

Introduction

This set of policy papers is a direct result of the project “To Solve Our Problems Together”, undertaken in partnership by the ECHOSOC Foundation—Romania and the Open University Subotica—Serbia. The papers aim at portraying the situation of the Roma minority in the two countries, in various areas of social life. Moreover, they bring forth a series of recommendations meant to contribute to the identification of feasible intervention means for solving many of the different problems presented.

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We hope these materials contribute to a better knowledge regarding the situation of the Roma population in Romania and Serbia, as well as adequate support for needed interventions.

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In this work we would like to cover three fields that were given a special attention at the meeting in Sinaia, and are of extreme importance for the Roma population, regardless of where they live in this world.

1. CULTURE

1.1. Existence of Roma Culture is Usually Denied

Since Roma left their ancient fatherland of India, and have been living with other nations, many scientists and ordinary people believe that Roma have no authentic culture. The general perception holds that Roma culture is a conglomerate of various borrowings from the neighbouring nations, regardless of whether they wanted it or not.

The fact that the culture is unknown, even to cultural experts, is a consequence of the other nations' attitudes toward Roma nation and of the impossibility for Roma to deal with the field, since they had to solve far more important existential problems. Cultural institutions, in Yugoslavia as well as abroad, that would deal systematically with the issue, practically do not exist, nor ever did. Sometimes, a fan or eloquent individual starts to study this undiscovered field, shyly, as if afraid of something. Often, they do it because of a cultural attraction towards aspects randomly seen as part of the rich cultural heritage of the nation.

1.1.a. *Lack of institutional forms of presentation for Roma culture*

Presentation of Roma cultural heritage to the public depended, until recently, from case to case; usually, it depends on good will or possibility of individual cultural missionaries to feel "the right feeling". In those times, everything was considered as part of Roma culture, and Roma had almost no possibilities to influence on what would be declared as theirs.

1.1.b. *Assembly of cultural achievements of Roma in Serbia*

Until recently, Yugoslavia featured no institutional form¹ that would enable a presentation of the little that is left of the rich cultural heritage of a nation which

¹ At the end of the 1960s, there were some important attempts by the Roma to show their cultural and artistic capabilities in a more organized way. At the beginning of 1974 in Nis, the First Republic Assembly of Cultural and Artistic Achievements of Roma was organized. Apart from Roma folklore and poetry, the Program of the Assembly also covered other cultural forms, such as: drama, choir and reciting. Also, an initiative of the Cultural and Educational Community of municipality of Leskovac and organization "Rom" was the discussion of the "Cultural Status of Roma", held in Leskovac at the beginning of 1974. Apart from these, there were several cultural activities of the Roma in some municipalities, mentioned in the programs of Romany cultural and artistic organizations.

wondered for millennia, and managed to preserve the naked-simple life, and everything else that makes it special, when compared to other nations.

About 25 years ago, a unique but the only manifestation of its kind in our country—the Assembly of Cultural Achievements of Roma in Serbia—started with a little help from Roma communities, and sustained efforts from Roma activists. In spite of numerous drawbacks, the Assembly played a great part in introducing the public to the latest cultural achievements of the Roma population.

2. EDUCATION

2.1. Previous Experience in Education for Roma in Different Countries

In some other European countries, such as the former Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Hungary, especially in the former communist countries², there were attempts to found schools for Roma.

2.1.a. Experiences of Soviet Union

"All-Russian Union of Roma" was founded in 1925 with the mission of organising Romany people, educating them, and elevating their cultural level. From that period originates the appeal sent to all Roma, "Proletarians of all countries, unite!" The appeal was published in Romany, and signed by A.S. Tanarov, President; members of the Bureau N. Pankov, N. Dudarova, D. Polikov and Secretary I. Lebedev signed on behalf of the Union. The document explained the works of the "All-Russian Union of Roma" and appealed to settled and nomadic Roma to quit their traditional trades like witchcraft, stealing, and the like. It was said, at the end of the appeal, that a textbook in Romany would appear soon.

The textbook "Nevo drom Bukvario vas manusenge", whose authors are N.A. Dudarova and N.A. Pankov, was published in Moscow in 1934. It was the first textbook written in the history of Roma, several generations of Romany children using it while studying in schools all over Soviet Union. It was the time when the first Romany intellectuals, writers, poets, and journalists appeared. Romany school in Uzhgorod attracted a lot of interest of the world public, and the idea was also greeted by Yugoslav poet Ivan Goran Kovacic. The first publications in Romany appeared, the Romany newspaper "Nevo drom" ("New Road") was established, and a radio program in Romany was broadcast.

² Education of Romany children in Italy receives more intensive attention since 1965, when the first experimental schools were opened. Special schools for Roma have been opened near Romany settlements and camps since 1980. The curriculum was established by the Center in Rome, and learning of Romany was also planned within the program. Results are not showing much achievement and, therefore, there are still no intellectuals among Italian Roma.

2.1.b. Recent Experiences in Hungary

In 1974, a Romany cultural club was founded in Budapest, publishing a newspaper titled "ROM SAM". At that time, a number of local schools tried to introduce Romany as a course. In Budapest 1979, there was a conference on education of Romany children in Hungary, where, among other information, it was stated that 80 percent of Roma were illiterate in Hungary in 1962.

2.1.c. Bulgarian Experiences

The first primary school for Roma in Bulgaria was established, according to Martin Blok, in 1900. According to information from Grattan Puxon, during the 1960s there were 145 special schools for Romany children opened in this country. Now, a large number of Romany children have completed secondary school in Bulgaria, and about 40 of them attend university every year.

2.2. Education Is a Component of Culture in Every Nation

Considering that the concentration of Romany population in some areas is such that the number of Roma pupils in some classes is more than 50% of total number of pupils, it is normal to expect requests that those children should learn in their native—Romany—language in the near future³. The Elementary Education Law allows this to happen, making us think of what to do, and how, in order to solve the problem.

Positive experiences were acquired in several municipalities of Kosovo and Metohija⁴ while the province was a part of Yugoslavia. Some elementary schools introduced "Romany language and culture" for pupils from the first to the eighth grade, initially as an optional, later as a regular subject, showing that such

³ However, a problem is that Roma do not have a unique native and literal language, which represents unabridged difficulties in the achievement of a constitutional decision on the right to schooling in native Romany language. Among many dialects (which are sometimes difficult to understand between themselves), the basic, central dialect that would be the closest to the future literary language of Roma has yet to develop. Insignificant starting attempts to studying the history of Romany language, should be followed by codification of the literary language, by standardization, lexicography, processing of vocabulary and grammar. These days, the most elementary book is to be prepared, the first textbook in Romany. The number of scientific workers (linguists Romologists) is very small, since the staff is not trained through University studies. A special problem is the impossibility of approaching, spreading and accepting the literary language (even its basics) among the Roma population, since the media and forms of communication and cultural communication in Romany are underdeveloped (for example, the only existing forms of cultural contact and communication among Roma are music, dance and song, which is insufficient for the spreading and affirmation of a specific literary and linguistic culture and knowledge).

⁴ Pristina, Prizren, Gnjilane, Mitrovica, Djakovica. Lessons in Romany had been temporary interrupted in some local schools.

experiences might spread in some other areas of Yugoslavia, as well as in other countries.

These experiments lasted for several years, showing positive results could be expected from repeating the introduction of the subject in all areas of Yugoslavia where necessity is evident. Such experiences should be expanded in the near future, in the sense that, apart from "Romany language", other subjects should be taught in Romany. The first priority lies with subjects from the social group: Literature, History, Geography, Social Sciences, etc.

In order to consolidate and cover the need for introducing Romany language as a subject of education, as well as introducing part of the curriculum in Romany, in areas where the concentration of Roma permits such course of action, some conditions should be fulfilled, and certainly the most important are:

2.2.a. Provide Educational Staff for Curriculum in Romany

There is such staff among members of the Romany population in our country. This problem could be solved if the relevant institutions advertised job vacancies for all those interested to apply.

2.2.b. There Is No Textbook in Romany at the Moment

Relevant institutions should take appropriate measures in due time. The first of those measures should be to establish a "group of experts" consisting of Roma scientists and others who are interested in the problem. They would then prepare, write and publish the most necessary textbooks: spelling-book, reading-book, textbooks in Romany language for 4th-to-8th-class pupils, textbooks in Romany culture for 4th-to-8th-class pupils, picture-book, selected texts from Romany folklore and art achievements—prose and poetry for 4th-to-8th-class pupils, etc.

Apart from the textbooks, it would be necessary to revive the publication of the Romany children's magazine "Chavrikano lil" ("Children's Newspaper"), which was published in Gornji Milanovac several years ago and was the only newspaper of its kind in the world.

2.3. Types of Education:

2.3.a. Official

Because the Elementary Education Law is not properly applied, Roma children in Yugoslavia were very irregularly enrolled in elementary schools and even less regularly completed elementary schooling during the past ten years. The reasons for that are numerous, but the most important is the economic poverty of Roma

families and their incapability to provide for the children who attend elementary schools regularly.

2.3.b. Unofficial and Informal Education at Elementary School Age (Family, School, Community)

In recent time, forms of informal education of Roma children started to be applied in Yugoslavia. We know about some experiences of some Roma associations and organisations that deal with the activities⁵.

2.3.c. Adult Education

A large number of Roma in Yugoslavia have never attended elementary school, and a number of them dropped out before completing the regular education. Therefore, more than 60% of Roma population in Yugoslavia is functionally illiterate.

For decades, Roma were one of the "most illiterate" nations on the planet, and in Yugoslavia, too. According to the 1948 census, out of total number of Roma over 9 years of age 51% were illiterate, while the 1981 census established that, out of the nation's Roma population over 14 years of age, 35% were illiterate.

The fact that more than 1/3 of the Roma outside the school age remained illiterate is a strong indicator of the socio-economic and socio-cultural neglect at an entire ethnic group. The low level of education, primarily caused by economic factors, is a reflection of the poor education on further maintaining and reproducing poverty and social lethargy in the life of the Romany population. Such level of education is constantly supported by a civilisation paradox that is characteristic to so-called primitive societies. To wit, the 1981 census shows that 42.5% of Roma over age 14 hold no qualification, while the lack of elementary education in women of the same age is even higher—55.3%. Educational levels higher than elementary were achieved only by 4.7% of Roma over 14 years of age: 7.7% of the male population, and 1.7% of women.

⁵ "Workshop of New Knowledge" is a compensatory program for children of elementary school age. The program has been underway since the establishment of the "Roma Community Center April 8th", in cooperation with a non-governmental organization—Norwegian People's Aid. Excellent results in regular school were achieved by children who attended the "Workshop of New Knowledge" persuading the donors to extend the work of the school to this year, as well as to introduce some new subjects. Children now attend lessons in nine subjects: Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, Serbian language, English language, Romany language, history and culture, Music, Computer science and Biology. Apart from the program for children of elementary school age, the teachers have organized lessons for children of secondary schools. Special attention is given to the children who attend lower classes of elementary school.

Population over 14 years of age, by nationality, gender and educational level, year 1981

	Total	Without qualifications	Incomplete elementary education	Elementary education	Secondary education	Tertiary (higher) education
% Roma	100.0	42.5	35.8	17.0	4.4	0.3
Male	100.0	29.4	39.3	23.6	7.3	0.4
Female	100.0	55.3	32.4	10.6	1.5	0.2

Insufficient presence of Roma in the working-active population of the country represents a main source of social restraint of the ethnic community. However, the real scale of social thwarting is visible if we look at the educational quality of its labour force: one fifth is almost without any school qualification; almost one half is without completed elementary education; also one fifth have completed elementary (eight-year) school; and only eight percent have secondary or tertiary education. It is clear that a nation with such educational structure cannot count on a serious social emancipation in recent time, without maximal support and effort from the entire social community⁶. We should not forget that members of the working-active population have primary economic functions in their households at the same time, and that, as heads of their families, they disseminate and regenerate socio-economical poverty through their own children.

2.4. Postgraduate Education

Unfortunately, at the moment, the Roma of Yugoslavia do not have a single Ph.D. However, there is one Master and a couple of young women and men who enrolled in postgraduate studies at one of the faculties.

2.5. Intercultural Education

Mutual introductions and socialising of the Roma and non-Roma children at the age of elementary and secondary school represent a way for reducing the ethnic distance between members of these two nations.

However, during the elementary and secondary education, neither Roma nor non-Roma children in Yugoslavia get any knowledge about the characteristics of Roma

⁶ In period 2000/01, "Roma Community Center April 8th" undertook the **Program for Business Secretaries** in cooperation with the Educational Center "Djuro Salaj" from Belgrade. The program was attended by 15 candidates and financed by the humanitarian organization Catholic Relief Services. The program lasted for four months. The candidates had lessons in nine subjects: Computer science, Serbian grammar, English language, Psychology, Shorthand writing, Economic business, Working right, Correspondence and Working relations. After the successful completion of the course, the candidates were awarded with internationally recognized certificates.

culture, history, customs, traditions or other characteristics that make this nation different from, but also similar to, the majority Serbian nation.

Through mutual learning and socialising of the children, a basic goal would be achieved, namely to reduce the ethnic distance that exists between the children, as it appears to be extremely large, according to the recent researches.

The practice could also apply in organising various such forms of education at international level (for example, between children in Romania and Yugoslavia).

2.6. Alternative Education for Children over the School Age and Their Parents

Such forms of education have never been registered in Yugoslavia. A number of Roma organisations conduct such forms of education with support from national, but mostly international donors. A special accent goes on the education of parents, though there are also programs for children over the school age.

Here, the accent is not on functional literacy, as in the case of alphabetic courses, but the concept of education is much wider. Roma Women Organisation "Bibija", Roma Children Centre from Belgrade and "Roma Community Centre April 8th"⁷ are notably specialised in this field.

2.7. Education of Roma in Native Language

According to some sources of information, there are about 60 million Roma in the world⁸; also, they are one of the few nations that almost never had education in their native language, nor had they any schools. However, such experiments existed in various periods and territories⁹. In Yugoslavia, this is only partially true¹⁰,

⁷ The program "**Romany Women Sharing the Responsibility for Sustainable Development of Healthy Communities**" is conducted by the non-governmental organisation Open Health Club since November 2000. The aim of the project is to initiate a process of empowerment and responsibility for own health and quality of life among Romany women, as well as to reduce the consequences of inequality among sexes. One of the more important aims of the project is to initiate pilot projects that could potentially generate income to Romany women that show a clear possibility of gaining economic independence. At this time, 9 micro projects are underway, generating incomes that raise the standard of beneficiaries—members of "Roma Community Center April 8th".

⁸ There are Roma in all countries and all continents. The highest concentration of Roma nation lives in Europe, where live about 30 million. The other half of the nation lives in other continents, mostly in Asia.

⁹ The first information on attempts to form schools for Romany children originates in Hungary. There, a priest called Johan Ham built a school for Romany children at Katmar, in 1857. The school was managed by a French priest. The second school was built in Hojhojfel by a Catholic priest, Ferdinand Farsas. None of these schools for Roma lasted too long.

¹⁰ The first school for Romany children in these territories was established in Apatin in 1913. It functioned for only a couple of years, until the beginning of World War I, and even during the war, but it was dismantled after the war. There were attempts for reviving it several times between the two world wars. The curriculum of the school was first in Hungarian, then in Serbian after the Second World War, when the town belonged to

as the subject "Romany Language and Culture" has been studied for several years.

2.7.a. Are There Categories of Romany Language and Romany Culture?

Different Romany dialects and provincialisms are presented as Romany language, especially by some Romany groups or those who study Romany linguistics. It certainly cannot be true, as the number of Romany dialects, and especially provincialisms, is enormous¹¹. Until recently, this was absolutely true¹². Only in recent time, the so-called standard Romany language is accepted in a number of European countries.

The process is only at the beginning in Yugoslavia. The reasons for that are numerous inter-linguistic clashes of opinions among Romany intellectuals, who tried to impose their local dialect or even provincialism as a standard Romany language. Of course, they are not succeeding in that, but it creates very confusing situation in the field. A number of additional reasons, such as the preservation and development of Romany language, the creation of literary tomes in Romany, the development of national awareness among Roma, the preservation and development of national culture, are important arguments for introducing a subject such as "Romany language and culture" into elementary schools in Yugoslavia, as well as in other countries.

Considering the term of culture in its broadest meaning¹³, the Romany people of the world, Yugoslavia included, have not completely preserved their national culture. We could rather speak of some segments of the category—some places more, some other places less, segments of the nation's culture are preserved. Their identification with the Romany population is high, but it is far more difficult to identify Romany cultural elements in other nations' cultures, especially if they were accepted a long time ago¹⁴.

Yugoslavia. Later attempts to open schools only for Roma were tried out in many places in Yugoslavia, but the most important was the unsuccessful one in Nis.

¹¹ There is a well-known proverb among Roma: "Sel Romane gava, sel Romane svaturja", which means "A hundred of Romany villages, a hundred of Romany dialects".

¹² International Romany Union formed a Commission for the Standardization of Romany language at the 1st World IRU Congress in London 1971. One of the conclusions adopted at the Congress was: "All Romany dialects are equal". At first, the conclusion seems completely correct and right, but it caused numerous problems regarding the later standardization of the language. Therefore, the Commission could not agree on the adoption of a unique, standard Romany language until the 4th World IRU Congress in Warsaw 1990.

¹³ We are defining the term of culture as "a way of fulfilling the totality of human needs".

¹⁴ The easiest and most obvious way of identifying some segments of Romany culture in other nations' cultures is in the field of material culture, and above all in craftwork. Thus, we can positively identify some crafts, which are present among members of other nations, that they belong to a group of crafts brought and developed by Roma. Above all, they include blacksmith, music or entertaining professions.

In the field of Romany spiritual culture, Roma were practising specific lucrative crafts for material benefit, even if those crafts were not characteristic only for them, but it is considered that Roma brought the crafts in Europe or, at least, helped to spread them around¹⁵.

2.7.b. *Conditions Exist in Some Countries for the Introduction of Romany Language and Culture in Schools*

During the 19th Century, just as nowadays, the realisation of this ideal was hindered by the lack of some specific conditions. First of all, Roma had no codified language¹⁶, no grammar, no educational staff, and, above all, no intellectuals¹⁷ that could have been interested in the education of their own nation, in their native language¹⁸. There are reasons now, as well as ripe conditions, for introducing the subject in Yugoslavia, as soon as possible.

3. IDENTITY

3.1. Consolidation of Self-Respect and Ethnic Identity of Roma

"The destiny of the Roma nation," says Amadu Mahtar M. Bo, a former General Manager of UNESCO, "is an example because it confirms duration of its culture even in different societies". During millennia of wandering, the nation came into contact with various other nations and cultures, but it never merged, nor lost its own culture. According to M. Bo's opinion, "it might be because it did not get attached to land, but to something deeper, to consciousness about social and human values. Therefore, its travels through the world remain a movement of continuity and truthfulness".

Roma kept continuity and truthfulness of their culture to the extent that the majority nations tolerated and allowed. However, that was sufficient for we can speak about the authentic culture of the nation today. Jacqueline Shalmagne says that "Roma developed ability of adoption to perfection, which enabled them to cope with the

¹⁵ Some of those trades are various kinds of fortune telling, witchcraft, chiromancy, tarot, etc.

¹⁶ The first writing in Romany was authored by Andrew Bord. Most probably based on a story by a Rom, Bord has written (transcribed) 13 sentences, which he published as a linguistic material in his book "The First Books of the Introduction of Knowledge", printed in 1542.

¹⁷ Most probably the first Romany intellectual was John Banyan (1628-1688) who was, apart from John Milton, the most expressive representative of Puritanism in 17th Century England. In his youth, Banyan was a coppersmith, but he managed to achieve high intellectual level only through education. He published his first book when he was 38, and he wrote about 60 works during his life. He was never considered a Rom, nor has he ever declared himself to be one.

¹⁸ At the time, the absence of Romany grammar was solved by Josef Habsburg who wrote a Romany grammar in 1877, as he was also collecting Romany songs and legends.

changes that a marginalised minority like them had to deal with." The scientist concludes that "Roma's home is where they are", and similarly, if not better, the situation is described by François Foletie, one of the most popular Romologists in the world, who said "their fatherland is the whole world".

Roma had to struggle for the preservation of their national identity and culture in a specific way, by closing inside their own, inside the existing society and oral transaction of "their own" laws and moral norms.

Such survivals among Roma are not unusual not even today. Up to World War II, the majority of Roma solved no internal problems before regular citizens' court, but before its own. Kris—the court or ad-hoc court council consisting of Roma elders—would solve even the most complicated problems. Both sides would respect Kris's decision, even if it were a death penalty, which was very rare. The hardest sentence for a Rom, very common in case of murder, would be exile from the community. Such an individual or family was destined to slow death. Treatment of the excommunicated was very harsh. No one from the family or from the tribe was allowed to communicate with them, or to help them in any way, in times of trouble.

A basic element of the preservation of the national culture is the native language. An author of a Roma grammar and dictionary, professor of linguistics at University of Catania, Giulio Soravioa says: "Roma nation is an example that a language is the key to the nation's identity. What surprised scientists was that Romany was a language similar in many ways to forms of Indo-European languages spoken in India, as well as its basic vocabulary that, despite some phonetic changes, contained words found in Hindi, Punjabi and Dardian".

For a long time, many individual scientists questioned the existence of Roma music. Especially Vladimir Dvornikovic and Tihomir Djordjevic dealt with the matter, and both of them concluded that what Roma did to the music was the so-called "Romanisation" of other nations' music. After the war, Andrijana Gojkovic went in the same direction with her thesis about Roma spoiling the music, but she was not successful. It is unbelievable that someone could question the existence of music with a nation, especially with the Roma, in whose music they enjoyed at least once in their lives.

"Long time ago, on the banks of the river of Gang lived a tribe of strong and good-looking people talented to charm people with their song and to wake strong feelings, laughter and sometimes tears", says Nikolay Alekseyevich Slichenko, a director of the Moscow Theatre "Romen", who played more than 60 roles in the oldest Romany theatre in the world. "What I appreciate most in this people," continues Slichenko, "is its ability to remain its own, everywhere and every time, its ability to search for its destiny through many roads of history, to transfer new strengths from father to son, its struggle to preserve its strength of life".

Wondering through the world, Roma have seen and accepted a lot from other nations, just as well as others did from them. Unconsciously, the eternal travellers were a bridge between different cultures. Accepting some skills in one part of the world, they would take to another, where those skills were completely unknown. The new environment would accept them not thinking of where they came from, but how useful they were.

For sure, one can claim that Roma were those who brought many trades in this and some other parts of the world, especially those related to metal processing.

Many researchers think that Roma have no authentic customs. This cannot be accepted, despite numerous arguments in favour of such reasoning. Roma kept a great number of customs, parts thereof being brought from their fatherland, in spite of numerous migrations that were the consequence of persecutions against a nation that lasted for centuries and struggled for keeping its flame alive. How authentic these customs are could only be judged according to the evident similarities with those in their fatherland.

Some of the reasons stated by researchers in order to confirm their own theses about Roma having no authentic customs, but in turn borrowing customs from some of the nations that they encountered during their movements, are far less acceptable, as there is no unique classification of customs in Ethnology. To wit, some classifications group social, economic, religious, legal and medical customs. Others divide them into social customs, work-related customs, annual or religious, and legal customs, and a special group consists of the celebration of the family saint, witchcraft and superstitions.

Apart from those who divide customs according to what they regulate, there are those who divide them according to the area of their spreading, or to how strong the social need is, or, to be more precise, to the degree of interest. There are such approaches that divide the customs according to the related walk of life.

Romani chib—Romany language—does not have a word for “custom”. Therefore, some malicious people claimed that the nation did not have its authentic customs since it had no word to describe them. The word “puranimata”, that Roma use to describe the term of “custom”, actually means antiquity. Since many theorists think the custom originated from the past, Roma word “puranimata” can be considered as an adequate replacement for Serbo-Croatian word “obicaј”—“custom”. It is not unknown that when it is spoken about works and procedures related to customs it always refers to some specific rules of behaviour, so Bircett-Smith's definition that “rules imposed by life” turned into what we call customs could be almost completely accepted. The only questionable thing in the definition is whether all those rules were set unintentionally. We think that some rules that turned into a custom were set intentionally, with a specific interest. For example, what is

temporary tabooing of some objects and later denying of the taboo? Does it not happen once the original reason of tabooing is forgotten and when the taboo remains a simple habit?

Characteristics of all “primitive” nations, including Roma, are different beliefs, superstitions and use of witchcraft for explaining what is unknown. It is typical for all customs that they appear in form of specific rituals. In time, what is logical, the custom and the ritual, which is a component thereof, start to be treated together. In nomadic nations, like Roma were until recently, custom and ritual were not tightly connected. The reasons for that are numerous, and in the case of Roma it is that with the change of environment they kept the custom and quit the rituals for objective reasons. How would it be possible to perform a famous Roma “wedding at the sally tree” in the desert of Tar? And in the very desert the nation had lived for a long time. From all these can be concluded that change of rituals does not damage the authenticity of the ritual, as some still believe.

3.2. Incoherence of Roma National Body

In the previous centuries, Roma paid more attention on their tribal identity in internal relations. Tribal identity would bear no interfering from some Roma linguistic and confessional groups to the next. The best way of illustrating this fact is an example of mutual intolerance that led even to mutual scorning¹⁹.

3.3. Preservation and Affirmation of Roma Identity in National Context with Preservation of Specific Rights (Language, Publications and Textbooks in the Language)

According to estimations based on internal information acquired from Roma organisations, on the territory of the present Federal Republic of Yugoslavia live about 700 thousand members of the nation. According to the 1991 census, the number is four times less and is something over 148,000.

In order to consolidate and cover the need for introducing Romany language as a subject of education, as well as introducing part of the curriculum in Romany, in areas where the concentration of Roma permits such course of action, some conditions should be fulfilled, and certainly the most important are:

¹⁹ “The division of the Roma ethnic body into Roma tribes and the division of the Roma language into different dialects went through several phases. First, they were already divided when they came to Europe. Secondly, as they went all over the world, a specific type of Romany developed within every nation. And thirdly, Roma found different dialects of inhabitant population, like in Yugoslavia, so they further divided, in order to adapt to the domestic element” (From *Roma Onomastic I*, Sarajevo 1955/56, page 51).

3.4. Introducing Elements of Roma History and Culture in Textbooks for Strengthening Roma Ethnic Identity at National and International Level

Researchers of the issue are facing a great problem: how is it possible that such a numerous, long-lasting and very talented population never managed to get the subject "Romany language and culture" introduced at least in elementary schools, as that is a natural right of every nation.

During their historical past, sometimes surrounded by not so hospitable majority nations, regardless where they lived, Roma hardly had the opportunity to deal with the basics of their literacy, wherefrom would result the interest for education in the native language.

Apart from the struggle for bare existence that Roma have been leading for the last two millennia since their migration from India, a very important reason, for which the nation never managed to fulfil institutional education in the native language, is the absence of their own country, or at least a part of a territory where they would be the majority population.

Since Roma had no possibilities for becoming a constitutional nation, they could not gain a high awareness about the necessity for having education in their native language. By circumstances, they needed, and very often were forced, to educate themselves in the languages that surrounded them. However, when educated in the neighbouring languages, and upon achievement of a significant level of education, Roma most often alienated from their own nation. The consequence was that Roma almost had no intelligentsia within their ranks, and hence people from other nations were more interested in Romany language and culture than Roma themselves.

The reasons why other nationalities were interested in the language and culture of the Roma are numerous; however, the deficiencies in their researches of Romany language and culture are also numerous. Regardless of the quantity and quality of those researching on Romany language and culture, they have usually done it better than Romany scientists, deserving all the credits therewith.

Mistakes and omissions resulted, primarily, from insufficient knowledge and documentary materials, and often from scorning valuations, unavoidable if we recall that Roma have often been the object of racial and other kinds of discrimination.

3.5. Some Strategies Are Destroying Roma Cultural Identity, and Lead to Their Assimilation within the Majority Nations

Such attitudes towards the Roma cultural heritage lasted almost a thousand years, and slowly but surely lead to what many have desired—the disappearance of authentic Roma culture. When losing its authenticity, any culture is doomed to

extinction, and the same destiny awaits its carriers. Majority groups sometimes accept and tolerate ethnic groups that represent an object of discrimination, on account of totally denying their cultural identity. Therefore it is necessary to stimulate the ethnic groups to preserve their cultural values. In that way, they would be prepared to contribute to the richness of world culture, to the benefit of the whole mankind.

"Today, the Roma community," says M. Bo, "is under pressure from other cultures that are putting its cohesion in danger, and its traditional way of life is facing new social and cultural problems everywhere in the world. Therefore, it is more than ever necessary to introduce you to the true character of Roma identity, Roma past and present, in order to build better understanding and cooperation between Roma and other parts of the world".