

# STATE INTERVENTION FOR THE ROMA PEOPLE AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND IN THE SOCIALISM IN SLOVAKIA

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## INTRODUCTION

When analyse the history of ethnic minorities in Slovakia, we can identify general approaches of the majority society and especially the state to the inclusion of Roma people. The first systematic approaches towards the Roma people in Slovakia date back to the first half of the 19th century. The rulers in Austria-Hungary Monarchy sought to replace the missing labour force in the Slovak countryside as a result of the development of urbanisation. From this period we know of assimilation measures which often failed in practice due to overlooking practical issues in their application. The worst period in the history of the Roma people was the Second World War, when they were directly exterminated throughout Europe. In public discourse, this tragedy has been given the name '*paraimos*' - the neglected holocaust of the Roma people. In Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia after the Second World War there were about 500 Roma people. In Slovakia, the situation worsened considerably when the Slovak National Uprising was suppressed, but genocide on a European scale did not ultimately occur on our territory.

At the end of the Second World War, in March 1945, the restoration of the Czechoslovak Republic was announced. At of April was approved Košice Government Programme. Document in article V proclaimed the elimination of racial discrimination against all national minorities on the territory of the restored state.<sup>5</sup> Despite this, the Roma people did not gain the political and legal status of an ethnic minority, but after the end of the Second World War, discrimination in the racial sense formally ended. In the paper we reflect on the different approaches of the state towards the Roma people, with a focus on the period of socialism. Our intention is to highlight some characteristics of the

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<sup>5</sup> The Košice government programme implies special provisions for Germans and Hungarians. In Draft Programme of the New Czechoslovak Government of the National Front of Czechs and Slovaks.

current situation and to reflect on them in the light of state approaches in the relatively recent past.

#### PERIOD AFTER WORLD WAR II TO 1948

After the end of the Second World War, we see a bipolar approach on the part of the state towards the Roma people. The first was strongly determined by the war events and promoted concessions and overlooking of some minor offences or crimes. Determinants for benevolence in attitudes were linked to accusations of racism or a certain regret in the context of previous events. The second approach was the opposite. In Czechoslovakia, there was often resentment and aversion towards the Roma people, which manifested itself, for example, in the acquisition of land for those who wished to settle after returning from labour formations and camps. In the first post-war years, we reflect strongly the emigration tendencies of Slovak Roma people, especially from eastern Slovakia, to Czech Republic, where the called "gypsy settlement" seemed to have been definitively resolved in the context of wartime events. The Czech Republic became a betrothed land for many Roma people, but there are known cases of strong appeals to regulate and prevent the influx Roma people in Slovakia. [1]

A lot of Roma people in Czechoslovakia lived a settled way of life and benefited mainly the rural population. The restored Czechoslovakia was in a difficult economic, political and social situation after the war, which contributed to the lax approach of the state to the receive of regulatory measures. Delinquency in particular needed to be addressed. As a consequence, the application of legislation adopted in the past.<sup>6</sup> Often a transfer to a home-rule municipality was applied, police supervision was established, and regular reporting obligations were mandated. However, these measures often did not work in practice, forcing the Government to take appropriate legislative action. A. Jurová recalls in this connection that new administrative and repressive procedures were introduced to suppress delinquency by assigning Roma to forced labour camps pursuant to Decree No. 105/1945 SNR and Decree No 89/1946 SNR. According to the statement of Interior Ministry, even these partial measures were not sufficient, since after their release from the camps the "delinquents" did not cease to be a danger to society. [1] Concentration in labour camps was not considered an appropriate method of intervention, especially in

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<sup>6</sup> Law No. 117/1927 on wandering gypsies was applied against some offences. In some cases, the procedure laid down in the Decree of the Ministry of the Interior of 20 April 1941 on the regulation of certain conditions of gypsies was implemented, without, however, the discriminatory paragraphs.

view of the post-war socio-political conditions. The focus was on forced settlement of nomadic groups, as these were considered the most problematic.<sup>7</sup>

At the beginning of 1947, the Interior Ministry definitively rejected the forced concentration in labour camps and stressed the need to carry out a census of the Roma people. The census took place in the summer of 1947. At that time there were about 16 000 Roma people in Czech republic and over 80 000 in Slovakia. In the restored Republic, around 5 000 Roma were identified as living a nomadic lifestyle. The objectives of the census were oriented towards establishing the most reliable figures with a view to future legislative changes. We assume that the census was not accurate. The census of the migrant population appears to be problematic. Finally, the planned measures were not taken because of the change in the state structure. [3]

The low socio-economic status of some Roma people was perceived ambivalently in the socialist system. Roma people reflected the new government in a positive, especially with regard to compensation for the wrongs they had suffered in the past. According to M. Šebesta et al., *"the Roma peopel question became a means of political manipulation when, as a result of the country's industrialisation and the construction of the socialist system, the problem was supposed to be solved spontaneously. Only such an establishment could atone for the wrongs done to the Roma people in the past and raise them to a higher level according to the ideas and demands of communist ideology."* [4] The government promoted the ideologically tinged view that the low standard of living of the Roma people was a consequence of exploitation by capitalist power.

## PERMANENT SETTLEMENT IN THE 50S

The rise of communist government resulted in the nationalisation of communal property. In the early 1950s, small business was abolished and as a result, licenses for various traditional crafts were withdrawn. Many Roma people worked with peasants as agricultural labour. An established ecosystem of relationships functioned in the rural settlements. The new government did not

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<sup>7</sup> Addressing the problems of nomadic Roma groups has been forced by voices from below. This is confirmed, for example, by a letter from the District National Committee in Moldava nad Bodvou addressed to the Regional National Committee in Banská Bystrica, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia in Bratislava, and also to the Interior Ministry on 5 September 1955. The letter states that nomadic Roma people were arrested in the village, who had horses in and out of the team and were going to sell them on the market. There were women and children on the carts and they were hiding about 800 kilograms of lucerne, which they had stolen in Drienovec. This had to be returned to the State along with the stolen poultry. It is true that the horses that the nomads had were properly shod and had all the documents.

allow the hiring of labour, putting pressure on the association of personal property. The Roma people were not considered an ethnic minority, but "Gypsy citizens" who lived a backward way of life. The means of dealing with backwardness were social assimilation, but also the paternalistic attitude of the state. Assimilation was to be achieved through the introduction of compulsory labour and the development of housing and education policy instruments, which aimed to change the culture and way of life of the Roma people. The above objectives were to be served by the 1952 Directives on the Adjustment of the Conditions of Persons of Gypsy, in the meaning of A. Jurová "*marked a transition from administrative to violent methods to essentially non-repressive forms of assimilation policy*"[1], which were the formal equalisation of the Roma people with the majority population.

The housing question was to be addressed within the framework of the state housing policy by allocating company flats that were linked to employment. The educational level of some Roma people was at a low level, which determined the range of suitable occupations. The resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Czechoslovak Communist Party of April 1958 was based on the division of the "gypsy population" into three groups:

- the settled Roma people formed the largest group, which was employed, had a permanent residence, had children attending schools, and gradually reached the cultural level of the rest of the population;
- the second less numerous group, the semi-settled (seasonal nomads) Roma people changed their place of residence frequently, did not work all year round, showed high turnover;
- the smallest group of nomadic Roma people, who "wandered" from place to place, avoided honest work and were illiterate, was the most problematic for the establishment. [5]

The failure of the assimilation programmes was reflected in increasing migration and in reports from the districts about the persistence of criminal activity by migrant groups, which eventually led to the resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Czechoslovak Republic of 8 April 1958, which advocated social assimilation without regard to the ethnic specificities of the Roma people, with the main goal of gradual and total merging. For this purpose, Law No. 74/1958 on the permanent settlement of nomadic persons was adopted.

The legislation in § 1 imposed on the National Committees the obligation to place Travellers in employment, to allocate them accommodation and to act by educational means to turn them into proper working citizens. In § 3 provides for punitive measures if the above is not complied with. People who refused to settle

down and fulfil the stated aims faced a penalty of imprisonment ranging from six months to three years. A census of the Roma people was carried out in February 1959. This inventory identifies individuals who fall under the enforcement of Law No 74/1958. Under the law, it is necessary to settle individual nomadic families in the place where the census is to be carried out. The local national committees were to provide a number of accommodation and employment opportunities, which can be considered unrealistic, as jobs were absent, especially in eastern Slovakia, and housing construction failed to saturate the need for suitable accommodation [6].

We reproduce the text of the report, in which the reasons for the enactment of the said law are given by T. Haišman. *"Persons living a nomadic or semi-nomadic way of life, although for the first time they can live as equal and free citizens in our people's democratic system, often abuse the advantages granted to them in our state and prevent them from adapting to a normal, settled way of life which would enable them to participate fully in all the amenities which the state provides for its citizens, both materially, culturally and health-wise. This state of affairs is unsustainable not only for nomadic and semi-nomadic citizens, but especially for the rest of the population, which is threatened by nomadic groups and demands that a decisive remedy be sought in this regard."* [10] The regulation could not be positively implemented in practice for objective reasons. In the 1960s, the attitude of the state authorities towards the Roma people changed, and there was a gradual transition from the concept of open assimilation and the prohibition of nomadism to the concept of the controlled dispersal of the "gypsy population".

## DISPERSION AND DISPLACEMENT OF ROMA PEOPLE IN THE 1960S

In the following period, another form of Roma people assimilation took place. The determinants and motives acceptance of the concept of controlled dispersal are varied. P Gajdoš says that *"from the first half of the Czechoslovak Republic onwards, there have been efforts to systematically examine and rework the concepts of settlement development. In particular, a qualitative turning point was the pursuit of comprehensive settlement development on the scale of the entire state."* [8] Motives of increasing industrialization were prevalent.

The new approach of the state was foreshadowed by the formation of the Government Committee on Gypsy Population Issues. This institution implemented, guaranteed and controlled the steps taken to assimilate the Roma people in the context of the new approach of the state. At the initiative of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Czechoslovak Republic, the government issued Resolution No. 502/1965, which was the legislative norm for the "civilianization of the Gypsy population" through the liquidation of Roma

settlements, the provision of education for Roma children and adolescents, and the involvement of the able to work population in the labour market. In the meaning of A. Jurová „*The main methods of solution consisted in the dispersal and systematic removal from the places of strong concentration of Roma people inhabitants.*”

[1] On the basis of this decree, a planned and systematic relocation of the East Slovak Roma people from the settlements to "partner" Czech industrial centres began, where they were to be allocated flats. In Slovakia, 611 of the existing 1 027 settlements were to be liquidated by 1970, while 2177 families with 14 000 persons were to be moved to the Czech republic. In the East Slovak Region, 240 of the existing 422 settlements were to be liquidated by 1970, while 834 families were to be transferred to the North Moravian Region and 342 families to the East Bohemian Region by the same year. [9] The transfer was to be well organized, planned and managed. Any arbitrary transfer was punishable by imprisonment. M. Šebesta et al. meanings that in 1966 a total of 263 Roma families moved to the Czech "partner" regions, of which only a small part moved arbitrarily. In Slovakia, 59 settlements were liquidated and 1 715 huts were bought for 19 million crowns. In the Czech regions, 139 housing units were repaired and used as new housing. 122 wells were built, 5 500 metres of ordinary water mains, 22 kilometres of roads and 18 electricity connections to the settlements. [4]

The implementation of the above plan was only partially successful. A number of regional authorities did not comply with the regulation and refused to accept Roma people due to lack of jobs or housing. The failure of the whole concept is confirmed by the abolition of the Government Committee on Gypsy Population Issues in November 1968. [10]

After some social and political softening in the late 1960s, the Union of Gypsies – Roma was authorized in Czechoslovakia. It was the first emancipatory organization primarily interested in recognizing the Roma people as a national minority, publishing its own magazine, and creating political representation.[11] The government of the time did not grant nationality status to the Roma people, which was based on the contemporary reflection of the nation and the nationalities of the time. According to Marxist theories, the Roma people were characterized as an extraterritorial, internally differentiated ethnic group, living in the form of a diaspora with no prospect of reaching the stage of a nation, and therefore with no claim to the legal and political status of a nationality, [4] as a consequence of which the union became a cultural organization, but not a national representative. Political and "normalizing" causes led to the dissolution of the organization in 1973.

## SOCIO-CULTURAL INTEGRATION OF ROMA PEOPLE IN THE 1970S AND 1980S

The application of the previous concept of displacement and dispersal was ambivalent from the outset, especially in praxeological terms. The following period is characterised by the forced culturalisation of the Roma people. According to the perception of the time, „citizens of Gypsy“ were an inadaptable social class that rejected the cultural values of the majority society, and it was therefore necessary to proceed with the process of acculturation and re-education along the lines of a socialist society.

Resolution No 279/1970 of the Czechoslovak Government and Resolution No 94/1972 of the Slovak Government set out the Concept for the General Socio-Cultural Integration of Gypsies. In practice, this was not a new approach towards the Roma people, but a continuation of the latent form of assimilation that the government had been promoting since the early 1950s. The invariable aim was to remove the legacy of the capitalist system which determined the lowest social positions of the Roma people. The state authorities realised that Roma people integration would be a long-term process. [12] Similar to previous approaches, it emphasised the assimilation of adults through the imposition of universal work obligations and continued the emphasis on educational issues.

The most important thing from the government's point of view was to train as many three- to five-year-olds as possible in kindergarten. In general, there was a need to improve school attendance so that at least 70% of children completed compulsory schooling. In the context of improving living conditions, the employment rate of Roma men was to be raised to 80%, that of Roma women to 63%, and it was planned to liquidate 2 100 shacks and move 2 500 families into prefabricated housing. [1]

Most of the set goals were not realized in practice, mainly due to the lack of financial resources and the disapproval of the state institutions, which were supposed to meet the educational and employment goals of the integration process. An important determinant of the failure of the forced integration of Roma pupils and youth in particular was the refusal to codify the Roma language. According to R. Lužica, Roma people were in a similar situation throughout Europe, regardless of whether they were socialist or capitalist states. The only difference was the fact that in socialist states state paternalism was applied, of which re-education was an integral part, more noticeable than in Western Europe, where the intervention of state authorities in Roma communities was rare and state policy applied to the Roma people was a rare phenomenon.

## SUMMARY

The existence of the Union of Gypsy -Roma in Czechoslovakia proves that the Roma people were interested in solving their own problems and also challenges the notion that the Roma people did not have their own intelligentsia during the period of the previous regime. Assimilationist efforts in the past caused the devastation of the Roma's ethnic self-awareness and forcibly imposed cultural, political, social and economic ideals without regard to previous historical and ethnic contexts. The concepts presented have often remained on paper without practical implementation. Efforts to assimilate the Roma people were only partially successful and the planned changes were not achieved. It should be added that the communist regime in the last two decades has achieved some successes in the fields of employment and education, gradually eliminating illiteracy and improving the quality of life through the obligation to work, but even in this respect the problem has been dealt with ideologically.

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- *Act No. 117/1927 on Travelling Gypsies*
  - *Decree of the Ministry of the Interior of 20 April 1941 on the regulation of certain conditions of Gypsies*
  - *Act No 74/1958 Coll. on the permanent settlement of travelling persons*

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## **Abstract**

The paper describes with the position of Roma people in Slovakia during the socialist period. It focuses its attention mainly on the approach of the state and analyses various measures in relation to the assimilation and integration of the Roma people. The article aims to identify the priority concepts of the state that determined the contexts and basic views of the Roma people in Czechoslovakia from 1945 to 1980. Socialist society had a strong interest in elevating "citizens of Gypsy" to a higher level of social development through the settlement of nomadic groups, social engineering, resettlement, and socio-cultural integration. An important common feature of these approaches is the applied paternalism, which is characterised by very low involvement of the Roma people in solving their own problems.

## **Keywords**

Roma people, socialism, state concept, paternalism