

The communist authorities' refusal to recognize the Roma as a national minority

by **Viorel Achim**



A moment in the history of the Roma in Romania, 1948–1949

abstract

This paper deals with the moment in 1948–1949, when the representative organization of the Romanian Roma unsuccessfully tried to obtain for them from the communist authorities the status of a national minority. For the Romanian Communist Party, the Roma represented a population that had to be brought into its sphere of influence. Discussions on the establishment of the People's Union of the Roma lasted for several months but eventually led to the rejection of the request of the Roma leaders. The institutions involved in these discussions created documents, some of which are kept in the archives and allow us to study this moment in time. An archival document of particular importance for understanding what happened in those years and for understanding the motivations behind the communist authorities' decision not to grant the status of a national minority to the Roma is the study titled *The Gypsy Problem in the Romanian People's Republic*, which was drawn up by the Department for the Issues of Coinhabiting Nationalities in the context of the negotiations in the first months of 1949 between the ministry's leadership and the Roma leaders in connection with the recognition of the Roma as a national minority.

KEY WORDS: National minority, citizenship, Roma people, communism in Romania.

The Roma in Romania were recognized as a national minority only in 1990. During the communist regime, although they were important in numerical terms,¹ and in the censuses, they were registered as a separate ethnicity, the Roma were not among the “coinhabiting nationalities” (in Romanian, *naționalitate conlocuitoare*, the name used in that era for minorities). The Romanian Communist Party (PCR), which took over all state power on December 30, 1947, – the day when King Mihai was forced to abdicate and the Romanian People's Republic (RPR) was proclaimed – established the foundation of its policy towards minorities in 1948. Policies in the field changed over the next four decades of communist rule in Romania, but the overall lines remained roughly the same. In 1948, most minorities obtained the status of “coinhabiting nationality,” which assured them certain rights, first of all of a cultural nature, and in the early years political rights as well.²

Because they did not benefit from coinhabitant nationality status, the Roma were not represented as a minority at the level of party and state administration, and there were no political or other kinds of bodies or institutions that – within the limits of the communist state, of course – promoted their collective



A group of semi-nomadic Roma in Romania in a photograph dating from before the deportation.

interests or took special care of the problems of this population. Among other things, the Roma did not have cultural institutions, schools, or publications, and there were no subsidies for their artistic activities, etc., as was the case for the recognized minorities. The specific social, economic, and cultural problems faced by large segments of the Roma population under the conditions of modernization in the years of communism were not effectively addressed by the Romanian authorities because the Roma were a population that officially did not exist as a minority.³

The Roma were in a position to obtain the status of coinhabiting nationality in the years 1948–1949. The General Union of Roma in Romania (UGRR), which was a representative organization for this population, tried in those years to obtain the status of coinhabitant nationality for the Roma, but ultimately the decision of the authorities was unfavorable to the Roma.

I WILL DEAL IN DETAIL with the moment in 1948–1949, when the representative organization of Roma unsuccessfully tried to obtain for them the status of a national minority, in a book I am currently working on about the situation of the Roma in Romania in the early postwar years. In the book chapter on the issue of the coinhabiting nationality status, my work is built almost exclusively on archival documents, which is only natural as there are no memories remaining among the Roma leaders or others regarding what happened in those years, and this sensitive issue was not addressed in the press of the time, which was under government control. An archival document of particular importance for understanding

what happened in those years and for understanding the motivations behind the communist authorities' decision not to grant the status of a national minority to the Roma is the study titled *The Gypsy Problem in the Romanian People's Republic*, which was drawn up by the Department for the Issues of Coinhabiting Nationalities in the context of the negotiations in the first months of 1949 between the ministry's leadership and the Roma leaders in connection with the recognition of the Roma as a national minority.⁴ This eight-page document, taken from the collection of *The Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party* in the National Archives of Romania, will be published in the appendix of the above-mentioned book.⁵ In this article, I will present this document, which will be prefaced by a discussion of the essence of the Roma policies in Romania in the years 1945–1949, and I will resume some ideas and summarize some paragraphs from an article I published in 2009.⁶

After August 23, 1944, when the government led by Marshal Ion Antonescu was overthrown and Romania returned to a democratic regime, the persecution of the Roma, which meant the deportation of certain categories of Roma to Transnistria in 1942–1944, came to an end.⁷ For the Romanian government and generally for the Romanian authorities, the Roma returned to what they had been before the dictatorship of Antonescu – a population representing a marginal social category rather than an ethnic minority. Beyond the economic problems of that period, which affected many Roma, and the very difficult situation of the Transnistria survivors, and especially of the nomads, who, with their deportation, had lost all of their possessions, the first postwar years saw the reactivation of some of the Roma organizations from the interwar period and the emergence of new organizations. The most important was the UGRR, an organization founded in 1933 and that was relatively active throughout the 1930s.⁸ The UGRR resumed its activity in the beginning of 1945 under the leadership of the old committee headed by Gheorghie Niculescu, a flower merchant from Bucharest. The main

“THE ROMA RETURNED TO WHAT THEY HAD BEEN BEFORE THE DICTATORSHIP OF ANTONESCU – A POPULATION REPRESENTING A MARGINAL SOCIAL CATEGORY RATHER THAN AN ETHNIC MINORITY.”

objectives they set were the material and moral support of the Roma, especially those who had been deported to Transnistria, and the appropriation of the Roma participating in the war, under the agrarian reform that was announced at that time.

The government with a communist majority chaired by Petru Groza, which was set

up on March 6, 1945, took some economic and social measures that were favorable to the Roma. Under the agrarian reform of 1945, 19,559 Roma were granted small parcels of land.⁹ Local measures were also taken to help the poor Roma. The authorities had a dialogue with Roma organizations and leaders, just as they did before the war. It seems that the measures taken by the government and the left-wing messages of the communists were attractive to some Roma. After 1948, the egalitarian policies

of the Communist Party were even more favorable to the Roma, which were generally poorer elements of society and among whom the communist regime recruited activists and militiamen in its first years.

A close collaboration between the Groza government and the UGRR can only be seen starting in August 1947. The Roma leaders had noticed the direction of events in Romania, where the PCR was about to seize all political power, and they understood that the only way they could maintain their organization and promote their interests was through collaboration with the communists. Some of these leaders, as well as ordinary Roma, then joined the PCR or the communists' satellite parties and organizations. For the PCR, the Roma represented a population that had to be brought into its sphere of influence. Gaining power over this population required a unique Roma organization at the national level, as was the case with the UGRR, which had a certain infrastructure at the national level and enjoyed some prestige among the Roma population.

SOME OF THE WRITINGS of the Roma leaders clearly show the contractual relationship they believed they had with the government authorities. For example, in his petition of March 3, 1948, to the Minister of the Interior, Grigore Nucu, the president of the UGRR branch in Timiș-Torontal County and inspector for Transylvania and Banat of the UGRR writes that "we have no other purpose than to raise the Roma from the millennial darkness and make them citizens who are peaceful, loyal and useful to the country, controlling closely their moral, cultural and economic behavior, hoping that through our work we will greatly help the High Government in carrying out its work."¹⁰ Beyond his language, which is characteristic for that era, Nucu expresses here the reality of the cooperation between the UGRR and the Communist government.

In 1947 and 1948, the UGRR received support from the authorities. Significant is the fact that in some places the Roma meetings were organized with the direct support of the authorities. The UGRR submitted to the central and regional authorities numerous memos on Roma issues, submitted petitions, intervened on behalf of some Roma communities, etc. There was communication between the UGRR and the central authorities, as well as between the local branches and the local administration. Evidence that the authorities responded to the UGRR's wishes is that in 1945 the ethnonym "Roma" began to be used in the administration's acts, and in 1948 this name became official. This was a previous request of the UGRR and the Roma intellectuals of the 1930s.

This was obviously a mutually beneficial relationship – state support ensured legitimacy for Roma leaders, and this power assured, to a certain extent, control over the Roma. Roma leaders repeatedly expressed their attachment to the "democratic" government of Petru Groza. In the elections to the Chamber of Deputies on March 28, 1948, the Central Committee of the UGRR called on the Roma to vote for the "Sun," the symbol of the Popular Democracy Front (FDP) which was in alliance with the Romanian Workers' Party (PMR). The slogan was "All Roma alongside

Asociația Uniunii Generale a Romilor din Republica Pop. Română
sub Președinția D-ului GH. NICULESCU
Recunoștință personală juridică — Sediu Central: Piața St. Avelin Nr. 10 — București

APEL
Către toți Romii și Romițele din Republica Populară Română

Frați Romi,
Eu, **Gheorghe Niculescu**, președintele general al Asociației Uniunii Generale a Romilor din Republica Populară Română, mă prezint în fața voastră cu toată dragostea de frate, cu rugămintea de a-mi da ascultare la chemarea pe care v-o fac, așa cum m'ați ascultat și m'ați urmat timp de peste un deceniu. Liniile de conduită pe care am trasat-o în conducerea „Asociației”, a fost și este dreaptă, fără cedări și abateri de la linia: **Toți pentru unii și unii pentru toți.**

Frați Romi, Frontul Democrat Popular, a lăsat un **Manifest-Program**, către Țară, prin care chiamă poporul în fața urmelor pe ziua de **28 Martie 1948**, să aleagă pe reprezentanții săi, cari să dea țării Constituția cea nouă, adică **Pravila cea mare**, menită să asigure prosperitatea tinerii noastre Republici.

Frați Romi,
În fața acestui mare eveniment, datoric mea de Președinte general al voștrii pe întreaga Țară, care sună răsunător un milion de sunete, mă obligă să nu las termenii în libertate lașilor: în cartea **Bilanta scrisă**, ca „**Păstorul bun, își dă viața pentru oile sale**”. Deci, fac apel la conștiința voastră și am credința fermă că nu veți asculta, așa cum m'ați ascultat și în alte vremuri când vă apăsa s'a abătut asupra voastră, și v'aru sece în limuză, așa cum s'a petrecut laptul cu înproprietățile lașilor, din răstănit, cari în Căminare trimisă de mine către Comitetul Agrar, județene și comunale din întreaga Țară, ca Romii lașilor, să nu fie omăgi dela deplăzire ce le acordă leges Agrară. Așa ca frații lașilor Romi, să pășineze și să bucure de pământ, după care au jindat alătele secole, moși și strămoși voștri.

Frați Romi,
Fără cu altădina Onor. Guvern, care se-a venit în ajutor, ori de câte ori nevoia m'a obligat să fiu în așa onor în drept și s'a desăvârșit. Așadar, mai mult ca ori când datoric mea este să vă intrăm ca la **Alegerile dela 28 Martie 1948**, să mergem alături cu guvernul și pentru Guvern, adică cu **Frontul Democrat Popular**.

Iar voi, dragi Romiți, cari alături cu soții voștri a-ți sunat și v'ați creștat copiii în legea noastră creștină, cu răbdare și multă înțelegere, să ați pregătit, așteptând vremea care să înceapă și pentru voi și pentru creștinii voștri să înțelegem.

Deci, urmați-mă și împreună în ziua de **28 Martie 1948**, să facem față în fața urmelor, și intrând în cabină să punem ștampila în locul curvenit pe **LISTA Nr. 1, cu SOARELE** care este semnul electoral al „**Frontului Democrat Popular**”

FRAȚI ROMI! Păinea copiilor voștri depinde de voi. Ascultați vocea Președintelui voștrii și votați cu toți: Romii și Romițele, **SOARELE** Trăiască Republica Populară Română! Trăiască Frontul Democrat Popular!

GH. NICULESCU, Președintele general al A. U. O. R. R.
Bilantă-vă din vremea oștite de abgătar, dela localitate respective.
Nici un rom și romiță să nu ignorați dela voi în ziua de **28 Martie 1948**.
N. B. — Rog pe toți Președinții de Secție, Către și Subcătre, să curățească de șterguri Alături guvernului românesc, în care să îndrepte pe Romii și Romițele să dea votul Guvernului. Săcură, să obțină din **Apelul** meu în toate localitățile, unde se află Romii (șterg, șterg, șterg și alina).

The manifesto *To all Roma and Roma women in the Romanian People's Republic*, by Gheorghe Niculescu, March 1948.

the FDP and the current Government of the RPR!" The UGRR activists organized electoral meetings in localities with a large number of Roma. A manifesto was published, entitled *To All Roma and Roma Women in the Romanian People's Republic*. Perhaps it is not without significance that the manifesto was printed in two versions – in one Gheorghe Niculescu signs his name with "Mr." and in the other with "Comrade."¹¹

The relationship with the government authorities evolved in the direction of the ever-increasing subordination of the UGRR. The PCR used the Roma as it used other minorities in the fight against the "reactionaries," in other words, against the democratic parties that tried to stop the communization of the country. The UGRR gradually became an instrument of the communist regime in a situation somewhat comparable to that of other minority organizations.

IT SEEMED AT THE TIME that things were going in the direction of recognizing the Roma as a national minority, at least this was the expectation of the Roma leaders. But after capturing all state power on December 30, 1947, the PCR started to reorganize all

fields of political and economic life, including policies towards minorities. If in the first postwar years the PCR tried to draw national minorities to its side and to use them in its political struggles, now, when it had full control over state power, the place of the national minorities in the Romanian state was rethought. The PCR elaborated a concept of the politics towards minorities that corresponded to the “new stage” of Romania. The tactical interests that had previously guided the policy towards minorities were replaced by formulations cut from the Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist ideology.

The beginning of the effort of elaborating the new policy in this sensitive field was the Second Plenary of the PMR Central Committee on June 10–11, 1948, which adopted a resolution on the issue of the national minorities.¹² The most important political document was the resolution of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the PMR on the national issue of December 1948. This document discusses the situation of the different coinhabitant nationalities, including Hungarians, Jews, Germans, Russians, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Serbs, Greeks, Albanians, and Turks. The document starts from the premise that “[t]he democratic regime created the conditions for economic, social, political and national development and prosperity both for the Romanian people and for the coinhabiting nationalities.” It is said that “[t]he solving of the national question is a main task of proletarian policy” and that “[i]t is necessary to ensure the participation of all nationalities together with the Romanian people in order to strengthen the RPR and create unity in the struggle of the working people for the liquidation of the nationalistic, chauvinistic, and anti-Semitic influences of the exploiting classes.” The analysis of the situation at the level of each minority was made through this criterion of class struggle. Of course, the Soviet model for resolving the national problem was invoked.¹³ The resolution of December 1948 does not refer to the Roma, who were not included in the list of coinhabiting nationalities.

After the plenary of June 10–11, 1948, UGRR leaders prepared themselves for the moment when the Roma would be recognized as a cohabiting nationality. In June 1948, some people of bourgeois origin, who were not acceptable by the communist authorities, were removed from the leadership. Gheorghe Niculescu remained president, but some new leaders began to assert themselves, such as Petre Rădiță, the new general secretary, who worked as a dentist. Changes were also made at the level of the organizations in the territory, and declarations of adherence to the regime’s policies multiplied. For example, a congress of the Roma from Alba County, organized with the support of the authorities, held in Alba Iulia on October 24, 1948, ended with the vote for a motion that was cabled to the Central Committee of the PMR, in which the Roma “com-

mitted themselves to work together with the other coexisting nationalities for the implementation of socialism in the RPR.”¹⁴ At the State Sub-Secretariat for Minorities, several meetings were held in connection with the reorganization of the Roma, such as that of September 23, 1948, between the secretary general of the ministry, Camil Suciuc, and the representatives of the Roma, Laurențiu Anghel and Ștefan Mureșan.¹⁵ Neither Roma gestures nor the meetings at the ministry could change the decision of the PMR leadership, which was formalized in December 1948, not to include the Roma among the recognized national minorities.

A natural consequence of the resolution on the national issue of December 1948 was the abolition of the UGRR. By a decision of the Council of Ministers of January 20, 1949, published on January 31, 1949, concerning the dissolution of some cultural associations, the UGRR was abolished.¹⁶ The measure was taken by the Ministry of Arts and Information. The published act does not say what the motivation for this measure was, but the internal documents of the communist authorities show how this decision was reached.

Following the publication of this governmental decision, the Roma leaders tried to establish a new organization in place of the abolished UGRR, called the People’s Union of Roma in Romania. They set up an initiative committee, which was to be the first leading committee of the new organization. The president was Petre Rădiță, the former secretary general of the UGRR and former member of the National Democratic Party (a satellite party of the PCR). The other committee members were Laurențiu Anghel, member of the PRM; Ion Năstase, peasant, member of the PRM; Iosif Forgaci, traveling merchant, member of the Hungarian People’s Union; Costache Nicolae, tailor, member of the PRM; Constantin Nica, accountant, politically unattached; Ștefan Mureșan, teacher, member of the Ploughmen Front (an organization led by the PCR); and Petre Borca, worker, member of the PRM. Most of these were new names, recruited predominantly from the working class and PMR members. Gheorghe Niculescu was no longer a member of the new body.

On February 22, 1949, the initiative committee (“a delegation of the Roma of RPR,” as noted by the authorities) received an audience with Prime Minister Petru Groza, who was requested to approve the establishment of the People’s Union of the Roma in Romania. The meeting with Petru Groza was encouraging for the Roma leaders, and the report on this project, drafted by the Securitate on March 18, 1949, was favorable to the establishment of the new organization.¹⁷ The request to create the People’s Union of Roma, however, was eventually rejected.

THE CREATION OF the People’s Union of the Roma would have meant that the Roma would be among the other cohabiting na-

“NEITHER ROMA GESTURES NOR THE MEETINGS AT THE MINISTRY COULD CHANGE THE DECISION OF THE PMR LEADERSHIP [...] NOT TO INCLUDE THE ROMA AMONG THE RECOGNIZED NATIONAL MINORITIES.”



tionalities, which at that time all had single organizations, called “People’s Unions” (the Hungarian People’s Union, the Albanian People’s Union, etc.), that were of course controlled by the government. If the UGRR was, for the communist authorities, the old organization created before the war by bourgeois elements, the People’s Union of the Roma would have been an organization created by the proletarian elements among the Roma, through which the Communist Party could have ensured its control over this population. Under the circumstances then, the refusal to accept the existence of such a Roma organization was equivalent to the refusal to recognize the existence of the Roma as a cohabiting nationality.

Discussions on the establishment of the People’s Union of the Roma lasted for several months but eventually led to the rejection of the request of the Roma leaders. The institutions involved in these discussions created documents, some of which are kept in the archives and allow us to study this moment in time. The most important is the study with the title *The Gypsy Problem in the Romanian People’s Republic*, written in the summer of 1949 by the Department for the Issues of Coinhabiting Nationalities and mentioned at the beginning of this article. This material synthesizes the discussions about the establishment of the People’s Union of the Roma. It states that communication with Roma representatives was not good at all, and reservations are made about these leaders:

“And with regard to the purpose that these representatives of the Gypsy population have pursued, I could specify it in the desire to replace the old organization but not with proletarian elements, but with elements that would have taken advantage for personal interests of the freedoms accorded to the cohabiting nationalities. So, we have interrupted these negotiations.”¹⁸

I notice that the objection to the poor representation in the structures of the Roma organization of the industrial workers did not take into account that the Roma, by their economic specificity, were not recruited into this social category, which at that time was small in number. The study assesses the situation of the Roma demographically, economically, socially, etc. We find out that, among other things, the establishment of the People’s Union of Roma was conditioned by the authorities by the presence at the head of the organization of persons from the working class who were attached to the communist regime.

The study also notes that the gathering of Roma in an organization was difficult to achieve: “The Gypsies are generally hostile to a Gypsy organization. As a result of their past suffering (the persecutions during the Antonescu government) as well as anti-Gypsyism, they prefer not to be considered Gypsies.”¹⁹ The document therefore recognizes the inhibitory role of the deportations to Transnistria in the development of an ethnic solidarity among the Roma.

In the material elaborated at the Department for the Issues of Coinhabiting Nationalities, the Gypsies (Roma) are seen as a social minority and not as an ethnic minority (“The Gypsy prob-

lem is primarily a social problem”), and the measures envisaged follow this idea. This is the first conclusion of the study. It is acknowledged, however, that at that time the department had little information about the Gypsies, such that it could not undertake a systematic research effort on the Gypsy problem and that “[t]he data we possess about the Gypsy population are not accurate enough.” In fact, all of the available information was obtained on the occasion of some travels made through the country for other purposes and as a result of contacts with former leaders of the UGRR. Only in the following years were some special inquiries made about the situation of the Roma, an issue that certainly was never a priority for this department. Conceiving the problem of the Roma as primarily a social problem is actually the main explanation for not including Roma on the list of coinhabiting nationalities.

THE DOCUMENT COMES with recommendations for addressing the different categories of Gypsies (Roma) – Gypsies with a job, undergoing a process of assimilation; Gypsies granted land through the agrarian reform of 1945; unemployed Gypsies; and nomadic Gypsies. This fragment is revealing of the new communist authorities’ view of the Roma population, and I think it deserves to be cited here:

“The conclusions that we can draw from these few known issues, with the help of the Soviet example, for our future work on this problem, are the following: 1. The Gypsy problem is primarily a social problem; / 2. The employed Gypsies, who speak the language of the population they are coinhabiting with, and who put their children in the respective schools, and who thus undergo a process of assimilation, are not our concern, except for raising their cultural level (literacy, hygiene education, social assistance) and the struggle against bourgeois nationalism which, by maintaining the old prejudices, prevents the twinning process between this population and the other coinhabiting nationalities; / 3. The situation of the Gypsies appropriated through the agrarian reform should be investigated (almost 20,000 Gypsies were appropriated in the counties inhabited by nationalities, as shown in the appendix); / 4. On field trips, the situation of the Gypsies should be investigated and statistics of the unemployed Gypsies, of nomadic Gypsies in general, should be drawn up; / 5. *The main problem is the problem of nomadic Gypsies, cortorari [i.e. tent-dwellers, n. V.A.], seminomads; their liberation from the despotic influence of the bulibaşa, of the vâtaf [traditional leaders of Gypsy communities – n. V.A.], will require the application of the measures indicated by the Soviet example*” (underlined in the original, n. V.A.).²⁰

This conception of the Roma and the Roma issue was to prolong the tradition of the Romanian administration, which, from the middle of the 19th century (when the Gypsy slavery was abolished) and until the Second World War, treated the Roma as



a marginal social group. Of course, a role in constructing this concept was played by the social position that the Roma held in the Romanian villages and the massive process of linguistic and ethnic assimilation at that time.²¹ Communist authorities took up this view of the “Gypsy problem,” with Roma being perceived as elements to be Romanianized because their identity was associated with a culture of poverty and underdevelopment.

The Gypsy Problem in the Romanian People’s Republic also tells us what was the second, and equally as important, reason for not granting the status of a national minority to the Roma. The study makes note (pp. 2–4) of “what emerges from the Soviet study of solving the Gypsy problem.” Referring to an article from the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* (Volume 60, Moscow, 1934), dealing with the Gypsies in the Soviet Union, the study states with satisfaction that “the history and the social evolution of Gypsies in Russia in the last century is identical with the history and the social evolution of Gypsies in our country.” The work speaks explicitly of taking up the Soviet model in addressing the issue of the Gypsies, and in 1949, in the USSR, Gypsies were not considered a national minority in the true sense of the term. The material suggests that the Romanian authorities could not recognize a Gypsy (Roma) minority because the USSR did not do so. They aimed to solve the Gypsy issue on the basis of the national policy promoted by the Romanian Workers’ Party. In those years, the Romanian authorities always appealed to the example offered by the Soviet Union in the Stalinist solution to the national problem.

The Romanian government’s refusal in 1949 to allow the creation of a new Roma organization was the natural consequence of not including this population among the coinhabiting nationalities. When they came to the new policy towards minorities, which was set out in the resolution of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers’ Party on the national issue, in December 1948, the communist authorities considered that the Roma could not be put on the same footing as the other minorities, that their problems were different, and therefore they must benefit from a specific approach – which is precisely what is stated in the material I have presented above.

IN 1949, the landscape of minority organizations was simplified. Only one representative organization per minority was accepted, an organization that was, of course, under the control of the authorities and had to contribute to the implementation of the Communist Party’s policy at the level of that minority. As a result, some old organizations disappeared, and sometimes a new organization was created in place of the old dismantled organization(s). Under these changes in minority policy, the General Union of the Roma in Romania was abolished in January 1949, and the authorities did not allow the creation of a new organization in its place.

The attempts made by the Roma leaders to obtain approval for the establishment of a new Roma organization at the national level actually express their struggle for the recognition of the Roma as a coinhabiting nationality with the same rights as other minorities.

After the failure in the first part of the year 1949, the Roma

leaders continued to hope that they would have the right to organize on behalf of the Roma. In their communication with the authorities and in extensive memos that they addressed to the government, they came up with this claim both in the second half of 1949 and in 1950. They showed that the existence of a Roma association was a necessary condition for a successful policy of the regime toward this population. Ștefan Mureșan, who in 1949–1952 worked with the Department for Issues of Coinhabiting Nationalities, on September 12, 1950, addressed to this department a special memorandum with the following content in which he asked for the approval of the Roma to organize a People’s Association. A fragment of this memorandum very clearly expresses this:


“All coinhabiting nationalities in the Romanian People’s Republic are well organized in people’s associations, etc., except for us [i.e. the Roma, n. V.A.], the ones who were repressed in the past, who cannot acquire a People’s Association in which we can solve organizational, cultural, economic, and other problems. On the basis of the rights of our Constitution, please be willing to allow us to organize our People’s Association, just like the other coinhabiting nationalities of the Romanian People’s Republic, in order to be able to achieve as soon as possible socialism and a society without exploiters.”²²

However, the Romanian communist authorities did not allow the existence of such an organization and did not recognize the Roma as a nationality neither in the late 1940s and early 1950s nor in the late 1970s and early 1980s when, in another context of the history of communism in Romania, but also of the “Gypsy problem,” Ion Cioabă and Nicolae Gheorghe asked in the memos addressed to the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party for the recognition of the Roma as a coinhabiting nationality.

I must note, however, that the situation of the Roma in Romania was not very different from the other socialist countries in Eastern Europe. Even though in some of these countries the authorities allowed the functioning of Roma/Gypsy organizations in some periods, they were not recognized as a nationality prior to 1989, although some representatives of the Roma made such claims. The exception was Yugoslavia, where the Roma gained the status of “ethnic group” and in the 1980s were recognized as a “nationality” in the republics of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro.²³

The reconstruction of the 1948–1949 episode, when the Roma in Romania were on the verge of being recognized as a national minority – but which, for the reasons outlined above, did not happen – occasioned the highlighting of the fact that the policies towards this minority in Romania in the first postwar years changed due to several factors. Of course, the tactical and ideological interests of the Communist Party prevailed, especially after March 6, 1945, when the Petru Groza government was installed and the communists went on a permanent political offensive, which ended with the taking over of all power on December

30, 1947, when it became the sole political party in the Romanian People's Republic. Equally important was the tradition of the Romanian administration, which came from the 19th century and which regarded the Roma as a social category rather than an ethnic group. The perception of the Roma among the general population was the same.

The rupture in the policy of the Romanian state towards the Roma, which began with the Groza government and addressed the Roma in their dual condition as a social group and an ethnic minority, was quickly repaired after the communist regime came into full power. Then, under completely new political and ideological circumstances, there was a return to the approach of the Romanian administration of the interwar period, which saw in the Roma a social category rather than an ethnic group. The ambiguous attitude of the Communist Party and then of the communist authorities towards the Roma in the first postwar years is also explained by the absence of the administrative experience of the communists, a situation that changed rapidly. We find that in 20th century Romania, in the approach to the Roma population with its specificity, the lines of continuity prevailed. 

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references

- The number of Gypsies (Roma) in Romania at that time is hard to establish. The population census of January 25, 1948, did not register the nationality (ethnicity) of the counted, but only the mother tongue. Thus, the census records 53,425 persons who used the "Gypsy language" as their mother tongue, representing 0.3% of the country's population. (A. Golopenția, D.C. Georgescu, "Populația Republicii Populare Române la 25 ianuarie 1948. Rezultatele provizorii ale recensământului" [The Population from the Romanian People's Republic on January 25, 1948. The Provisory Results of the Census], *Probleme economice*, 1948, no. 2, 28, 30.) At the next census of 1956, the nationality was registered as well, and 104,216 persons who declared themselves "Gypsies" (0.6% of the population) are recorded here, and 66,882 persons had the Gypsy language as their mother tongue. (*Recensământul populației din 21 februarie 1956* [The Population Census of February 21, 1956], vol. III, *Structura populației după naționalitate și limba maternă* [Population Structure by Nationality and Mother Tongue] (București, 1959), 556.) According to the fieldworks made in 1951 by the Department for the Issues of Coinhabiting Nationalities, the number of Gypsies would reach about 400,000 people, out of which 286,500 were sedentary, 81,300 were seminomads, and 31,900 were nomads. (Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale (ANIC) [Central National Historical Archives], fond Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri (PCM), dosar 1721, f. 2.)
- An overview on the policies towards the national minorities in Romania from 1948 to 1989, in *Comisia Prezidențială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România. Raport Final* [The Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania. Final Report], Vladimir Tismăneanu et al. (eds.) (București: Humanitas, 2007), 332–394.
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- About the General Union of Roma in Romania and more generally about the Roma movement in the 1930s, see V. Achim, *The Roma*, 153–161.
- The statistics of the Roma who were granted land under the agrarian reform of 1945, by counties, appear in the appendix to the study *The Gypsy Problem in the Romanian Peoples's Republic*, from 1949: ANIC, fond CC al PCR – Secția Organizatorică, dosar 93/1949, f. 8.
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