verfassung, Sitten und Schicksale dieses Volks seit seiner Erscheinung in Europa, und dessen Ursprung* (Johann Christian Dieterich, Göttingen, 1787); Ian Hancock, "The East European Roots of Romani Nationalism", in David Crowe and John Kolsti (eds.), *The Gypsies of Eastern Europe* (M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, 1991), 133-150; Emília Horváthová, *Cigáni na Slovensku: Historicko-etnografický náčrt* (Vydateľstvo Slovenskej Akademie Vied, Bratislava, 1964); Anna Jurová, "K otázkam pôvodu a pomenovania Rómov", *Človek a spoločnosť*, 2000, at http://www.saske.sk/cas/3-2000/index.html; Donald Kenrick, *Gypsies: From India to the Mediterranean* (Gypsy Research Center/CRDP Midi Pyrénées, Toulouse, 1993); Arne B. Mann, "Odkiaľ prišli Rómovia?" *Historická revue* (1990) No. 3, 7-9; Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov, *Gypsies in the Ottoman Empire: A Contribution to the History of the Balkans* (Centre de recherches tsiganes, University of Hertfordshire Press, Paris, Hatfield, 2001); Trajko Petrovski, "Jazikot na Romite", 10(474) *Puls* (2000), 62-63; and Albert Thomas Sinclair, "The Word 'Rom'", 3 *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* (1909-1910), 33-42, at 14. See also Marcel Courthiade, "O pôvode rómskeho národa - skutočnosť a legendy", *Sam adaj - Sme tu*, May 2001, 4-5.

[2] William G. Lockwood, "Balkan Gypsies: An Introduction", in Joanne Grumet (ed.), *Papers from the Fourth and Fifth Annual Meetings of the Gypsy Lore Society, North American Chapter* (Gypsy Lore Society, North American Chapter, New York, 1985), 91-99; Petrovski, "Jazikot na Romite …"; Trajko Petrovski, "Potekloto i istorijata na Romite", 10(470) *Puls* (2000), 59-61; John Sampson, "On the Origin and Early Migrations of the Gypsies", 2(4) *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* (1923), 156-169; and George C. Soulis, "The Gypsies in the Byzantine Empire and the Balkans in the Late Middle Ages", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* (1961) No. 15, 142-165.

Despite numerous internal divisions, Roms in general refer to themselves by a common ethnonym (singular '*Rom*', plural '*Roma*').[3] Until late in the twentieth century, however, the use of the term 'Rom' was the exception rather than the rule. Instead, Roms have often been called by names that are either derived from the words '*Atsinganoi*' or '*Atsinganos*'/'*Atsinkanos*'/'*Athingani*' or that mistakenly associate the Roms with Egypt. Words derived from '*Atsinganoi*' include '*Cigan*' (Bosnian, Croatian, Macedonian, Serbian, Slovenian), '*Ciganin*' (Bulgarian), '*Cigán*' (Slovak), '*Cikán*' (Czech), '*Czigány*' (Hungarian), '*Sigøjner*' (Danish), '*Ţigan*' (Romanian), '*Tsigane*' (French), '*Zigenare*' (Swedish) and '*Zigeuner*' (German and Dutch). The English misnomer 'Gypsies', like its counterparts in other languages (e.g., '*Gitans*' (French), '*Gitanos*' (Spanish)), can be attributed to the belief common in the middle ages that the Roms had originated in Egypt. Whereas the term 'Rom' is neutral, the term 'Gypsy' often has a pejorative connotation. For this reason, I use the term 'Gypsy' only in presenting policies and statements the declared targets of which are "Gypsies".[4]

III. Identity and Measurement

A. Stigmatization and Confounded Identities

In the Western Balkans, as elsewhere in Eastern (and Western) Europe, estimates of the size of the Romani population vary widely. There are several reasons for this. Perhaps the most important reason is the stigma of being identified as a 'Gypsy', which leads many self-conscious Roms to declare in censuses an ethnicity different from the one with which they identify in daily life. This can happen even where the official census category is 'Rom', as many Roms view the change in the name of the category as merely cosmetic.

Other persons identified from without as Roms confound ethnicity with civic, confessional and linguistic identities. In the first type of confounding, Roms declare themselves members of the titular nationality out of an identification with the state rather

[3] In using the plural 'Roms' rather than 'Roma', I accept Victor Friedman's assertion that "'*Roma*' exoticizes and marginalizes rather than emphasizing the fact that the group in question is an ethnic group" equal to all others, the names for which end in 's' in the English plural. Victor A. Friedman, "The Romani Language in the Republic of Macedonia: Status, Usage, and Sociolinguistic Perspectives", 46(3-4) *Acta Linguistica Hungarica* (1999), 317-339, at 319-320, footnote **.

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

than with the titular nationality itself. To take an example from outside the Western Balkans, Roms in Slovakia explained to me repeatedly in the course of my data-gathering in Romani settlements there that "Roms are Slovaks". The second variant of confounded identities seems to occur most frequently in former Ottoman possessions. In Bulgaria, Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia, for example, Roms sometimes declare themselves to be Turks on the grounds of their shared religion (i.e., Islam). Examples of confounded linguistic and ethnic identities, on the other hand, include declarations of Magyar ethnicity by Hungarian-speaking Roms in southern Slovakia and declarations of Albanian ethnicity by Albanophone Roms in Western Macedonia.

Although we can distinguish among them analytically, these confoundings of ethnic, civic, confessional and linguistic identities need not be distinct in practice. In Macedonia, for example, Turkish-speaking Roms (like the Romani population of Macedonia as a whole) are predominantly Muslim, such that a declaration of Turkish ethnicity to a census taker may stem as much from religious as from linguistic considerations. Moreover, some people identified as Roms (or Gypsies) from without do not think of themselves as Roms. Thus, in light of the stigma associated with being a Gypsy and the possibilities for confounding ethnic identity with other identities, it is often unclear whether declarations of non-Romani ethnicity by persons identified from without as Roms stem from instrumental calculations or confusion on the part of self-conscious Roms or whether the same declarations come from persons who do not identify themselves as Roms in any circumstances.

B. Roms versus Egyptians and Ashkali

Any discussion of numbers on Romani populations in the Western Balkans requires also that we give some attention to two other groups: Egyptians and Ashkali. The relevance of Egyptians and Ashkali to a discussion of numbers on Romani populations stems from the fact that members of both groups are generally considered Roms both by self-identifying Roms and by non-Roms. Moreover, some members of each group contest the legitimacy of the other group.

Generally, Egyptians and Ashkali speak Albanian as their first language and do not speak Romani. This fact is integrally related to Egyptian and Ashkali accounts of their own ethnogenesis, as members of both groups use it to claim origins outside the region to which Roms have been traced. Egyptians, of course, trace their roots to Egypt. There is less consensus among Ashkali, as different accounts locate the group's homeland in Iran, ancient Rome and Palestine.[5]

Wherever the Egyptians and Ashkali actually originated, some states in the region have chosen to make their existence official by counting them in censuses. First recognized as a distinct group in 1990 by the (then) Yugoslav state in methodological materials to be used in the 1991 census, Egyptians appear in the results of the 1991 Macedonian census in the number of 3,307 persons.[6] More recently, the Macedonian census of 2002 produced a figure of 3,713.[7] The results of the 2002 census in Serbia, on the other hand, indicate that a total of 814 Egyptians live in Central Serbia and Vojvodina.[8] No separate figures are available on the number of Egyptians in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo or Montenegro, and the Albanian government explicitly denies the existence of such a minority.[9] As for Ashkali, the only official figure comes from Serbia, which counted 584 members of this population in the 2002 census.[10]

[5] Elena Marushiakova *et al.*, *Identity Formation among Minorities in the Balkans: The Cases of Roms, Egyptians and Ashkali in Kosovo* (Minority Studies Society Studii Romani, Sofia, 2001).

[6] Ger Duijzings, "The Making of Egyptians in Kosovo and Macedonia", in Cora Govers and Hans Vermeulen (eds.), *Religion and the Politics of Identity in Kosovo* (Columbia University Press, New York, 2000), 132-156, at 140; Marushiakova and Popov, *Gypsies in the Ottoman Empire* …; and Stojan Risteski, *Narodni prikazni, predanija i običai kai Egipkjanite/ Egjupcite vo Makedonija* (Nikola Kosteski, Ohrid, 1991), 10.

[7] While the published results of the 2002 census in Macedonia do not include a separate figure for Egyptians, the relevant data are available by special order from the State Statistical Office.

[8] Ministarstvo za ljudska i manjinska prava Srbije i Crne Gore, *Etnički mozaik Srbije* (Ministarstvo za ljudska i manjinska prava Srbije i Crne Gore, Belgrade, 2004), 14.

[9] European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, "Third Report on Albania", CRI (2005) 23, adopted 17 December 2004, 39.

[10] Ministarstvo za ljudska i manjinska prava Srbije i Crne Gore, *Etnički mozaik Srbije* …, 3. Two other small ethnic groups whose members others tend to identify as Roms are *Kovači* in Montenegro and *Magjupi* in Kosovo. Perhaps not surprisingly, official numbers on the size of these groups are not available.

IV. Roms in the Ottoman Empire

As mentioned above, Roms seem to have arrived in the Balkans well before the Ottomans did in the middle of the fourteenth century. One piece of evidence that supports this contention is the considerable number of Muslim Roms with Slavic surnames in Ottoman registers, which also suggests that many Roms were settled rather than nomadic.[11] Available information on Roms in the Ottoman Empire suggests, on the one hand, that Roms generally lived on the periphery of Balkan society and, on the other hand, that they did not suffer the kinds of systematic repression commonly aimed at them in other parts of Europe. While the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw a set of administrative measures aimed at Gypsies, the explanation for the special attention seems to be found in the Empire's fiscal priorities. In other words, while under Ottoman rule religion was emphasized over ethnicity, tax collection was more important still. Policies aimed at the Romani population were accordingly designed to eliminate nomadism and establish a system of self-government that would reduce tax evasion.[12]

The crisis of classical Ottoman institutions in the late sixteenth century led to the emergence of a considerable number of nomadic Roms, most of whom at that point were (still) Christian. From this time on, the distinction between sedentary and nomadic Roms largely determined relations between Roms and non-Roms on the territory of the declining Empire and nomadic Roms were increasingly the subject of complaints from sedentary subject populations.[13] Apparently, problems of this kind subsided by late in the nineteenth century, when an increasing number of Roms—by this time predominantly Muslim—settled permanently in villages as the tax privileges for Roms in or associated with the Ottoman army disappeared.[14]

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[11] Aleksandar Stojanovski, *Makedonija vo turskoto srednovekovie (od krajot na XIV - početokot na XVIII vek)* (Kultura, Skopje, 1989), 132.
[12] Crowe, *A History of the Gypsies* …, 198-199; Fraser, *The Gypsies* …, 75; Marushiakova and Popov, *Gypsies in the Ottoman Empire* …, 35-37; and Muhamed Mujić, "Položaj Cigana u jugoslovenskim zemljama pod osmanskom vlašću", 3-4 *Prilozi za orijentalnu filologiju* (1952-1953), 137-193, at 148.
[13] Michael B. Petrovich, "Religion and Ethnicity in Eastern Europe", in Peter Sugar (ed.), *Ethnic Diversity and Conflict in Eastern Europe* (ABC-Clio, Santa Barbara, 1980), 373-417, at 63; and Olga Zirojević, "Romi na području današnje Jugoslavije u vreme turske vladavine", 25 *Glasnik Etnografskog muzeja u Beogradu* (1981), 225-245, at 245.
[14] Marushiakova and Popov, *Gypsies in the Ottoman Empire* …, 57-58 and 64.

V. Between Ottomans and Communists

If the data on Roms in the Ottoman Empire are generally fragmentary, available information on Roms in the Western Balkans between the late nineteenth century and the Second World War is still more incomplete. In independent Serbia, for example, Roms seem to have been subject to official attempts to assimilate them through sedentarization and conversion to Orthodox Christianity but the extent to which the relevant government decrees were actually implemented is unclear.[15] Documentary evidence on the status of Roms elsewhere in the region during this period is even thinner. Despite the lack of systematic documentation, however, anecdotal accounts by travelers to the Western Balkans in this period suggest a continuation of previously established patterns of generally peaceful coexistence between Roms and non-Roms.[16]

During the course of the Second World War, most of the approximately 28,500 Roms who found themselves in the Independent State of Croatia—which included most of Bosnia and Herzegovina—were killed.[17] In Serbia, on the other hand, the proportion of the pre-War Romani population killed was closer to 20%.[18] Although no statistics are available on the numbers of Roms killed in what is today Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro and Macedonia, the losses suffered in these areas seem to have been relatively small.[19] With regard to Roms' active participation in the war, there seem to have been not only many Romani partisans in the Yugoslav lands but also significant numbers of collaborators with the fascist occupying forces in Albania, where many Roms apparently viewed the Serbs as the greater enemy.[20] Overall, it can be said that, with the notable exception of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Roms in the Western Balkans constituted a

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[15] Crowe, *A History of the Gypsies* …, 210-211.
[16] See, for example, Edith Durham, *High Albania: A Victorian Traveller's Balkan Odyssey* (Phoenix Press, London, 1984); Gustav Weigand, *Ethnographie von Makedonien* (Partizdat, Sofia, 1981); and Rebecca West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey through Yugoslavia* (Penguin, New York, 1994).
[17] Crowe, *A History of the Gypsies* …, 219.
[18] *Ibid*., 221.
[19] *Ibid*, 221; John Kolsti, "Albanian Gypsies: The Silent Survivors", in David Crowe and John Kolsti (eds.), *The Gypsies of Eastern Europe* (M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, 1991), 51-60, at 56; Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov, "The Bulgarian Romanies during the Second World War", in David Kenrick (ed.), *In the Shadow of the Swastika: The Gypsies During the Second World War* (Centre de recherches tsiganes, University of Hertfordshire Press, Hatfield, 1999), 89-94, at 27-28; and Trajko Petrovski, *Kalendarskite običai kaj Romite vo Skopje i okolinata* (Feniks, Skopje, 1993).
[20] Crowe, *A History of the Gypsies* …, 221.

population stably embedded in the ethnic landscape when the Communists came to power after the war.

VI. Communism and the 'Gypsy Question'

Drawing on the writings of Joseph Stalin, which served as a model for policy toward minorities throughout Eastern Europe, most Communist regimes initially classified Gypsies as an ethnic or a social group arising out of the political and economic conditions characterizing feudalism.[21] Resolving what was commonly called the 'Gypsy Question' in these regimes was thus a matter of eliminating the social space for 'Gypsiness', which the feudal system had maintained in order to bring about the Gypsies' assimilation into a nascent proletarian culture. In this manner, Communist policy makers marked a reified Gypsy way of life for destruction through policies of sedentarization, permanent housing, regular employment and education. If this general pattern characterized the approach of most East European Communist regimes, however, the two Communist regimes in the Western Balkans constituted exceptions to the general rule: Whereas the Albanian Communist regime pursued a variation of an assimilationist policy founded on non-recognition of minorities in general, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was unique in never treating Gypsies as a problem.

A. Albania

Among the many ways in which Albania distinguished itself from other East European Communist regimes was in its official non-recognition of Gypsies as a distinct group of any kind (whether national, ethnic or social). In the 1960s, the regime implemented a set of measures aimed at sedentarizing nomads but it is not clear that these policies were explicitly directed at Gypsies.[22] Similarly, legislation from 1975 aimed at eliminating 'alien influences' in personal names affected Roms with identifiably Romani names but

[21] See Joseph Stalin, *Joseph Stalin: Marxism and the National Question, Selected Writings and Speeches* (International Publishers, New York, 1942).
[22] Hermine G. De Soto, Sabine Beddies and Ilir Gedeshi, *Roma and Egyptians in Albania: From Social Exclusion to Social Inclusion* (The World Bank, Washington, D.C., 2005), 11.

the law seems not to have targeted Roms specifically.[23] Writing about Albania's Egyptian population in 1981, Enver Hoxha expressed the view that "under socialism, there are no distinctions between them and the others. There is no segregation among us, nor racism or apartheid against them; they have cast off their roots completely."[24] Notwithstanding their official non-existence as Roms (or even as Gypsies), it is likely that many Roms in Albania benefited from the regime's policies of providing employment and social services to all citizens.

B. The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

Like most of its contemporaries throughout Eastern Europe, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia distinguished among 'nations' (or 'peoples'), 'nationalities' (or 'national minorities') and 'ethnic groups'.[25] The distinctions among groups corresponded to rights accorded the groups in question: whereas nations (with the exception of Muslims) were entitled to their own republics and the elevation of their languages to official status at the federal level, nationalities were guaranteed linguistic and cultural rights in the republics of their residence.[26] As an autochthonous population exhibiting "a

[23] Maria Koinova, *Roma of Albania* (Center for Documentation and Information on Minorities in Europe - Southeast Europe (CEDIME-SE), Glyka Nera, 2000), 12.
[24] Cited in De Soto, Beddies and Gedeshi, *Roma and Egyptians in Albania* …, 11.
[25] While there is no Yugoslav legal document containing a definition of these ethnopolitical categories or a list of the groups belonging in each category, Yugoslav scholars have offered analyses of the categories themselves and the members of each. On these accounts, nations are groups the majority of the members of which live on Yugoslav territory and which lack a state outside the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia: Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians, Montenegrins and, after 1971, Muslims. See Dubravko Škiljan, *Jezična politika* (Naprijed, Zagreb, 1988), 67. Insofar as the largest communities of Albanians, Bulgarians, Czechs, Italians, Magyars, Romanians, Rusins, Turks and Ukrainians reside outside Yugoslav territory and all except the Rusins have a state outside Yugoslavia, these groups were not classified as nations. Because the groups exhibit some degree of autonomy, however, they are classified as nationalities rather than ethnic groups. Finally, ethnic groups are autochthonous groups that lack sufficient concentration (e.g., Jews), sufficient national differentiation (e.g., Vlachs) or that exhibit "a historical mortgage of nomadism" (e.g., Roms). August Kovačec, "Languages of National Minorities and Ethnic Groups in Yugoslavia", in Ranko Bugarski and Celia Hawkesworth (eds.), *Language Planning in Yugoslavia* (Slavica Publishers, Columbus, 1991), 43-58, at 46; Škiljan, *Jezična politika* …. 67; and Silvo Devetak, *The Equality of Nations and Nationalities in Yugoslavia: Successes and Dilemmas* (Wilhelm Braumüller, Vienna, 1988), 42. An additional feature of ethnic groups, according to August Kovačec, is a lack of self-awareness: "[w]hatever the language they use in private communication, members of an ethnic group as a rule share the national awareness of the community within which they live". Kovačec, "Languages of National Minorities …", 47.
[26] Kovačec, "Languages of National Minorities …", 46.

historical mortgage of nomadism", on the other hand, Roms fell into the category of "ethnic group", the realization of the rights of which was not generally regulated.[27]

"Yugoslavia [was], arguably, the most progressive of states with regard to treatment of Gypsies."[28] Unlike other Communist regimes, Yugoslavia made 'Gypsy' a voluntary (self-) designation, replacing this official category with 'Rom' from 1971 onward. Neither commissioning special studies nor designing special policies for Yugoslavia's Romani population, Yugoslav authorities never attempted to force Roms (or anyone else) to settle permanently.[29] The absence of a sedentarization policy in turn allowed widespread migration of Roms into the more industrialized northern republics of Croatia and Slovenia.[30] Still, the largest concentrations of Roms in Yugoslavia remained in Serbia and Macedonia, where the 1970s and 1980s saw a series of "sporadic attempts" at developing Romani cultural rights.[31]

VII. After Communism

Roms' overall situation in post-Communist Eastern Europe suggests broad continuity with their past. Nonetheless, there is a significant range of variation within the Western Balkans and even among the successor states of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In Albania, the official inattention characteristic of the Communist period remains the dominant tendency today. In the former Yugoslavia, on the other hand, the treatment of Roms over the last fifteen years has run the gamut from constitutional recognition with political representation to various forms of ethnic cleansing.

A. Albania

Although Albania conducted a population census in 2001, Roms' official status as a cultural minority rather than a national one effectively precluded the gathering of data on the size of the country's Romani population. Estimates of the number of Roms in

[27] Devetak, *The Equality of Nations* …, 42 and 58, footnote 42; *ibid*., 46-47; and Škiljan, *Jezična politika* …, 67.
[28] William G. Lockwood, "East European Gypsies in Western Europe: The Social and Cultural Adaptation of the Xoraxane", (21/22) *Nomadic Peoples* (1986), 63-70, at 63.
[29] Fraser, *The Gypsies* …, 282; and Lockwood, "East European Gypsies …", 63.
[30] Fraser, *The Gypsies* …, 282.
[31] Friedman, "The Romani Language …", 327.

Albania range from 10,000 to 120,000, such that Roms would constitute between 0.3% and 3.4% of Albania's general population.[32] As is true elsewhere, in Albania Roms arguably constitute Albania's most marginalized population and the lack of accurate data on the Romani population poses a significant obstacle to efforts to increase Roms' level of integration. Moreover, there have been very few efforts in this direction, with no sustained action to date toward implementation of the 2003 National Strategy for Improving Roma Living Conditions, even following a ground-breaking needs assessment conducted by the World Bank in 2005.[33]

Romani participation in policy making in Albania has been minimal at all levels. Among the factors contributing to this is a prohibition on ethnically based political parties. Outside of government, the total number of active Romani nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) seems to be around ten, with coordination among them limited. Apparently growing out of the absence of other viable sources of income, involvement in prostitution and various forms of trafficking in human beings seem to be relatively widespread among Roms in Albania.[34]

B. Bosnia and Herzegovina

Whereas the most recent census in Bosnia and Herzegovina reported a Romani population of 8,864, the figure dates from 1991, before the wars of Yugoslav succession.[35] A 2002 estimate from the Office of the Ombudsman of Bosnia and Herzegovina, on the other hand, places the total Romani population of the two entities at

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[32] Alphia Abdikeeva, *Roma Poverty and the Roma National Strategies: The Cases of Albania, Greece and Serbia* (Minority Rights Group International, London, 2005), 3; Jeremy Druker, "Present but Unaccounted for: How Many Roma Live in Central and Eastern Europe? It Depends on Whom You Ask", 4(4) *Transitions* (1997), 22-23, at 23; Der Spiegel, "Alle hassen die Zigeuner", 44(36) *Der Spiegel* (1990), 36.

[33] Government of the Republic of Albania, "National Strategy for Improving Roma Living Conditions", 18 September 2003, at http://www.osce.org/documents/pia/2006/09/21138_en.pdf; De Soto, Beddies and Gedeshi, *Roma and Egyptians in Albania* …See also Glenda Shahinaj, "Implementation of Rom Strategy - Its Review and Fundraising Indispensable", *Albanian Telegraphic Agency*, 5 July 2006.

[34] See, for example, De Soto, Beddies and Gedeshi, *Roma and Egyptians in Albania: From Social Exclusion to Social Inclusion*, Chapter 9.

[35] Nađo Milićević, "State and Problems of National Minorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina", in Goran Bašić (ed.), *Prospects of Multiculturality in Western Balkan States* (Ethnicity Research Center, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Belgrade, 2004), 107-146, at 139.

60,000 to 70,000.[36] If this range is correct, then Roms constitute approximately 1.6% of the total population of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Although the effects of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina on the size of the Romani population there have not been assessed, it appears that Roms incurred the greatest human and material losses in Republika Srpska. With the reconstitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina in accordance with the Dayton Agreement, Roms were effectively excluded as neither Bosniaks, Croats nor Serbs. Since 2003, however, Roms have been officially recognized as a national minority.[37] That same year, Roms in Bosnia and Herzegovina formed a political party but to date it has not been successful in gaining representation. There are also approximately 40 Romani nongovernmental organizations registered throughout the country.

C. Kosovo

In Kosovo, ethnic cleansing of Roms began following the NATO air campaign of 1999 and the withdrawal of Yugoslav troops from the province.[38] Thus, whereas the Romani population of Kosovo numbered approximately 150,000 before the NATO air campaign, data released by UNMIK in July 2003 indicate the number of Roms, Ashkali and Egyptians left in the province to be 35,608 or 1.41% of the total population of Kosovo. Because this figure dates from before the violence of March 2004, which prompted further flight of Roms from the province, present-day Kosovo may well constitute an exception to the general rule that official estimates on the number of Roms are lower than the actual number of self-identifying Roms on a given territory.

In the Assembly of Kosovo, a total of four seats are reserved for Roms, Ashkali and Egyptians. While conditions for Roms in Kosovo vary significantly by locality, concerns with personal security related to freedoms of movement and assembly generally remain such that a sustainable return of Roms to Kosovo arguably cannot be expected at present.

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[36] Brigitte Mihok, "Länderbericht Bosnien-Hercegowina", in Brigitte Mihok (ed.), *The Roma Population in South Eastern Europe* (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Reşiţa, 2002), 25-43, at 25, footnote 14.
[37] "Zakon o zaštiti prava pripadnika nacionalnih manjina u BiH" [Law on National Minorities in BiH], *Službeni glasnik BiH* (2003), No. 12.
[38] European Roma Rights Center and UNOHCHR, *Memorandum: The Protection of Roma Rights in Serbia and Montenegro* (European Roma Rights Center and UNOHCHR, Belgrade, 2003), 4.

Moreover, even among the most integrated Roms, the prospects for earning a living in Kosovo are extremely poor.

D. Macedonia

The Macedonian census of 2002 gives a figure of 53,879 Roms, such that Roms officially constitute 2.66% of the general population.[39] Figures from various other sources place the Romani population of Macedonia between 110,000 and 260,000.[40] Informed estimates from local Romani NGOs throughout Macedonia suggest that the actual size of the Romani population is at the lower end of this scale.

Distinguishing Macedonia from all other countries is its explicit placement of Roms on the same level with other minorities in the Constitutions of 1991 and 2001.[41] Also worth noting is that Romani political parties have succeeded in securing one to two parliamentary seats throughout the post-Communist period. In 2004, the Macedonian government approved its first policy measure aimed specifically at the country's Romani population in the form of the Strategy for Roma in the Republic of Macedonia.[42] Although the Strategy is arguably among the most carefully conceived in the region, implementation to date has been minimal. In the nongovernmental sector, on the other hand, some of the Romani organizations founded in the early and mid-1990s have served as models for other nongovernmental organizations, with approximately 30 Romani NGOs currently active in the country.

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[39] State Statistical Office, "Release", in *id., Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Macedonia, 2002* (State Statistical Office, Skopje, 2003), 19.
[40] European Roma Rights Center, *A Pleasant Fiction: The Human Rights Situation of Roma in Macedonia* (European Roma Rights Center, Budapest, 1998), 34; Crowe, *A History of the Gypsies …*, 232; Druker, "Present but Unaccounted for …", 23; and Jean-Pierre Liégeois and Nicolae Gheorghe, *Roma/Gypsies: A European Minority* (Minority Rights Group, London, 1995), 7.
[41] "Ustav na Republika Makedonija" [Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia], *Služben vesnik na Republika Makedonija* (1991), No. 52.
[42] Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, *Strategy for Roma in the Republic of Macedonia* (Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Skopje, 2004).

E. Montenegro

The Montenegrin census of 2003 gives a figure of 2,601 Roms, which would make Roms account for approximately 0.4% of Montenegro's total population.[43] According to the Montenegrin Red Cross, however, there are nearly 17,000 Roms, Ashkali and Egyptians living on the territory of the Republic of Montenegro. An estimate from the Romani NGO network *Romski krug* ('Romani Circle'), on the other hand, gives the slightly higher estimate of 19,500 Roms, Ashkali and Egyptians.[44] If this higher estimate is correct, then Roms, Ashkali and Egyptians together constitute roughly 3.1% of the general population. A December 1999 census of internally displaced persons conducted by the Montenegrin Bureau for Displaced Persons found 5,840 Roms and 917 Egyptians from Kosovo resident in the Republic of Montenegro.[45] Roms in Montenegro are not represented in parliament and the country's Romani NGO sector is both small and fragmented.

F. Serbia

According to the population census conducted in 2002 in the Republic of Serbia, Roms constitute 1.44% of the total population.[46] Expressed in absolute terms, the Romani population of the Republic of Serbia stands officially at 108,193, with 79,136 Roms residing in Central Serbia and 29,057 in Vojvodina.[47] By way of contrast, a survey of 593 settlements with more than 100 inhabitants or 15 families conducted under the auspices of the Ethnicity Research Centre found a total of 210,353 Romani residents, not including an additional 46,238 displaced from Kosovo.[48] Finally, estimates from Romani NGOs indicate the Romani population of Serbia to be more than 750,000.[49]

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[43] Data provided by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Montenegro.
[44] Institute for Strategic Studies and Prognoses, *Household Survey of Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptians, Refugees and IDPs in Montenegro* (UNDP, Podgorica, 2003), 85.
[45] Božidar Jakšić, *Roofless People* (Republika, Belgrade, 2002), 299.
[46] Ministarstvo za ljudska i manjinska prava Srbije i Crne Gore, *Etnički mozaik Srbije* …
[47] *Ibid.*
[48] Božidar Jakšić and Goran Bašić, *Romani Settlements, Living Conditions and Possibilities of Integration of the Roma in Serbia* (Ethnicity Research Center, Belgrade, 2002), 14.
[49] Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, *Human Rights in Yugoslavia 2003* (Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, Belgrade, 2004), 365.

Although the overall situation of Roms in Serbia generally stagnated from the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia until late 2000, the last few years have seen the drafting of various progressive policy measures, including most notably the (Union-level) Law on the Protection of the Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities[50] and (Republic-level) Draft Strategy for the Integration and Empowerment of the Roma[51]. As is the case in Macedonia, however, there has been little action on the Serbian Strategy since its drafting. While several Romani political parties exist in Serbia, none was successful in securing national level representation until the January 2007 parliamentary elections, when two MPs were elected to seats newly reserved for Romani political parties. Arguably more effective to date have been some of Serbia's approximately 70 active Romani nongovernmental organizations.

VIII. Vicious Circles and the Need for Information

While Roms in the Western Balkans have experienced little overt discrimination in comparison with their ethnic brethren who settled further north and west, even in the cases of best practice with regard to Roms in the region, Roms invariably constitute the most disadvantaged ethnic group in countries that remain relatively disadvantaged themselves. In more concrete terms, this means that Roms throughout the region have the lowest rates of school attendance and the highest dropout rates, resulting in extremely low levels of educational attainment. The low levels of educational attainment among Roms in turn form vicious circles with high unemployment, on the one hand, and incomplete enjoyment of civil rights, on the other. Whereas, in the former case, the lack of occupational qualification resulting from a low level of educational attainment makes for unemployment and thus to material conditions not conducive to the completion of education, in the latter case lack of knowledge about civil rights contributes to suspicion of ongoing violations of those rights and the perception that Roms are powerless to do anything about such violations such that becoming informed is futile. Moreover, the absence of comprehensive anti-discrimination policies in the political units of the region

[50] "Zakon o zaštiti prava i sloboda nacionalnih manjina" [Law on the Protection of the Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities], *Službeni list Savezne Republike Jugoslavije* (2002), No. 11 and No. 57.
[51] Ministry of National and Ethnic Communities, "Draft Strategy for the Integration and Empowerment of the Roma", Belgrade, 13 December 2002, at www.humanrights.gov.yu/files/doc/Roma_Nacrt-Strategije_English.doc.

offers no escape from this second vicious circle, with the prospect of eventual accession to the EU thus far not effecting a perceptible change in this domain.

Like their counterparts elsewhere in Europe, governments in the Western Balkans have often been insufficiently informed about the real needs of the Romani populations living under them. International donors interested in improving the situation of Roms have run into similar obstacles, with the absence in many countries of a global view of the Romani population's living conditions making it difficult to channel donor activity in the most appropriate manner. Compounding the effects of the lack of general guidelines, coordination among donors has often been lacking, leading to duplication of efforts in some areas and neglect of others. Moreover, implemented projects have in many cases been designed by NGOs with tenuous connections to their target group and which propose projects only in response to donor interest. Finally, the role of Roms in directing donor support has been minimal, with Romani project officers a rarity.

Addressing the problems faced by Romani populations throughout the region, as well as those faced by governments and international donors alike in focusing their efforts, requires an increase in the quantity and quality of information about Roms. As noted in the European Commission's Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion[52] and Framework Strategy on Non-discrimination and Equal Opportunities,[53] the lack of relevant data on the most vulnerable groups (including but not limited to Roms) not only hampers comparative analysis of the problems faced by these groups but also precludes effective monitoring and assessment of programmes prepared for them. Accordingly, the Commission has recommended that activity be increased in the area of data collection.

While the gathering of quality information constitutes a necessary prelude to designing programmes to address Roms' concrete needs, however, the 'bare facts' rarely speak for themselves and the gathering of statistical data on Roms is often problematic. For this reason, attaining a global picture of the needs of Romani populations in Central and

[52] European Commission, "Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion", COM(2005)14 final, 27 January 2005, 9 and 12, at http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2005/com2005_0014en01.pdf.
[53] European Commission, "Non-discrimination and Equal Opportunities for All—A Framework Strategy", COM(2005) 224 final, 1 June 2005, 3, at http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2005/com2005_0224en01.pdf.

Eastern Europe requires that analyses of available statistical data be supplemented with intensive consultation with local activists and stakeholders.

IX. ECMI's Work toward Greater Inclusion

Taking the foregoing into account, ECMI's activities with Roms in the Western Balkans share the broad—and admittedly ambitious—aim of equipping Roms with the resources needed for playing an effective role in a democratic society based on the rule of law as well as for participating successfully in a competitive labour market. Emphasizing intensive stakeholder consultation to help Roms to break out of the vicious circles that tend to characterize their existence in the present day, ECMI's activities with Roms are designed to address not only the situation of the Romani population as a whole but also the position of Romani women relative both to Romani men and to the non-Romani population.[54]

ECMI conducted the first global assessment of the needs of the Romani population of Macedonia in autumn 2003. Preliminary background research for a similar project in Serbia and Montenegro was completed in winter 2004, with project implementation proceeding in autumn of the same year on the basis of the needs assessment methodology employed in Macedonia. Involving Roms as sources not only of raw data but also of ideas and as integral members of the respective research teams, ECMI's needs assessments have also formed the basis for action-oriented follow-on initiatives, in which Roms play an active role in programme development, as well as for improved coordination among government, domestic NGOs and international donors.

A. Needs Assessment

Combining quantitative and qualitative research methods, ECMI's needs assessment methodology is unusual in the degree to which it actively involves Roms at all stages of project design and implementation. While the assessments begin by procuring the most recent domestic and international statistical data available on the situation of the Romani

[54] Detailed information on ECMI's work with Roms—including downloadable research reports—can be accessed at www.ecmirom.org.

population in the country in question, these data are treated primarily as a starting point for discussions with non-elite as well as elite populations, rather than as painting an accurate picture (or even a fair sketch) of the existing state of affairs.

Categories of information included in ECMI's needs assessments include the following:

1. Size of the Romani population according to available census data and informed estimates (including refugees and internally displaced persons where applicable);
2. Social demographics and statistics for measuring exclusion, including but not necessarily limited to the areas of civil rights, education, employment, health and housing;
3. Legal framework and relevant state policies, with particular emphasis on government strategies for the integration of Roms;
4. Political representation, including elected state-, regional- and local-level elected and appointed bodies;
5. Romani political parties and organizations;
6. Romani civil society organizations and media; and
7. Relevant activities of international organizations.

In addition to the more standard individual interview format, the discussion component of the needs assessments makes extensive use of focus groups for identifying Roms' most pressing needs and exploring ways in which the identified needs can be met. Beyond the rich qualitative data they generate, focus groups offer two significant advantages over other research methodologies for identifying the needs of marginalized populations: intelligibility for participants and peer-group security. Whereas the former stems from the fact that a person need not have a background in research in order to participate in a constructive dialogue, the latter effectively reduces the effects of power differentials between participants and researchers, encouraging participants to express themselves freely. In this manner, focus groups provide a crucial building block for the design of appropriate policy based on Roms' real needs.

B. Following on Needs Assessments

Whereas ECMI's modular approach to needs assessment allows the methodology to be modified and applied in work with Romani populations throughout the region, the same cannot be said of the initiatives designed on the basis of the needs assessments. Because the findings of needs assessments vary by country, follow-on initiatives must duly take into account relevant national variations in the situation of Roms. Even in the absence of a unified approach to addressing identified needs, however, elements common to ECMI's follow-on initiatives include facilitated dialogue, capacity building and peer learning. These can be seen in ECMI's recent work with Roms in Macedonia and Serbia.

X. Macedonia: Romani Expert Groups

While the narrative report from ECMI's needs assessment in Macedonia[55] outlines specific follow-on measures drawn from the proceedings of the focus groups, with an eye to sustainability ECMI established in 2004 all-Romani Expert Groups in the core areas of education, health, employment and civil rights. Conceived to undertake further research in the four core areas as a prelude to the design and implementation of concrete policy measures to remedy Roms' comparative disadvantages, the Expert Groups were expected through their work and participation in training activities to encourage an expertise-based division of labour among Romani NGOs by contributing to the professionalization of Roms active in the four core areas. A further medium-term expectation in designing the initiative was that the Expert Groups would grow into free-standing points of reference for organizations and individuals seeking consultation on the Romani population of Macedonia.

Shortly after their formation in late 2004, the four Expert Groups played a significant role in contributing to the revision of the government's draft strategy on Roms. The Expert Groups' most visible achievements, however, are their two volumes of research reports on topics that have received relatively little consideration from other actors.[56]

[55] ECMI, *Toward Regional Guidelines for the Integration of Roms. Macedonia: Narrative Report* (European Centre for Minority Issues, Flensburg, 2004).

[56] See Romani Expert Groups for Romani Integration, *Roms on Integration: Analyses and Recommendations* (European Centre for Minority Issues, Skopje, 2005); and Romani Expert Groups for

Conducting their research primarily in Romani ghettos in the cities throughout Macedonia with the largest Romani populations, the Expert Groups' research focuses on various manifestations of marginalization in need of urgent attention from domestic and international actors. While it is still early to measure the effect of the Expert Groups' research on the social exclusion of the Romani population, the reports provide material that can be used in implementing the Strategy for Roma in the Republic of Macedonia.

XI. Serbia: Supporting Local Romani Coordinators

Among the recommendations resulting from ECMI's 2004 analysis of the situation of Roms in Serbia and Montenegro was to focus efforts on increasing and improving contacts between Romani communities and local authorities. Increasing the presence of Roms at the level of local government shows considerable promise for improving relations between Romani communities and local authorities, as well as local organs of state agencies. This is so due in large part to the broad-based disadvantage of the Romani population as a whole, as well as to the tendency for disadvantaged Roms to be less ashamed of differences in education and economic status in dealing with other Roms than in their encounters with non-Roms. Additionally, the Law on Local Self-Government of the Republic of Serbia provides for the establishment of a Council for Interethnic Relations in ethnically mixed municipalities.[57] Prior to the establishment of local Romani coordinators in 12 municipalities through a cooperative initiative of the (then) Ministry for Human and Minority Rights, the European Agency for Reconstruction and the OSCE in 2005, however, only one municipality in Serbia had appointed such a coordinator.

While the demand for assistance from the Romani coordinators established prior to the commencement of ECMI's work in the corresponding municipalities demonstrated the potential for the coordinators to serve the corresponding local Romani communities, the continued existence of these positions depends in large part on the coordinators' ability to generate the concrete results necessary to gain support from the municipal budget in

Romani Integration, *Roms on Integration II: Analyses and Recommendations* (European Centre for Minority Issues, Skopje, 2006).

[57] Article 63, "Zakon o lokalnoj samoupravi" [Law on Local Self-Government], *Službeni glasnik Republike Srbije* (2002), No. 9.

future. ECMI's role was accordingly to design and implement activities aimed at increasing the capacity of not only the local Romani coordinators but also the (non-Romani) local government officials in charge of the various sectors within which Roms' complex and multi-faceted marginalization manifests itself. By the end of the project's pilot phase, ten of the thirteen municipalities included in the project had completed at least one local action plan, with five of the included municipalities having completed action plans in all four priority areas of the Decade of Roma Inclusion[58] (i.e., education, employment, health and housing), as compared with the existence of only a single action plan in a single municipality at project launch. Also telling is that, by the end of the project year, the prospects for integrating the position of Romani coordinator into the municipal budget were positive in all but two municipalities included in the initiative. To encourage replication of ECMI's work with local Romani coordinators and their non-Romani counterparts elsewhere in Serbia as well as in other countries in the region, in early 2007 ECMI generated a concise publication entitled *Supporting Local Romani Coordinators: A Practical Guide to Integrating Roms in Municipal Government*.[59]

XII. Equal Opportunities for All in 2007?

Despite Roms' firm embeddedness in the ethnic landscape of the Western Balkans and the more or less successful efforts of some actors both within and outside governments in the region to level the playing field between Romani and non-Romani populations, Roms remain to this day the most marginalized ethnic group in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. A change in this state of affairs will require not only a period of time perhaps best measured in generations but also the careful design and consistent implementation of comprehensive anti-discrimination policies in all the political units of the region. How quickly this happens is likely to depend largely on how quickly the marginalization of these political units is addressed by improving the possibilities for their closer integration with the EU. In the

[58]The Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005-2015) is an explicit commitment by nine governments in Central and Southeast Europe (Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia) to combat Roms' poverty, exclusion and discrimination. Additional information on the Decade is available at http://www.romadecade.org/itentcms/www/roma/index.php.

[59] ECMI, *Supporting Local Romani Coordinators: A Practical Guide to Integrating Roms in Municipal Government* (European Centre for Minority Issues, Belgrade, Skopje, 2007).

absence of such change, there appears to be little reason to expect this part of Europe to see itself as a part of the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All.

Biographical Note

Eben Friedman holds a Ph.D. in political science from the University of California, San Diego. His dissertation, "Explaining the Political Integration of Minorities: Roms as a Hard Case," drew on two years of field research in Slovakia and Macedonia. Friedman has been employed since 2002 at the European Centre for Minority Issues, where his activities have focused on Macedonia and on Romani populations in Eastern Europe. His most recent publication is "Minority Rights in Europe: Roms in Slovakia and the Czech Republic," in Malte Brosig, ed., *Minority Rights in Europe: A Fragmented Regime?* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, 2006).