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Ethnic Identity and Policy Making: the Case of the Roma in Central and Eastern Europe

Summary of the PhD Thesis

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Executive Summary of the Ph.D. Thesis

In the last two decades, due to internal and external factors, governments with a significant Roma population, especially the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, began to adopt measures and policies targeting Roma. Although numerous programs, policies, and projects have been implemented, the situation of the Roma continued to worsen. This paradox calls for seeking explanations and solutions. This thesis explores the multiple causes of this situation.

The research analyzes the process and content of public policies towards Roma employed by governments in Central and Eastern Europe. It connects the concept of ethnic identity with the policy-making process towards Roma minority. The research examines how policy makers and Roma activists categorized the Roma, as a target group, in developing these policies. In other words, it explores experts and policy-makers' definitions and classifications of Roma, in comparison to Roma self-identification, and then investigates the impact of such different classifications on the policy-making.

The research hypothesis presumes that one of the important causes of the limited impact of policies towards Roma is the way how their ethnic identity is reflected during the policy-making process. How are the Roma defined by the policy makers? How are their problems defined? Who exactly is part of the policy target group? What are the limits of the ethnic group set by policy makers? Who are the Roma social actors that define the Roma? How do they define the Roma? How do they communicate their ethnic identity in the public sphere? What is the importance of these Roma-developed definitions to the policy makers? How does the social construction of Roma identity take place? Are the definitions of Roma identity proposed by different actors legitimate at the community level? Who is included and who is left out as part of these definitions?

The research is a qualitative comparative analysis of policies towards Roma in three countries. The countries selected for this research are the Czech Republic, Hungary and Romania. All these countries are members of the European Union (EU) and have a significant Roma population or the Roma are perceived as a major challenge for social cohesion. Government policies of these countries toward Roma were scrutinized and supported by the EU during the accession negotiations. In the pre-accession period these governments have

developed the first national Roma strategies or programs. EU financial support for public policies targeting Roma has increased considerably with the accession of these countries. Moreover, as countries participating in the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015, the three governments developed sectoral action plans in four areas - education, employment, health and housing. The Decade required closer coordination between the participating countries, the Open Method of Coordination being chosen as the managing tool of the whole process. The increasing pressure of various member states, pressure caused by migration of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe to Western countries, the European Commission adopted in 2011 a policy framework document on Roma for all member states. The current research analyses all these three policy making processes with the focus on the EU Framework for Roma national integration strategies. It seeks to identify patterns in the way states and governments have responded to certain claims, in this case the claims made by the Roma. From the methodological point of view, studying three waves of processes could identify trends and establish causal links with greater accuracy than studying an isolated event.

The research does not analyze and does not compare the situation of Roma in the three countries. Test analysis and comparison of the situation of Roma in various countries in Central and Eastern Europe have been undertaken by international organizations or donors. Their analysis emphasizes the similarities rather regarding the difficult situation of Roma in these countries and the differences between them. Although these data have some relevance to the research topic, the purpose of this research is the analysis of public policies towards Roma. The research will analyze the response of governments to the problems and needs of a group.

The thesis does not analyze the impact of public policies towards Roma. Research conducted on the ground suggests significant differences in the impact of policies towards Roma in these countries, although the problems facing Roma are very similar, such as education, housing, health etc. Moreover, in all these countries Roma are on the lowest rank of the poverty and social exclusion. These discrepancies could be explained largely as a result of how ethnic identity is included in the policy making towards Roma. However, the impact analysis of these policies is beyond the scope of the present research. Lack of reliable data concerning the situation of the Roma, coupled with the lack of baseline studies to allow measuring the impact of such measures make such an attempt void. The few data available show that, in fact the impact of certain

government measures targeting Roma is very limited. In addition, many of the measures taken by governments would be hard to classify as coherent public policies targeting the Roma, as comprehensive approaches of certain social problems (Tashev and others, 2007)

Considering the possibility to approach policymaking process as cyclically process, this thesis aims to analyze only the first stages of the policy making cycle towards Roma. Thus, it compares policy ideas, the problematization of Roma, the different approaches to Roma problematique, the identifying of actors who launch these definitions and paradigms, the main concepts behind these policies and the context in which they are proposed.

This research belongs primarily to the field of comparative public policy having though an interdisciplinary character. The analysis of ethnic identity requests a thorough literature review highlighting the different approaches to issues of identity and ethnic identity in different disciplines: anthropology, social psychology, sociology and legal studies. This endeavor will emphasize the novelty approach to ethnic identity issues in the policy studies. For example, if in other disciplines defining ethnic identity involves the use of abstract concepts and theories in the policy studies ethnic identity is a concrete factor whose presence could be detected and its intensity could be measured.

One of the major sources that influenced the perspective of this research was the project coordinated by Professor Rawi Abdelal on the study of identity. The team led by Abdelal tried to develop a unifying theory of identity, be it ethnic, religious, social, etc., considering that the lack of such a theory determines a conceptual and methodological mess in the study of identity (Abdelal et al, 2001,2006,2009). This research borrows the theory developed by Abdeall and his colleagues regarding the identity and applies it to the situation of Roma in Europe. Methodologically, it measures the validity of this theory by applying it to a heterogeneous ethnic group, highly stratified across multiple cleavages, spread across the entire European continent, without a kin state, that is regarded as the most vulnerable group in the European Union (Toritsyn: 2009 : 10).

To achieve the goal of this study I used the following research methods: the literature review on public policy and the role of ethnic identity, and the one concerning the Roma and their ethnic identity, analysis of policy documents relevant to the case study, conducting semi-structured interviews with policy community members and Roma activists, secondary analysis of data and

participative observation. The use of different methods and techniques employed by various disciplines - content analysis, legal analysis, public policy analysis - offers an interdisciplinary character to the research.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter explores the definition of ethnic identity provided by different authors in different disciplines, analyzing the complexity of Romani identity and proposes a definition of the concept of ethnic identity that can be operationalized in the study of public policy. Based on the attempt of Abdelal and his colleagues to develop a unified theory of identity, the present paper takes their approach a step further by applying it to a single ethnic group, transnational one, with a wide in-group variety. The concept of identity has undergone changes from the initial definition proposed by Abdelal and his colleagues, bringing to light issues ignored or poorly developed by the team led by Abdelal, such is out-group role in defining identity, the distinction between the representation of the group and the problems in the public sphere and the causal relationships in public policy making. In practice, the definition used in this paper is based on four dimensions: (1) ethnic group participation in the policy making process, (2) ethnic claims and grievances expressed formally by social actors who speak on behalf of the group, (3) representation of the group or the problems faced by this group in public sphere by the different social actors involved in policy making: policy makers, researchers, representatives of the group, etc. and (4) causal relationships that determine the current state of affairs identified by analyzing public policy documents.

In this chapter the analysis of Romani identity was made from different perspectives to show the novelty of the approach of this thesis. The Romani identity was analyzed from the perspective of anthropological, sociological and psychological research, as well as from the perspective of policy studies, an interdisciplinary perspective that includes the concept of representation and power. In this way, the Romani identity is not just a social or cultural identity but also a political one, taking into account that the state's role through policy making and other processes, as well as that of other groups in society in defining the Roma cannot be ignored. In analyzing the Romani identity through the discourse about Roma six components of this identity were defined, thus combining the two great perspectives on identity: the primordialist and the constructivist.

The second chapter examines the various ways of framing the issues faced by the Roma, it presents the complex analysis of the public policy processes, it analyzes types of policy making

towards Roma, it identifys concepts that were at the basis of policies towards Roma and it discusses challenges in the development of policies targeting ethnic groups. Within the chapter the evolution of vision on the public policy towards Roma was analyzed in terms of the concepts used by the authorities as the foundation of these policies - social integration, multiculturalism, social inclusion and combating poverty - and in terms of policy models towards Roma, as they were articulated by various specialists. With respect to these policy models, they have been analyzed against a standard model of inclusive social policies (Dani and De Haan, 2008) and the finding was that the structural inequalities were ignored in policy making towards Roma. Analysis of the concepts behind the policies towards Roma has led to a better understanding of policy options available to decision-makers, of the mutations of various concepts in time and the transnational influences. The analysis of these concepts revealed their inadequacy and the need to propose alternative concepts encompassing the complexities of Roma problematique. For this purpose I propose a new concept which takes into account the power relations between the Roma and other groups in society and which express a possible balance in access to power and resources - the concept of accommodation. The concept of accommodation has the capacity to express a new paradigm in terms of power relations in the society. Thus it emphasizes negotiation, not imposition from above and it may even include minority veto on some important issues for the minority which does not require major efforts from society, such as, for example denomination ethnic group in the public sphere. Moreover, the concept of accommodation includes the need for institutional arrangements in this regard to ensure the participation of Roma in formulating a general interest of the group and the exercise of power at various levels so that the public policy making to have a deliberative one regarding the goals and the means to achieve those goals. If the new policy concepts towards Roma are meant to cover the complexity of Roma problematique they require a paradigm shift of Roma issues. Another controversial issue discussed in this chapter was the need for policies targeting the Roma. During the discussion various arguments supporting the need for special policies for Roma policy and not as a general policy were presented based on the analysis of the factors that determine the vulnerability of Roma.

The third chapter examines policies towards Roma in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Romania in the pre-accession period and the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015 as preceding processes to the EU Roma Framework. This approach aims to provide an understanding of the current state

policy towards Roma by analyzing the context in which these policies have emerged, past experience in developing policies towards Roma in the three countries and external and internal factors that influenced policies towards Roma and determined some specific approaches. Institutional development of the system of minority protection and government responses to acute problems of society helped to understand the Roma ethnic grievances and claims in the three countries. Policy evaluations conducted within the Decade of Roma Inclusion provided a clearer picture of the ongoing development process of policy towards Roma. The chapter includes an analysis of the factors that influenced the development of policies towards Roma: internal factors specific to each country, Euro-Atlantic integration, international migration of Roma and the development of the Roma transnational activism.

Chapter four examines the causes and the development of the EU Framework for national Roma integration strategies of the three countries included in this research, as well as the content and the process of adoption of these policies in terms of identity. EU Roma framework was based on a study led by a team of researchers from the London School of Economics and Political Science which analyzed policies and initiatives towards Roma in 12 EU member states. The report contains major inconsistencies, lacks consistent data to support arguments and reveals a rather eclectic approach to problems faced by the Roma. The adoption of the EU Roma framework was preceded by the development of a set of ten common principles to guide public policy towards Roma. Criticism of EU Roma Framework covers the following aspects: it did not lead to the creation of new mechanisms for Roma participation outside of the existing mechanisms, both at European and national level; its content is limited to just four key areas; the objectives included are very limited in scope and uncorrelated among themselves; it does not require states to adopt positive duties in promoting equality; it does not address the issue of international migration of Roma; it does not define who exactly is the target group of this policy; it does not consider troublesome and often tense relations between Roma and non-Roma; it ignores the problem of anti-tiganism and mistrust of Roma and non-Roma in institutions; it addresses superficially and stereotypically the gender relations and discrimination against women in Roma communities; and has an inefficient management tool. These factors substantially influenced the EU Roma Framework transposition at national level as revealed by the analysis of the national strategies of the three countries.

The representation of Roma in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Romania does not ensure effective participation of Roma in public policies targeting them. Basically, the system is that of the national minority representation but the problems faced by the Roma far exceed the framework of national minority issues. Moreover, compared to other public policy initiatives discussed above - government strategies in the pre- accession period and the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015 - Roma participation was at a lower level. Regarding ethnic grievances and claims, the Roma have expressed them in different ways as compared to other groups. In addition, Roma do not have a mechanism for defining and aggregating their collective interests which is a major impediment to the functioning of the democratic system. Institutions for identity representation of Roma in public are few and not consolidated. Attitudes towards Roma are alarming, both in terms of social distance but also as regards the growing influence of far right organizations. National strategies pay little attention in the public representation of Roma identity and the development of such institutions is empty rhetoric. The analysis of causal relations to substantiate state intervention reveals major inconsistencies between the stated objectives, how problems are defined and proposed measures.

This chapter also addresses the topic of data collection and censuses as administrative practices through which citizens of the states are classified and categorized, in addition to public policy through which the state or supranational structures categorize Roma. These practices, some closely related to the process of public policy making, have the ability to influence ethnic identity or classification of groups. Based on various arguments, including international legal standards, some solutions were suggested based on practical experiences in different countries.

The last chapter examines the definition, classification and categorization of the Roma made by international actors who have a say in policy making towards Roma, presents the major research findings and innovations, suggests a reconceptualization of the Roma as a politically insular minority and identifies some directions for further research.

Therefore, the thesis analyzed comparative policies towards Roma in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Romania in an original theoretical framework: ethnic identity defined along four dimensions, the concepts behind the policies towards Roma and their evolution, the analysis of the system of Roma representation, the analysis of the Roma identity representation institutions, the institutions developed by the Roma in post-communism, ethnic claims of these institutions,

representation of Roma problematique in public sphere, and the analysis of causal relations by analyzing public policies.

The thesis demonstrates that Romani identity is not considered as a factor in public policy making towards Roma. The consequences of this finding are the most harmful because the impact of these policies on the target group is not directed to solve the problem and leads rather to the blaming of the target group.

The thesis shows the theoretical and practical difficulties in public policy making towards Roma, a diverse, highly stratified group, with multiple identities and sometimes conflicting choices and preferences. Insufficient knowledge of the target group and the dynamics of fluid identity processes taking place is one of the causes of the limited impact of specific public policies targeting Roma. Therefore an investigation of how much knowledge there is on Roma and the source of this knowledge will show that the policy towards Roma is an ad hoc process rather than a planned one, that there is a need to deepen the knowledge about the Roma in order to build institutions and to adjust public policy instruments in order to increase the impact of these policies. Considering public policy as an institutional output, limited understanding of Romani identity and identity-related processes, as was shown in chapters of this thesis, largely explains the lack of impact of policies towards Roma.

From this point of view, the idea suggested in this paper for a new concept that describes the relations between Roma and the majority, acquires greater force. This new concept should take into account the power relations between the Roma and other groups in society and to express a possible balance in access to power and resources. Accommodation seems to be such a concept. But this concept does not make sense without rethinking the position of Roma. Reconsidering Roma is necessary to exit the current thinking pattern, to cause a different kind of thinking about Roma issues, and to allow the emergence of innovative solutions. This reconceptualization should express the need for a new paradigm in defining Roma as equals, translated into policies that support substantial equality, norms, procedures and mechanisms to combat anti-gypsyism and support for expression of ethnic identity in public space as part of the management of social, ethnic and cultural diversity. Meanwhile, the reconceptualization of Roma must be coupled with the need for Roma to assume an active role in pushing for social change

and that a major part of it is the development of a mechanism for the aggregation of interests and defining the public interest in a democratic system.

The reconceptualization of the Roma requires a different problematization and categorization of Roma. Roma problematization in terms of access to resources and power through their categorization as a politically insular minority transforms Roma and Romani identity in a political issue, about how the state provides equal opportunities redistribute resources in society and protects the rights of minorities. The concept of politically insular minority was developed by the Supreme Court of the United States in the 30s. Ackerman defines political insular minorities as those groups which are "systematically disadvantaged in the ongoing political process" and, as a result, "they have a low bargaining power, which makes it extremely difficult for them to fall to an agreement with potential coalition partners "(Ackerman, 1985).

Roma in Europe have all the characteristics of a politically insular minority that needs special protection. An analysis of their current situation, the causes that led to the reproduction of phenomena, of the way they are involved in national politics, the way in which their interests are aggregated at local, regional and national level, the lack of a kin state, the persistent strong negative attitudes towards them, limits their bargaining power in relation to other groups in the society. These arguments support once more the need for the development of institutional mechanisms at national and European level to protect the Roma minority.

Key words: Roma, public policy, policy making, ethnic idenity, Romani identity, EU Framework, Central and Eastern Europe,