

# ENC ANALYSIS



## **The EU accession process in the Western Balkans and the Roma**

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Author:  
Dr. Yorgos Christidis

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Dr. Yorgos Christidis** is a Doctor of Philosophy in Politics (University of Exeter, UK, 1998), has a Master of Arts in Middle East Politics (University of Exeter, 1993) and a Bachelor's Degree in Politics and International Studies (Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, Athens, 1991). At present, Dr Christidis is an Associate Professor of Comparative Politics in the Balkans at the Department of Balkan, Slavonic and Oriental Studies of the University of Macedonia, Thessaloniki, Greece. He is also a Research Fellow at the Hellenic Foundation for European and Security Policy (ELIAMEP), Athens, and a Visiting Professor at the Faculty of History, University of Sofia Sv. Kliment Ohridski. His research interests include political parties and minority issues, foreign policy and bilateral relations in Southeastern Europe.

## Introduction

Despite EU's policies and "best intentions" it's more than obvious that in the next round of EU enlargement, involving Western Balkan countries, another group of marginalized Roma communities will become part of the wider Roma predicament faced by the EU. The following brief analysis examines the position of the Roma in the Western Balkan countries, EU's "Roma policy" and sets some questions on the effectiveness of the current EU and national approaches.

### I. The Roma in the Western Balkans

Roma communities exist everywhere in the Western Balkans, although official estimates tend to underrepresent their real size and are usually disputed by experts, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Thus, in Albania the 2011 census recorded 11,699 Roma living in the country, while unofficial estimates put them at around 115,000<sup>1</sup>. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the 2013 census identified 12,583 people as Roma, while according to the Council of Europe estimates between 40,000 and 76,000 Roma were living in the country<sup>2</sup>. In Kosovo the European Roma Rights Centre has estimated the pre-1999 Roma population at 120,000, with a significant number remaining displaced after the violence of 1999 and 2004, mainly in camps in Kosovo and Serbia in the 2011 census, which excluded North Kosovo, a total of 8,824 Roma were registered, although 2010 estimates by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) suggested that there were around 34,000 Roma people still residing in Kosovo<sup>3</sup>. In Montenegro, according to the April 2011 population census, 6,251 Roma and 2,054 Egyptians were living in the country; however, according to experts and NGOs the number is much higher,

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<sup>1</sup> Bledar Feta, "The Protection of Minority Rights in Albania through EU's Enlargement Conditionality", EU Policy Hub, September 2019, p. 15, <http://www.eupolicyhub.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Policy-Briefs-Publication-Bledi-en-final.pdf> (last access 5/5/2020)

<sup>2</sup> *Bosnia and Herzegovina 2019 Analytical Report*, European Commission, Brussels, 29.5.2019, SWD(2019) 222 final, p.55, <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-bosnia-and-herzegovina-analytical-report.pdf> (last access 2/4/2020)

<sup>3</sup> "Kosovo. Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians. World Directory of Minorities and indigenous Peoples", *Minority Rights Group International*, 2018, <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/roma-9/> (last access 2/4/2020)

between 13,000 and 15,000 or even 21,000<sup>4</sup>. In North Macedonia, the 2002 census registered 53,879 Roma; however NGOs and international organizations estimated a range from 80,000 to 134,000 Roma living in the country<sup>5</sup>. And in Serbia the 2011 census registered 147,604 Roma, while various estimates put the number of Roma between 250,000 and 500,000<sup>6</sup>.

Roma in the Western Balkans have been suffering from large-scale poverty and social exclusion, as elsewhere in South-eastern or Central Europe. In every major area, from unemployment and housing, to education, statistics concerning Roma in the Western Balkans are quite grim. Thus, on *unemployment* Roma have the highest unemployment and long-term unemployment rates everywhere in the region; Concerning their *housing conditions* an increasingly large number of Roma live in illegally constructed houses, in poor conditions, with limited access to public services; In *education*, there has been, since 1990, a deterioration of the anyway low educational attainment of Roma. In addition, the Roma face a number of other socio-economic problems, like *growing isolation of the residents of segregated neighbourhoods* – where they are excluded from the labour market, and are having limited access to health care, education and social assistance, and limited opportunities for contacts with members of other communities<sup>7</sup>.

## II. The formulation and evolution of the EU's "Roma policy"

Prior to 1989 the European Communities and the Council of Europe lacked a Roma-related policy, as they considered the challenge of Roma-related problems as

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<sup>4</sup> Sofiya Zahova, "Gypsies/Roma in Montenegro: Group identity and the role of language", In: Schrammel-Leber, Barbara and Barbara Tiefenbacher, eds. Romani V. Papers from the Annual Meeting of the Gypsy Lore Society, Graz 2011. Grazer Romani Publikationen 2. Graz: Grazer Linguistische Monographie, p. 82  
[https://www.academia.edu/17586896/Gypsies\\_Roma\\_in\\_Montenegro\\_Group\\_identity\\_and\\_the\\_role\\_of\\_language](https://www.academia.edu/17586896/Gypsies_Roma_in_Montenegro_Group_identity_and_the_role_of_language) (last access 7/3/2020)

<sup>5</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia 2002, European Commission 2014, cited in Suad Skenderi, Deniz Selmani, "Institutional Antigypsyism in the Western Balkans. The case of Albania, Serbia and Macedonia", in Ismael Cortez Gomez, Markus End (ed.), *Dimensions of Antigypsyism in Europe*, European Network Against Racism (ENAR) and German Council of German Sinti and Roma, Brussels, 2019, p.224,  
[https://www.academia.edu/39936154/2019\\_Dimensions\\_of\\_Antigypsyism\\_in\\_Europe](https://www.academia.edu/39936154/2019_Dimensions_of_Antigypsyism_in_Europe) (last access 5/5/2020)

<sup>6</sup> Council of Europe, 2011 cited in Skendri & Selmani, op. cit., p. 225.

<sup>7</sup> On the social position of the Roma communities in the Western Balkans see, for example, the relevant references made in the annual country reports produced by the European Commission.

primarily the responsibility of individual states<sup>8</sup>. The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe in 1989-1990 had a major impact upon policy making: more specifically, the moves to re-unite the Continent together with the fear of a massive migration of “impoverished Roma” from Central and Eastern Europe to Western European countries forced the issue of the Roma on the agenda of organizations like the Council of Europe and the European Union (EU)<sup>9</sup>. While initially blaming the ex-Communist regimes for the social predicament of the Roma (when in all probability they didn’t fully comprehend the policies that had been implemented by the various communist regimes of ex-Eastern Europe) European officials realized the need to formulate a Roma-centred policy<sup>10</sup>. The Council of Europe was the first pan-European institution to adopt in 1993 a document treating the Roma as a “European minority in need of special attention”; The European Commission followed suit, adopting initiatives that essentially sought to develop policies promoting Roma integration.

The EU Eastward enlargement of 2003 and 2007 created a major incentive for the further development of an EU-centred policy on the Roma, as the numbers of the Roma living in the EU member-states approached 11 million, making them the largest minority inside the Union. The fact that so many Roma people had become EU citizens “brought into the Union the politics of Roma in accession states”<sup>11</sup>. Since 2003 two policy initiatives in particular stand out: the first one is the *Decade of Roma*

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<sup>8</sup> Huub van Baar, ‘Cultural policy and the governmentalization of Holocaust remembrance in Europe: Romani memory between denial and recognition’, *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, Vol. 17, No. 1, January 2011, p.8

<sup>9</sup> Nando Sigona, Nihdi Trehan, *The (re)criminalization of Roma communities in a neoliberal Europe*”, 2010, p. 5 [file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/The\\_re\\_criminalisation\\_of\\_Roma\\_communit%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/The_re_criminalisation_of_Roma_communit%20(1).pdf) (last access 7/3/2020); also Yaron Matras, “Scholarship and the politics of Romani identity: Strategic and Conceptual Issues”, *European Yearbook of Minority Issues*, Vol. 10, 2011, pp. 230, 233, [https://www.academia.edu/10101774/Scholarship\\_and\\_the\\_Politics\\_of\\_Romani\\_Identity\\_Strategic\\_and\\_Conceptual\\_Issues\\_European\\_Yearbook\\_of\\_Minority\\_Issues\\_Vol.10\\_2011\\_209-245](https://www.academia.edu/10101774/Scholarship_and_the_Politics_of_Romani_Identity_Strategic_and_Conceptual_Issues_European_Yearbook_of_Minority_Issues_Vol.10_2011_209-245) (last access 10/3/2020)

<sup>10</sup> Elena Marushiakova, Vesselin Popov, “European Policies for Social Inclusion of Roma: Catch 22?”, *Social Inclusion*, Vol. 3, Issue 5, 2015, p. 21, [file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/European\\_Policies\\_of\\_Roma\\_Social\\_Inclusi%20\(2\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/European_Policies_of_Roma_Social_Inclusi%20(2).pdf) (last access 10/3/2020)

<sup>11</sup> Martin Kovats, “Foreword”, in *National Roma Integration Strategies: What Next?* European Roma Rights Centre, Brussels, December 2013, p. 3-4, [https://www.academia.edu/31766989/National\\_Roma\\_Integration\\_Strategies\\_What\\_Next\\_Roma\\_Rights\\_Journal\\_1\\_2013](https://www.academia.edu/31766989/National_Roma_Integration_Strategies_What_Next_Roma_Rights_Journal_1_2013) (last access 15/3/2020)

*Inclusion* of 2005, which was initially introduced by the network of Open Society Foundations and was taken up by the EU; the second is the *Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies* adopted by the European Commission in 2011. The EU Framework draws inspiration from and focuses on the same policy areas as the Decade: education, employment, health, and housing. It is related to the initiative *Europe 2020 A Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth*, designed *inter alia* to combat poverty, and draws on the Race Equality Directive (RED) as the foundational legal instrument prohibiting discrimination. The EU Framework requires all EU Member States to develop National Roma Integration Strategies – a requirement similar to the Decade’s National Action Plans. Both the EU Framework and the Roma Decade established coordinating structures at national and international level (with governments designating a National Contact Point in the case of the EU Framework (or a National Decade Coordinator in the case of the Decade), to interact with Brussels, to coordinate national efforts and to implement their official Roma inclusion/integration policies. The EU Framework is managed by a unit at the Directorate-General for Justice of the European Commission. The 2011 Framework “aims to make a tangible difference to the lives of Roma, by subjecting them to broader and more detailed examination, monitoring and evaluation than ever before. Far more information is intended to be produced and made public about Roma people - how many of them there are, where they live, what they need, how much money is spend on them etc.”<sup>12</sup>.

Thus, EU policies since the mid-2000s have been promoting Roma’ integration/inclusion on the four priority areas of EU policy, that is employment, housing, education and healthcare, with the addition of gender issues and the fight against discrimination and what has been called “anti-Gypsyism”, a term adopted by the European Parliament in 2005. In June 2011, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) adopted the first international document to acknowledge and combat anti-Gypsyism and discrimination against Roma. ECRI refers to anti-Gypsyism as “a specific form of racism, an ideology founded on racial

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<sup>12</sup> Kovats, op. cit., p. 3-4,

superiority, a form of dehumanization and institutional racism nurtured by historical discrimination, which is expressed, among other things, by violence, hate speech, exploitation, stigmatisation and the most blatant kind of discrimination”<sup>13</sup>. In order to support national efforts towards Roma inclusion, the EU also has designed various funding mechanisms: in the 1990s the PHARE program “provided job training to Roma youth and awareness campaigns to educate the Roma about their rights”<sup>14</sup>, more recently there is funding provided by the European Social Fund, and the European Regional Development Fund.

### III. The Western Balkans’ accession process and the Roma

There is little doubt that the EU has played an important role in the promotion of minority rights in the Western Balkans through its enlargement conditionality, improving national legal frameworks, i.e., Western Balkan countries are having the obligation to harmonize their legislation to the *acquis communautaire*. Thus, the aspiring member states are called upon to adopt specific minority protection standards formulated in the EU's enlargement policy and the stabilisation and association process. Concerning EU Roma policy vis-à-vis the Western Balkans, the issue of Roma marginalization was first mentioned in the EU Enlargement Strategy of 2010-2011. By the 2014-15 Enlargement Strategy the tone had changed significantly, as the EC underlined that there was no dramatic change in the situation of minorities in the area by stating that “there is a need to better protect the rights of persons belonging to minorities and to tackle discrimination” admitting that the treatment of minorities continued to be a problem in the region<sup>15</sup>. For the first time, the EC rendered a number of issues that should be addressed by the aspiring member states such as “the use of minority languages, the access to education and

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<sup>13</sup> ECRI *General Policy Recommendation no.13 on Combating anti-Gypsyism and Discrimination against Roma* cited in Dezideriu Gergely, “Fighting Discrimination and Promoting Equality in the Context of the Roma Inclusion Policies in Europe”, p. 48, in *National Roma Integration Strategies: What Next?*

<sup>14</sup> Shannon Jones, *The Litmus Test of European Democracy: The EU and the Protection of the Roma Minority*, draft text prepared for the 2010 Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, New Orleans, 17-20 February 2010, [https://www.academia.edu/2384120/The\\_Litmus\\_Test\\_of\\_European\\_Democracy\\_the\\_EU\\_and\\_Protection\\_of\\_the\\_Roma\\_Minority](https://www.academia.edu/2384120/The_Litmus_Test_of_European_Democracy_the_EU_and_Protection_of_the_Roma_Minority) (last access 10/1/2021)

<sup>15</sup> “Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges”, pp. 14-15, cited in Feta, op. cit., 5

minorities' political representation", while it pointed out the necessity "the Roma inclusion to become a national priority backed by strong political will at all levels"<sup>16</sup>. The treatment of the Roma communities in candidates and potential candidates from the Western Balkans is continuously addressed by the European Commission, not only in their annual progress reports on the integration of the Roma community, but also in the Progress Reports for each country. The emphasis put by the European Commission has been on the four priority areas of EU policy for Roma inclusion - employment, housing, education and healthcare - plus gender issues and the fight against discrimination and anti-Gypsyism. The same strategy can be seen in the Berlin Process dealing with the Western Balkans. Under the Berlin Process, a *Declaration of Western Balkan Partners on Roma Integration within the EU Enlargement Process* was adopted at Pozdan on 5 July 2019, stating "a commitment to continue and enhance efforts for full equality and integration of Roma", pledging commitment on a number of objectives concerning employment, housing, education, health, civil registration and non-discrimination<sup>17</sup>.

#### **IV. Critique of EU policies/approach**

The EU policy on the Roma in the Western Balkan countries faces the same challenges and problems its wider Roma policy has encountered from the beginning. Critics of EU's Roma policies developed since the mid-1990s have underlined the "dangers" of treating the Roma as a homogeneous group. Yaron Matras has argued that, "By and large, European institutions have failed to adopt a realistic and politically practical conceptualization of Roma. In the absence of a clear concept, proposals for intervention strategies are doomed to be incoherent in themselves and inconsistent among governments and institutions"<sup>18</sup>. Matras' concerns have been shared by other known scholars, like Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov who have argued that the problem with European policies starts with the terminology applied: "in the last 20 years the politically correct term is considered to be 'Roma'

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<sup>16</sup> *ibid*

<sup>17</sup> *Declaration of Western Balkan Partners on Roma Integration within the EU Enlargement Process*, Poznan, 5 July 2019, [le:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/2019-06-roma-deklaracija-b%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/2019-06-roma-deklaracija-b%20(1).pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Matras, *op. cit.*, pp. 245-46,

which is the self-appellation of a significant part of communities... The definition of Roma used in political documents of the European parliament and the European Council (as an umbrella term) is misleading because Roma who live in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe share “more or less similar cultural characteristics” with the surrounding majority population much more than with other groups such as Sinti, Travellers, Kale, Gens du voyage etc... Nearly all official documents underline the heterogeneity of groups labelled Roma, but in the same time they fail to recognize the importance of such diversity for policies... a legitimate question that arises is, whether it is possible at all to have a successful realization of national and supranational policies if they are based on strategies and programs, in which it is not clear who is the main target...”<sup>19</sup> Another well-known scholar on Roma issues, Huub van Baar has argued that the Roma have been treated by the EU “as a homogeneous European minority that has accordingly become approachable in terms of a distinct population to be integrated in European societies... the construction of the Roma as a homogeneous ethnic European minority that faces large-scale exclusion risks the promotion of a stereotypical image of the Roma as an un-integrated group or even a group that actively resists attempts to be included in mainstream society. Focusing on the Roma as a homogeneous European minority and on the necessity to integrate this minority population into mainstream European societies disregards those Roma who live ‘integrated’ and even more importantly, ignores the complex mechanisms that have recently and historically produced the exclusion of many Roma. This threat is all the most relevant since the representation of the Roma as marginal and asocial outsiders, who are themselves responsible for the situation in which they live, is still the most dominant and reproduced stereotype of the Roma. Promoting a ‘pan-European Roma problem of integration’ could easily become counterproductive...”<sup>20</sup>

Another issue that has been, repeatedly, pointed out is the lack of proper implementation of the various programs and measures announced by the EU. A monitoring conducted by civil society coalitions and supported by the Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat and the Open Society Foundations, covering six EU

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<sup>19</sup> Marushiakova & Popov, op. cit., p.23.

<sup>20</sup> Baar, op. cit., pp. 10-11

member states and two accession countries, published back in 2013, raised, among others, the issue of “poor use” of EU funds<sup>21</sup>. Lack of proper implementation also includes anti-discrimination legislation: the legal framework exists however national and local authorities fail to enforce it. The Western Balkan countries are no exception, as “despite the recommendations of the European Commission, the candidate and potential candidate countries have not taken any serious steps to improve the situation of the Roma community... (Institutions in the Western Balkan) propose and adopt policies and laws that promote social inclusion and equal rights; however, these policies and laws are not implemented due to the lack of human and financial resources and lack of coordination”<sup>22</sup>. It has even been argued that “initiatives and projects have failed to make an impact on the daily lives of the majority of Roma in Europe... EU projects rather tend to reinforce the marginalization of Roma and impede their opportunities to participate equally in the education system or labour market”<sup>23</sup>.

## V. The example of Bulgaria

According to the last available census, that of 2011, there were 325,343 Roma living in Bulgaria<sup>24</sup>, with most unofficial estimates however giving a much higher number, around 10% of the total population or between 700,000 to 750,000 people<sup>25</sup>. By the end of the 1990s, it had become pretty obvious that Roma’ standards of living in Bulgaria had sharply deteriorated, with a number of national and international analyses underlining the dramatic drop in the Roma’ standards of living that took

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<sup>21</sup> Bernard Rorke, “What Future for the EU Framework? What Prospects for Roma Inclusion”, in *National Roma Integration Strategies: What Next?* European Roma Rights Centre, Brussels, December 2013, pp.5-6

<sup>22</sup> Skenderi, Selmani, op. cit., pp. 217, 219

<sup>23</sup> Sabrina Kopf-Steindl, “From the Principles of Tolerance and Equality to the Reproduction of Marginalisation – Discussing European Roma Policies”, in I. C. Gomez and M. End (edit.), *Dimensions of Antigypsyism in Europe*, Anti-Racism in Focus 3, published by ENAR and the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma, Brussels, 2019, p.19, [https://www.academia.edu/39936154/2019\\_Dimensions\\_of\\_Antigypsyism\\_in\\_Europe](https://www.academia.edu/39936154/2019_Dimensions_of_Antigypsyism_in_Europe) (last access 11/1/2020)

<sup>24</sup> “2011 Population Census – Main Results”, *National Statistical Institute*, Sofia, 2011, 8, [https://www.nsi.bg/census2011/PDOCS2/Census2011final\\_en.pdf](https://www.nsi.bg/census2011/PDOCS2/Census2011final_en.pdf) (last access 6/2/2020)

<sup>25</sup> Cited in “The European Union and the Roma - Factsheet Bulgaria”, *European Commission*, 4 April 2014, <http://ec.europa.eu/justice/roma-integration/bulgaria> (last access 22/1/2020)

place during the 1990s in all spheres of social life<sup>26</sup>. Until 1999, Bulgaria had failed in effect to develop any kind of policy for dealing with the deteriorating position and living conditions of the Roma community: any measures that had been introduced – for example by Ivan Kostov’s government (1997-2001) – had failed because among others, “they were not harmonized with the Roma community, who therefore remained indifferent to them”<sup>27</sup>. The fact however that in December 1999 Bulgaria got the “green light” to open its accession negotiations with the EU provided a stimulus, and “kept the pressure” to Sofia to develop policies dealing with the growing poverty and marginalization of the Roma population. Thus, a *Protection from Discrimination Act* was adopted by the Parliament in September 2003; while the *Action Plan for the Implementation of the Framework Programme for Roma Integration* adopted by the government on 6 October 2003 - a program that had been initially introduced in April 1999, under the name *Framework Programme for Equal Integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society* - explicitly recognized the existence of discrimination against the Roma, setting as a “strategic goal” the eradication of the unequal treatment of Roma<sup>28</sup>. In June 2005 the Bulgarian government announced another action plan, the *Action Plan for Achieving the Goals of the Decade of Roma Inclusion*, adopted in the context of the *Decade on Roma Inclusion*. And although the plan was greeted as containing “many laudable measures... which could significantly ease, if not resolve completely, problems related to healthcare, employment, education and the hygiene and infrastructure in the Roma neighbourhoods... the great majority of these measures are only good wishes, because the Bulgarian budget’s funding for them is minimal”<sup>29</sup> - a total of 37,622,000 Euros was envisioned for the entire ten-year period<sup>30</sup>. Between 2005 and 2010, Sofia adopted plans in

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<sup>26</sup> Yorgos Christidis, “The Roma in Post-Communist Bulgaria: Growing Social Marginalization and State Policies”, *Journal of Asian Social Science Research*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2020, pp. 5-7.

<sup>27</sup> Maria Yaneva, “System of Central and Local Government, Political Participation and Civil Participation of Minorities in Bulgaria”, in Goedele De Keersmaeker, Plamev Makariev (ed.) *Bulgaria. Facing Cultural Diversity*, (IPIS in cooperation with ACCESS, Sofia, July 1999), p. 57.

<sup>28</sup> “Framework Programme for Equal Integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society”, *Newsletter*, National Council on Ethnic and Demographic Issues, 2003, p.19

<sup>29</sup> *Human Rights in Bulgaria in 2004*, Report of the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, April 2005, p. 16, [www.bghelsinki.org/annual/en/2004\\_human%20rights.pdf](http://www.bghelsinki.org/annual/en/2004_human%20rights.pdf) (last access 5/12/2005)

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*

education, health, housing and employment<sup>31</sup>. At the end of the day however, as it was pointed out, among others, by Todor Todorov in his detailed report on Bulgaria entitled “*Measures to promote the situation of Roma citizens in the EU. Country reports*”, commissioned by the Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the European Parliament and published in 2011, the situation concerning Roma hadn’t improved, but had actually deteriorated.<sup>32</sup>

On 12 May 2010 Bulgaria adopted the *Framework Programme for Integration of Roma in the Bulgarian Society (2010-2020)* “extending the strategic areas and guidelines, laid down in 1999, and establishing the framework for the next steps of Bulgaria in the new EU membership context”<sup>33</sup>, Following the adoption of an *EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020* by the European Commission in April 2011, which required all member-states to produce national strategies to guide Roma integration<sup>34</sup>, the Framework Programme was updated as *The National Integration Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020)*<sup>35</sup>, adopted by the government in December 2011 and also by Parliament in March 2012. The Bulgarian National Strategy explicitly recognized the predicament facing Roma in various areas<sup>36</sup>, setting as its “*strategic goal... creating conditions for equitable*

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<sup>31</sup> *Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Pupils from Ethnic Minorities* (adopted 2004, updated 2010); *Health Strategy for Disadvantaged Persons Belonging to Ethnic Minorities* (adopted 2005), *National Programme for Improvement of Roma Housing Conditions for the period 2005-2015* (adopted 2006); various programs included in the *National Employment Strategy for the period 2008-2015* and the *Employment National Action Plan*. Todor Todorov, “Country report – Bulgaria”, in *Measures to promote the situation of Roma citizens in the EU. Country reports*, Directorate-General for Internal Policies, European Parliament, 2011, p.23, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2011/432747/IPOL-LIBE\\_ET\(2011\)432747\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2011/432747/IPOL-LIBE_ET(2011)432747_EN.pdf) (last access 5/2/2020)

<sup>32</sup> *ibid*, pp. 13-16.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid*, p. 22

<sup>34</sup> “EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020”, *European Commission*, Brussels, 5 April 2011, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52011DC0173&from=en> (last access 10/2/2020)

<sup>35</sup> For the document see [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/roma\\_bulgaria\\_strategy\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/roma_bulgaria_strategy_en.pdf) (last access 8/2/2020)

<sup>36</sup> “A serious problem facing the Roma is the increasing spatial isolation of their community. The concentration of Roma in isolated neighbourhoods has increased during the last fifteen years both in the urban and rural areas...”; “The Roma people are in a disadvantaged position at the labour market as a result of the structural changes that have taken places in Bulgaria. The changes of the macroeconomic situation in the country have resulted in their exclusion from the labour market and in constantly persisting very high unemployment levels in their community, or employment in only very low-income jobs”; “Observations show that the improvement of the educational status of the Roma community has

*integration of the Roma and the Bulgarian citizens in a vulnerable situation... in the social and economic life by ensuring equal opportunities and equal access to rights, goods and services, by involving them in all public spheres and improving their quality of life, while observing the principles of equality and non-discrimination”, enumerating a variety of measures in education, healthcare, housing conditions, employment, rule of law and non-discrimination, culture and media<sup>37</sup>.*

A European Commission report published in April 2014 recognized the “positive steps” that had been taken in the direction of Roma integration in Bulgaria since 2011 in education, employment, health, housing and anti-discrimination<sup>38</sup>, adding however a number of “further priorities” for the future: *“Further reforms are needed in education, employment, health and housing policy to support Roma inclusion; Political leadership of the inter-ministerial working group on the use of EU funds for Roma integration should be reinforced; The overall mandate and resources allocated to the national Roma contact point should be reinforced; Anti-discrimination campaigns and communication activities on Roma integration should be developed targeting the entire population”<sup>39</sup>. Four years later it had become clear that real progress in most areas was missing: a monitoring report on the implementation of the National Integration Strategy in 2018 underlined that “...the period of 2016-2017 does not mark any significant advances in the implementation of the NRIS. Improvements have been observed in the usage of EU funds for Roma inclusion... and for education (especially in reducing early school leaving and increasing participation in different levels of education, although segregation remains a problem). Deterioration is obvious in the fields of governance... and the consultative process with civil society and antigypsyism (with a significant rise in anti-Roma rhetoric,*

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slowed down during the last 20 years. Another specificity of the group is that functional illiteracy is three times more frequent among Roma women than men...”; “The survey shows that 12.6% of the entire Roma population in the country, including children, has some kind of disabilities or suffer from a heavy chronic disease. What is specific for the Roma people is the very early onset of disability and the widespread chronic diseases on a mass scale as early as the middle age. One third of the male Roma population and two fifths of the female population in the age bracket 45-60 have already lost partially or in full their work capacity due to poor health status”. *The National Integration Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020)*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>38</sup> “The European Union and the Roma - Factsheet Bulgaria”, op. cit.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid*

*publications and even actions)... The added value of the Action Plan was limited by a lack of financial backup for most of its activities”<sup>40</sup>.*

## **Conclusion**

Present EU and national policies are inadequate to address the problems of extreme poverty and social exclusion suffered by Roma in the Western Balkans and elsewhere. As a World Bank study on the Roma in Europe noticed, back in 2003, Roma social exclusion has multiple dimensions: economic, political, sociocultural and geographic: “In economic exclusion, individuals cannot participate in market activity, including employment, access to credit, and land. Political exclusion refers to limitations on participation in democratic processes, such as voting, participation in political parties and other associations within civil society. Sociocultural exclusion encompasses separation based upon linguistic, religious, and ethnic grounds. Geographic exclusion involves various types of spatial differentiation”<sup>41</sup>. The Roma predicament cannot be addressed under present policies at national and EU levels, which are simply insufficient. As the Bulgarian sociologist Ilona Tomova underlined back in 2002 for the Roma population in Bulgaria, *“The problem is that unemployment for more than two years causes processes of demotivation and depression, and loss of training and disciplinary skills, which means that reintegrating those people requires additional funds and efforts. Unemployment for more than five years brings about serious changes in the motivation for everyday work, and re-employment becomes extremely difficult... The problem is that when unemployment in a particular community exceeds 30% and lasts more than two years, this leads to processes of degradation with which the community cannot cope on its own. The need arises of an active policy on reintegration in the various social spheres”<sup>42</sup>*. Member-states and the EU must address Roma marginalization as first and foremost

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<sup>40</sup> “Civil Society Monitoring Report on Implementation of the national Roma integration strategies in Bulgaria”, *Roma Civil Monitor, European Commission*, Brussels, 2018, pp. 7,9, [https://www.academia.edu/37271117/Civil\\_Society\\_Monitoring\\_Report\\_on\\_Implementation\\_of\\_the\\_National\\_Roma\\_Integration\\_Strategy\\_in\\_Bulgaria](https://www.academia.edu/37271117/Civil_Society_Monitoring_Report_on_Implementation_of_the_National_Roma_Integration_Strategy_in_Bulgaria)

<sup>41</sup> Dean Ringold, Mitchel A. Orenstein, Eric Wilkens, *Roma in an Expanding Europe: Breaking the Poverty Cycle*, World Bank, 2003, p. 18

<sup>42</sup> Ilona Tomova, “Problems of the Roma in Bulgaria”, in *Bulgaria-Yugoslavia. Journalism in Intercultural Dialogue*, Sofia: ACCESS, 2002, p. 134

a problem of poverty and thus design and implement long-term programs of *eradicating poverty* tailored to the specific features and needs of individual Roma communities; a “people-centred approach to poverty eradication” should, as the UN has underlined, involve “[the empowerment of people living in poverty through their full participation in all aspects of political, economic and social life, especially in the design and implementation of policies that affect the poorest and most vulnerable groups of society”<sup>43</sup>. Here however lies another important problem: in many EU member-states public policies addressing Roma problems have little public support, a hostile public opinion does not favour or approve higher resource allocations, it simply focuses upon “law and order”. Bulgaria’s case is again indicative: successive surveys underline widespread negative stereotypes and public hostility against the Roma<sup>44</sup>, with political parties being averse in dealing with Roma issues, afraid of alienating voters. As Angel Ivanov has argued, “*The political and party system is almost wholly detached from the Roma, engaging with them only during elections in order to buy Roma votes*”<sup>45</sup>. A few NGOs that are involved in Roma integration programs and understand their problems well are not in a position to alter a hostile public opinion. Public awareness must change and that demands well-orchestrated and financed public campaigns.

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<sup>43</sup> “Poverty Eradication”, United Nations, Department of economic and Social Affairs, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/socialperspectiveondevelopment/issues/poverty-eradication.html> (last access 5/3/2021)

<sup>44</sup> Christidis, op. cit., pp. 2-3

<sup>45</sup> Angel Ivanov, “Antigypsyism in Bulgaria”, in Hristo Kyuchukov (ed.) *New Faces of Antigypsyism in Modern Europe*, Prague 2012, p. 51, [http://jaroslavbalvin.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/AG\\_04.pdf](http://jaroslavbalvin.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/AG_04.pdf)