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## Europeans in-Between

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# Does the EU really have polygamy of place? The Roma case

*Anuja Kelkar*

## 1 Introduction

The expulsion of Roma people from France in September 2010 brought to the fore the political reasoning behind the incident and the EU's reaction to the problem. Politicians in the European Union seem to be capitalising on the fear of increasing Roma immigration. Roma people are mostly not migrant workers but nomads who inhabit the outskirts of society and according to these politicians; they are seemingly escalating public security threats.

Roma people do not easily assimilate into society due to their nomadic nature and unique culture. How the interconnectedness of immigration and political discourse affects them will be dealt with in this paper in order to highlight the need to address this issue if Europe is to be a polygamy of place in its true sense.

The paper will thus focus on the Roma issue in the EU. Understanding where Roma people come from is explained in the second chapter. Their situation in France and other member states is expounded in the third chapter. Both these aspects are essential in understanding their current status as minorities who are not allowed to be true citizens of the EU and move freely within the borderless union. The paper will also look into the measures that the EU takes to answer these problems in the fourth chapter and in conclusion, the polygamy of place that Europe wishes to embody will be put into question using the Roma example as a counter-argument.

## 2 Roma in Europe

Roma people have been an ethnic minority in Europe for centuries now. Also known as Gypsies, they came from the Indian subcontinent, migrating in the ninth and the fourteenth centuries.<sup>1</sup> They are mostly travelers who sometimes settle down in camps, usually on the suburbs of towns with their own clan. France, for example, has approximately 15,000 Roma people, most of them from Eastern Europe, who are often seen camped out on the outskirts of villages and cities, and many make a meagre living as harvest hands.<sup>2</sup>

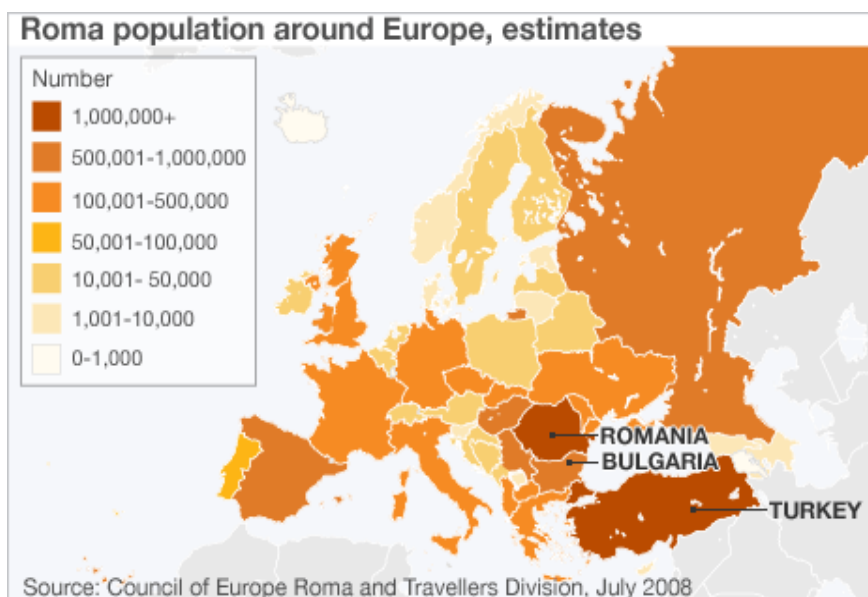


Figure 1: Roma Population around Europe,  
BBC News, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11027288> (accessed 20.04.2011).

The Council of Europe estimates the number of Roma in Europe to be slightly more than 11 million, and precise data is extremely hard to furnish as Roma people are afraid of authorities and can be reluctant to identify themselves as

<sup>1</sup> Jean-Pierre Liégeois and Council of Europe, *Roma in Europe* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2007), 18.

<sup>2</sup> Jan Puhl, "A Desperate Homecoming for Deported Roma," *Spiegel Online*, 31 August 2010, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,714649,00.html> (accessed 20 April 2011).

Roma, given the widespread stereotypes and attitudes against them.<sup>3</sup> Annex 1 provides the estimated Roma population in Europe in 2008.

Roma history in Europe has been a history of alienation, persecution, and flight despite the fact that they have lived in Europe for centuries. "Roma are subjected to intolerance, prejudice and discrimination and their presence in Europe has been marked by centuries of persecution, slavery, extermination and assimilation policies. Modern societies continue to demonstrate growing anti-Gypsy feelings."<sup>4</sup>

Roma people are essentially nomads, and this behaviour has continued into the modern times. The nomadic behaviour is explained by sociologist Jean-Pierre Liégeois as partly structural, arising from a certain type of social and economic organisation and a desire to travel, and partly reactive, due to external developments like expulsions.<sup>5</sup> The external developments may also include the anti-Gypsy sentiments reflected in national politics that this paper will investigate later.

Stereotypes against Roma people are deeply embedded. Thought to be liars, cheats and thieves, Roma people are sometimes ironically blamed for the trouble they are in by leading human rights activists.<sup>6</sup> An *Independent* editorial supported French President Nicolas Sarkozy's decision of dismantling of Roma camps.

If you are a French citizen, who has lived in France all your life, paid your taxes and woken up to find a third-world – let's use the word – encampment at the bottom of your garden, which expands every day. What are the authorities supposed to do? These are not travellers who buy a farmland plot and move on to it on a bank holiday weekend in breach of planning regulations; this is an incursion of an entirely different order.<sup>7</sup>

These words portray what people think of Roma settlers. Whether these perceptions are justified or not is beyond the scope of this paper, but the quote reflects on how Roma people are perceived by other European countries, as settlers who cannot be integrated easily. Such perceptions, coupled with political intentions to make the Roma people leave, can produce results as seen in France, which will be

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<sup>3</sup> Kristi Severance, "France's Expulsion of Roma Migrants: A Test Case for Europe," Migration Information Source, October 2010,

<http://www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/display.cfm?ID=803> (accessed 11 May 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Council of Europe, "Defending Roma - Human rights in Europe," leaflet on the website, [http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/romatravellers/source/documents/defendingRomarights\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/romatravellers/source/documents/defendingRomarights_en.pdf) (accessed 9 May 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Liégeois and Council of Europe, *Roma in Europe*, 25.

<sup>6</sup> James A. Goldston, "Roma Rights, Roma wrongs," *Foreign Affairs* 81:2 (March-April, 2002): 146-147.

<sup>7</sup> Mary Dejevsky, "Sarkozy is right about the Roma," *The Independent*, 3 September 2010, <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/mary-dejevsky/mary-dejevsky-sarkozy-is-right-about-the-roma-2068991.html> (accessed 5 April 2011).

explained in the next chapter. What needs to be understood is that these perceptions work against Roma people and public support for them gets affected.

### 3 Roma people in the European Union

In the EU, Roma people live in many member states. Their nomadic nature earns them many names like migrants, migrant-workers, asylum seekers, refugees etc.<sup>8</sup> All these labels come with a certain type of negative image of people who do not seem to assimilate in society due to their distinct lifestyle.

Estimates by the Council of Europe show that almost all EU countries have Roma communities of varying sizes. A noteworthy proportion of the population in Bulgaria (around ten percent), Slovakia (nine percent), Romania (eight percent), Hungary (seven percent), Greece, the Czech Republic and Spain (all countries one point five to two point five percent) is Roma.<sup>9</sup>

#### 3.1 The Roma issue in France

In July 2010, a young Roma was shot dead by the police in the region of Saint-Aignan in the Loire Valley. The immediate violent protests against the police were answered by tough measures from President Sarkozy. He issued a communiqué declaring the lawlessness that characterised the situation of the Roma population coming from Eastern Europe to France as unacceptable and that the government was going to dismantle 200 illegal Roma sites. These sites, he claimed, were causing “illicit trafficking, profoundly unfit living conditions, the exploitation of children for the purposes of begging, prostitution or crime.”<sup>10</sup>

Following the orders of the President, by the end of August, French authorities said they had evacuated 128 settlements and sent back 979 Romanian and Bulgarian citizens with an irregular status.<sup>11</sup> Brice Hortefeux, the Minister of Home Affairs, in order to justify the dismantling of Roma camps, said that there had been a 259% increase in the number of crimes committed by Romanians in France in 18 months. He further stated that “today, in Paris, the reality is that nearly one in five

<sup>8</sup> Goldston, “Roma Rights, Roma wrongs,” 147.

<sup>9</sup> European Union, “EU framework for national Roma strategies: Frequently asked questions,” MEMO /11/216, Strasbourg, 5 April 2011, <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/11/216> (accessed 23 April 2011).

<sup>10</sup> French government, “Communiqué faisant suite à la réunion ministérielle de ce jour sur la situation des gens du voyage et des Roms,” Elysée website, July 2010, <http://www.elysee.fr/president/les-actualites/communiques-de-presse/2010/juillet/communiqué-faisant-suite-a-la-reunion.9381.html> (accessed 22 April 2011).

<sup>11</sup> Valentina Pop, “EU questions legality of French Roma expulsions,” *EU Observer*, 2 September 2010, <http://euobserver.com/?aid=30720> (accessed 9 April 2011).

thefts is carried out by a Romanian. There is no question of stigmatising this or that population ... but nor is there a question of closing our eyes to a reality.”<sup>12</sup>

Since the communiqué and President Sarkozy’s speech in Grenoble on the same lines, many Roma left France, and many went back to Bulgaria or to Romania, under a scheme called “voluntary repatriation” offering €300 for each adult and €100 for each child.<sup>13</sup> The Roma people who received the repatriation grant were fingerprinted and registered in the OSCAR data base so that they do not claim the same grant twice.<sup>14</sup>

Voluntary repatriation is a scheme of voluntary return to the country of origin. In a 2005 press release of the Justice and Home affairs the Council of the European Union stated that “voluntary return, carried out in conformity with obligations deriving from applicable international instruments, is the assisted or independent departure to the country of return based on the will of the returnee and his/her informed decision to return.”<sup>15</sup>

The press release further states that Assisted Voluntary Return programmes may include assistance in travel arrangements.<sup>16</sup> The assistance given by the French government may be considered to be this type of travel assistance. Whether the Roma people wanted to return or not is questionable. It can be deduced from the news that was given about the incident that they did not approach the government with those intentions, but were asked to leave and their homes dismantled. Expulsions do not necessarily entail voluntarily leaving the country; it can be quite the opposite. It can be concluded that when forced to leave, the Roma people had no choice but to accept the repatriation money and leave.<sup>17</sup> Annex 2 comprises a French newspaper caricature by Plantu that aptly illustrates the stereotypes about Roma people and the voluntary repatriation scheme.

<sup>12</sup> “A Paris, un voleur sur cinq est Roumain, assure Hortefeux,” *Le Monde*, 30 August 2010, [http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2010/08/30/a-paris-un-voleur-sur-cinq-est-roumain-assure-hortefeux\\_1404613\\_3224.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2010/08/30/a-paris-un-voleur-sur-cinq-est-roumain-assure-hortefeux_1404613_3224.html) (accessed 10 April 2011).

<sup>13</sup> Christian Fraser, “France fingerprints Roma deportees to prevent return,” *BBC News Paris*, 1 October 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11450831> (accessed 6 May 2011).

<sup>14</sup> OSCAR stands for “Outil de statistique et de contrôle de l’aide au retour relevant de l’Office français de l’Immigration et de l’Intégration” (Statistical tool of control of repatriation assistance under the responsibility of the French Department for Immigration and Integration).

“France: Imminent ‘Humanitarian Fingerprinting’ Of Roma With OSCAR,” *Digital European Rights*, 8 September 2010, <http://www.edri.org/edriagram/number8.17/fingerprinting-roma-france-oscar> (accessed 3 April 2011).

<sup>15</sup> Council of the European Union, “Press Release - 2683<sup>rd</sup> Council Meeting,” Justice and Home Affairs, Luxembourg, 12 October 2005, [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressData/en/jha/86570.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/jha/86570.pdf) (accessed 25 April 2011)

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Lizzy Davies, “Roma return home and lament end of dreams of a better life in France,” *The Guardian*, 17 September 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/sep/17/roma-france-dreams-better-life> (accessed 15 March 2011).

### 3.2 Italy

The Italian government had a problem with illegal Roma camps too. In 2008, the government had launched a crackdown of Roma camps but had to back down when the Commission warned it of breaching the 2004 EU law that guarantees EU citizens' right to free movement.<sup>18</sup>

According to the *EU Observer*, Roma camps near Milan have been dismantled and the government has done the same to 315 settlements since 2007. In the article, the city's right-wing mayor Riccardo De Corato stated that there are some 1,200 Roma in Milan, compared to 10,000 three years ago and he justified the dismantling of camps by stating that these actions were taken in order to "contain the influx of Roma whose status is illegal."<sup>19</sup>

It is interesting to note that these happenings coincided with the French government's orders to dismantle Roma settlements in France. The perception of Roma people being unwanted migrants is reflected in the politician's order to contain their influx and politicians often act on popular demand. It can be said that Roma people are not welcome in Italy either.

### 3.3 Hungary

Unlike France and Italy, Hungary has been home to Roma people for centuries as they arrived in the country in the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries and are the largest ethnic minority of the country.<sup>20</sup> They are not nomads who have settled for a few months in the host country but have been a part of the Hungarian society for a long time and this makes the issue of their integration even more sensitive. Roma people have a certain degree of participation in the political life of the country.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, the stereotypes and perceptions of the rest of the population are not particularly welcoming, especially with the financial crisis and consequent economic problems.<sup>22</sup>

2011 has shown that the "assault on Roma criminality," as *Le Monde* put it, is far from over.<sup>23</sup> The article, reported in English in *Presseurop*, clearly states the worrying situation of Hungary's extreme right-wing party demonstrating anti-Roma

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<sup>18</sup> Jim Brunsten, "Italy wants to limit free movement of Roma people," *European Voice*, 23 August 2010, <http://www.europeanvoice.com/article/2010/08/italy-wants-to-limit-free-movement-of-roma-people/68718.aspx> (accessed 21 March 2011).

<sup>19</sup> Valentina Pop, "Italy resumes anti-Roma action in teeth of EP vote," *EU Observer*, 9 September 2010, <http://euobserver.com/?aid=30753> (accessed 9 April 2011).

<sup>20</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary, "Fact sheets on Hungary," Budapest, 2004, [http://www.mfa.gov.hu/NR/rdonlyres/05DF7A51-99A5-4BFE-B8A5-210344C02B1A/0/Roma\\_en.pdf](http://www.mfa.gov.hu/NR/rdonlyres/05DF7A51-99A5-4BFE-B8A5-210344C02B1A/0/Roma_en.pdf) (accessed 13 May 2011).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Siobhán Dowling, "Hungary's Roma bear brunt of downturn," *Spiegel Online*, 24 February 2009, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,609669,00.html> (accessed 4 April 2011).

<sup>23</sup> Joëlle Stolz, "L'extrême droite hongroise repart à l'assaut de la 'criminalité tzigane,'" *Le Monde*, 6 April 2011.

patrols.<sup>24</sup> The article further states that the patrols by militia-men continued for two weeks, and what was even more disturbing was that these activities were supported by local people who provided free food and accommodation to the militia.

The situation seems to be similar to that in France and Italy. The EU has been working on concrete measures on the Roma situation at the same time, and this shows the differences of approach between the national and the EU level measures. It is yet another example of how the member states do not always adhere to the supranational decision-making of the EU. In fact, the situation points at a need for better coordination on an EU level that is reflected in the national level.

At the end of March, paramilitary members of Hungary's extreme-right Jobbik political party organised several weeks of village patrols to counter 'Gypsy criminality,' a worrying demonstration of strength that failed to prompt a reaction from Viktor Orbán's government. At the same time, the EU called on Member states to take concrete action to improve conditions for the 10 to 12 million Roma living in Europe.<sup>25</sup>

Italy and Hungary are not the only countries where there are human rights issues involving Roma people. Explaining these issues in all the countries would be beyond the scope of this paper and hence only two countries have been mentioned, other than France. However, what is quite obvious is that France is not the only country which has problems integrating Roma people and that the phenomenon needs to be changed.

## 4 The European Union and the Roma issue debate

### 4.1 Disapproval of the French government's actions

The European Commission and the European Parliament both were very firm in their disapproval of the French government's actions in 2010 against the Roma settlements in the country.

The repatriation of Roma people carried out by France was criticized by the EU. As it was rightly argued in the *EU Observer*, collective expulsions of people without prior notice is not allowed under the EU law.

As EU citizens, Roma ethnics can only be expelled if the decision is sent to them 'in writing, fully justified and open to appeal,' and should

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<sup>24</sup> Joëlle Stolz, "Roma hunting season set to continue," *Presseurop*, 6 April 2011. <http://www.presseurop.eu/en/content/article/586961-roma-hunting-season-set-continue> (accessed 30 April 2011).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*



be given at least one month to leave. The commission also stresses that no ‘collective expulsions’ or ethnic profiling is allowed under EU law, even if the travellers living in improvised camps have overstayed the three months in which they can reside in a member state without registering with the local authorities.<sup>26</sup>

How effective this repatriation is, is doubtful because the Roma people keep returning. Despite all the efforts of the government, the estimated Roma population in France has remained stable at about 15,000, even though 8,000 to 10,000 are repatriated each year.<sup>27</sup> Matthew Newman, spokesman for EU Fundamental Rights Commissioner Viviane Reding, clearly stated that European law allows for the free movement of EU citizens anywhere in the 27 member states and so, despite the expulsions, there is nothing to prevent the individuals from “heading back to France the very next day.”<sup>28</sup>

Viviane Reding expressed her opinion on the French government’s expulsions issue very strongly. She clarified in a public statement that

discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin or race has no place in Europe. It is not compatible with the values on which the European Union is founded. National authorities who discriminate ethnic groups in the application of EU law are also violating the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, which all Member states, including France, have signed up to.<sup>29</sup>

The commissioner also announced her intention to take France to the European Court of Justice under the grounds of ethnic discrimination.<sup>30</sup> The issue did not end up in court but the consequent spat between the Commission and France escalated into a dispute. The commissioner compared the Roma expulsions in France to those that took place under the Vichy government and the French government was naturally not happy.<sup>31</sup> The disagreement brings forth the problems

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<sup>26</sup> Pop, “EU questions legality of French Roma expulsions.”

<sup>27</sup> “EU Rebukes France Over Roma Expulsions,” *Spiegel Online*, 14 September 2010, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,717324,00.html> (accessed 23 March 2011).

<sup>28</sup> Leigh Phillips, “EU commission monitoring French Roma expulsions,” *EU Observer*, 19 August 2010, <http://euobserver.com/?aid=30643> (accessed 25 March 2011).

<sup>29</sup> Council of Europe, “Recent rise in national security discourse in Europe: the case of Roma,” 5 October 2010, <http://assembly.coe.int/Documents/WorkingDocs/Doc10/EDOC12386.pdf> (accessed 8 April 2011).

<sup>30</sup> Phillips. “EU commission monitoring French Roma expulsions.”

<sup>31</sup> “French ministers fume after Reding rebuke over Roma,” *BBC News Europe*, 15 September 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11310560> (accessed 25 April 2011).

The Commissioner said, while referring to Roma people being singled out for expulsions: “This is a situation I had thought Europe would not have to witness again after the Second World War.”

that the EU faces in ensuring that the member states abide by the directives of the Union.

The European Parliament did not take kindly to the fingerprinting of Roma people being repatriated from France and the MEPs (Members of the Parliament) stated that such an act was illegal and that it violated the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.<sup>32</sup> According to them, the EU legislature states that “automatic expulsion” of poor people is illegal and that, according to EU law on free movement of persons, “the lack of economic means can in no circumstances justify the automatic expulsion of EU citizens” and that freedom of movement can be restricted by member states “solely on the basis of personal conduct, and not of general considerations of prevention or ethnic or national origin.”<sup>33</sup> This brings in the need to understand the directive for the freedom of movement that is explained in the next sub-chapter.

#### 4.2 The European Union law on free movement of people

The directive for the “Right of Union citizens and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member states” clearly states that all the citizens have a right to residence in another member state for up to three months.<sup>34</sup> It is only those who stay more than three months who need to state the purpose of their stay – work, studies or otherwise. It also mentions that “Member states may require them to register with the competent authorities within a period of not less than three months as from the date of arrival.”<sup>35</sup>

This means that Roma people are allowed to stay in France, or any other member state for up to three months. The European Court of Justice has prohibited the deportation of EU citizens who do not provide the documents necessary to obtain a residence permit in the member state where they are residing and which is not their home country; which means that by law, the French government is not allowed to deport Roma people even if they do not possess the documents necessary for a French residence permit.<sup>36</sup> What the law does require, however, is the need to have sufficient means to be able to stay in another member state, which can be problematic in the Roma case as they do not always have enough means to support themselves in the host country.<sup>37</sup> The jobs that most Roma people take up

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<sup>32</sup> Valentine Pop, “Parliament demands France immediately stop Roma expulsions,” *EU Observer*, 9 August 2010, <http://euobserver.com/9/30766> (accessed 9 April 2011).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> “European Parliament and Council Directive 2004/38/EC of 29 April 2004 on the right of citizens of the Union and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member states,” EU official website, [http://europa.eu/legislation\\_summaries/justice\\_freedom\\_security/free\\_movement\\_of\\_persons\\_asylum\\_immigration/133152\\_en.htm#KEY](http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/justice_freedom_security/free_movement_of_persons_asylum_immigration/133152_en.htm#KEY) (accessed 5 May 2011).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Dimitri Kochenov, “Ius Tractum of Many Faces: European Citizenship and the Difficult Relationship between Status and Rights,” *Columbia Journal of European Law* 15, no. 2 (2009): 95.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

tend to be at the bottom end of the labour market; low-level menial jobs of unskilled labour and the stereotypes work against them when they try to secure a job.<sup>38</sup>

At this point of the paper, it can be said that the EU law prohibits expulsions of any citizen of the EU residing in another member state due to lack of documents proving their stay. The law does require that the citizen has sufficient economic means for his/her stay. Given the problems that they face due to their status, it can be said that Roma people are caught in a vicious circle of not getting jobs in the host member states and of being sent back to the countries where they will not get a job either, given the presence of detrimental perceptions everywhere.<sup>39</sup>

### 4.3 Measures taken by the EU for Roma people

The Council of Europe and the European Union have several policies and measures in place in order to ensure the protection of minorities like the Roma. The EU has a European level framework in place to ensure that Roma people are not discriminated against or mistreated.

The national governments implement the EU legislation to integrate the minorities as the implementation is left largely in their hands. Education, employment, housing and essential services, and healthcare – these important areas of Roma integration are left to the jurisdiction of the member states by the EU, and are monitored annually by the Commission. This is a part of Directive 2000/43/EC that implements the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin and guarantees non-discriminatory access to education, employment, vocational training, healthcare, social protection and housing.<sup>40</sup>

The EU coordinates the national level actions on a European Union level with policy and financial tools which include “European legislation against discrimination, policy coordination, common integration goals and structural funding in Member states.”<sup>41</sup>

EU funding is also available to member states for boosting their national Roma inclusion policies, from the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). Apart from these funds, the EU also co-finances

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<sup>38</sup> European Roma Rights Centre, *The Glass Box - Exclusion of Roma from employment* (Budapest: Westimprim bt., 2007), 17, 24.

<sup>39</sup> Puhl, “A Desperate Homecoming for Deported Roma.”

<sup>40</sup> Council of the European Union, “Council Directive 2000/43/EC - implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin,” 29 June 2000, <http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32000L0043:en:HTML> (accessed 14 May 2011).

<sup>41</sup> European Union, “EU framework for national Roma strategies: Frequently asked questions.”

projects for the Roma in sectors like education, employment, microfinance and equal opportunities.<sup>42</sup>

Resolution 1740 (2010) clearly states that “the situation of Roma in Europe and relevant activities of the Council of Europe” stresses the need to ensure that the fundamental rights of the Roma are preserved and urges the member states to “protect the Roma from discrimination, promote a positive image of diversity and address stereotypes and prejudices and take special measures to protect Roma asylum seekers who have fled racist violence,” among other things.<sup>43</sup>

All these measures seem well co-ordinated on paper, but after what the member states have been doing is reviewed, it becomes obvious that the EU needs a stronger European-level coordination of the Roma measures. Leaving the main areas of integration to the national governments is not stopping the expulsions that are against the EU’s laws nor is it helping in any way to improve the situation of Roma people who need to be integrated and not expelled. The need of the hour is not to “urge” or to “suggest” directives, but to have strict measures in place in order to ensure that expulsions of this kind do not take place. The reasons behind these expulsions can be many, and the political one is worth investigating as it helps support the research question of this paper. The next chapter will, in this regard, explore the link between immigration, populism and the Roma situation in Europe.

## 5 Rise in populism in the European Union

The European Union is not just an economic union. It is a union of multi-ethnic and multi-lingual people who are no longer impeded by national borders, be it for seeking employment, travel or profitable business. The EU encourages a greater union of people beyond linguistic, social, cultural borders through its motto “United in diversity,” which stands for Europeans working together for peace and prosperity, with its many different cultures, traditions and languages as a positive asset for the continent.<sup>44</sup>

Yet, the European political discourse has taken a turn since the rise in populism, which is a demonstrable trait all over Europe in the extreme-right parties like the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), the French National Front, the Belgian extreme right-wing Vlaams Belang and the Polish Law and Justice Party.<sup>45</sup> Populism is defined as

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Council of Europe, “Resolution 1740 (2010) The situation of Roma in Europe and relevant activities of the Council of Europe,” Parliamentary Assembly, 22 June 2010, <http://assembly.coe.int/Mainf.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta10/ERES1740.htm> (accessed 10 May 2011).

<sup>44</sup> “Symbols of the EU,” Official EU website, [http://europa.eu/abc/symbols/motto/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/abc/symbols/motto/index_en.htm) (accessed 20 April 2011).

<sup>45</sup> Meike Dülffer, “Populism in Europe,” *Eurotopics*, 10 October 2007,

a political movement that emphasizes the interests, cultural traits, and spontaneous feelings of the common people, as opposed to those of a privileged elite. For legitimation, populist movements often appeal to the majority will directly—through mass gatherings, referendums, or other forms of popular democracy—without much concern for checks and balances or the rights of minorities.<sup>46</sup>

Although these extreme right-wing parties are not the mainstream parties who govern the country their rhetoric does not go unheard. People do seem to listen to what they have to say, and the votes for the right-wing parties are not negligible, but something to worry about in the Roma case in Hungary, for example.<sup>47</sup>

The populist agenda affects the ruling party too, and the agenda has been on the rise for a while now. “Since the early 1990s populism has become a regular feature of politics in western democracies. While populism is still mostly used by outsider or challenger parties, mainstream politicians, both in government and in opposition, have been using it as well.”<sup>48</sup> The phenomenon is not restricted to the aforementioned countries. The Czech Republic illustrates this point as the anti-Roma sentiments of the country affected votes and brought a Christian-Democrat, Jiří Čunek, into the Senate in 2006.

For some time, a negative opinion of the Roma ethnicity has been on the rise in the Czech Republic, an opinion based on significantly simplified generalisations. Exploitation of this public mood has brought several politicians a wave of success – Jiří Čunek even rode this mood to the head of the Christian Democratic Party and into the cabinet.<sup>49</sup>

Populism is thus not restricted to right-wing politicians but to mainstream politics in countries like the Czech Republic. Marc Plattner states in an article that a popular agenda for the populists is immigration problems and that they are hostile to all minority groups, be it cultural, linguistic, religious or racial.<sup>50</sup> According to the article, this entails hostility towards migrants as they are perceived to be different

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[http://www.eurotopics.net/en/archiv/magazin/politikverteilerseite/populismus\\_2007\\_10/debatte\\_populismus\\_2007\\_10/](http://www.eurotopics.net/en/archiv/magazin/politikverteilerseite/populismus_2007_10/debatte_populismus_2007_10/) (accessed 9 April 2011).

<sup>46</sup> Torcuato S. Di Tella, “Populism,” in *The Encyclopedia of Democracy*, ed. Seymour Martin Lipset, (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Books, 1995): 985–89.

<sup>47</sup> Siobhán Dowling, “EU Presidency a Test for Tolerance in Hungary,” *Spiegel Online*, 31 December 2010, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,737283,00.html> (accessed 4 April 2011).

<sup>48</sup> Cas Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist,” *Government & Opposition* 39.3 (2004): 551.

<sup>49</sup> Marie Gailova, “Populism in the context of the Roma question,” in *Populism in Central Europe*, ed. Václav Někavil and Maria Staszkievicz (Prague: Association for International Affairs, 2008), 65.

<sup>50</sup> Marc F. Plattner, “Populism, Pluralism, and Liberal Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy* 21:1 (2010): 88.

from the people who constitute the country; the “nativism” of the party rhetoric sharply denounces people from places other than the motherland.

Hungary’s lack of response to the Roma “patrols” by the extreme-right party of the country is an example of how populist attitudes towards minorities are affecting mainstream politics. This lack of response is demonstrative of how populism can affect minorities and may even create instability and insecurity if there is confrontation – as there might have been in the Hungary situation, had the Roma people decided to retaliate against the patrols that they were being subjected to. It is interesting to note, in this example, how public security can be threatened by provoking minorities in such a fashion.

Despite the EU’s efforts towards a Europe without borders that encourages free movement of goods, labour, capital and services, national governments of some EU countries are expounding anti-immigration rhetoric.

From France to Germany, from Austria to Holland, in the new spirit of pride in one’s cultural and historical identity, the main parties now find it acceptable to stress that immigrants are guests who have to accommodate themselves to the cultural values that define the host society – ‘it is our country, love it or leave it’ is the message.<sup>51</sup>

Public security is important to these parties as they claim to represent the people. It is equally important for the ruling governments. The political agenda has become sharply focused on public security as every country tries to deal with rising unemployment and consequent increase in crimes.<sup>52</sup> Unemployment leads to economic insecurity which in turn can lead to an increase in crimes.

In this scenario, immigrants like the Roma people come into focus, especially when the elections are approaching, and they become the scapegoats for populist leaders.<sup>53</sup> It is easy to play the security card and underline the threat posed by illegal and/or unemployed immigrants like the Roma people for example who weigh down on an economy made fragile by the financial crisis.<sup>54</sup> Such a security discourse, in today’s world affected by spending cuts and rising employment insecurity, works well in favour of the party soliciting votes with it.

Whether Roma people are truly unemployable and violent is not the question tackled as the politicians cannot win votes by perpetrating a threat that is not visible. “For a politician, the more successful approach is to brand them as trouble-

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<sup>51</sup> Slavoj Žižek, “Liberal multiculturalism masks an old barbarism with a human face,” *The Guardian*, 3 October 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/oct/03/immigration-policy-roma-rightwing-europe> (accessed 14 April 2011).

<sup>52</sup> Council of Europe, “Recent rise in national security discourse in Europe: the case of Roma,” 5 October 2010, <http://assembly.coe.int/Documents/WorkingDocs/Doc10/EDOC12386.pdf> (accessed 8 April 2011).

<sup>53</sup> Plattner, “Populism, Pluralism, and Liberal Democracy,” 91.

<sup>54</sup> Council of Europe, “Resolution 1740 (2010) The situation of Roma in Europe and relevant activities of the Council of Europe.”

makers, perpetrators of welfare fraud and thieves.”<sup>55</sup> Populism thus gains votes, as already demonstrated in Hungary and the Czech Republic, and is on the rise, albeit slowly. Roma people can be immigrants, as in the case of France and Italy, or minorities that have been a part of the country for generations – like in Hungary; the perceptions about them are the same and the efforts taken to address the issue of the Roma as immigrants or as minority citizens is yielding the same result – that of rejection and expulsion.

## 6 Conclusion – The European Union as polygamy of place

In order to make the European Union a true polygamy of place, minorities like the Roma people need to feel “at home” everywhere like any other European Union citizen. It is highly improbable if they cannot live in another member state without being told to go back. In the case of countries like Hungary where they are citizens and not immigrants, the situation is more worrying, as the populism there is not aiming at immigrants but at its own citizens. The EU’s very goal of an integrated union is jeopardised if the citizens cannot feel at home in other member states, or even in their own country for that matter.

Multiculturalism is a part of European identity, and so is preserving it; which is why the Roma people who are an ethnic minority in Europe need to be able to preserve their own unique lifestyle. Europe is a mosaic of cultures and all of them need to co-exist peacefully if the European Union wants to be a union of multicultural and multi-ethnic people. It is definitely not easy to change detrimental perceptions and stereotypes against Roma people and laws do not change mind-sets. However, this means that Roma people need the help of the EU and the Council of Europe to integrate into the member state and try to earn a living without having to change their lifestyle.

The European Union project does not just promise one currency, one central bank and one parliament. It also promises its citizens the right to move freely from one country to another. The borders between member states may no longer exist but psychological borders persist. Stereotypes and prejudiced perceptions about Roma people are repeated in the political discourse to such an extent that it seems impossible to change the scenario. A constructive dialogue of cultures would be possible only if the cultural diversity is understood, accepted and not hindered by the politics of public security discourse.

The integration policies for minorities, though well-constructed, do not seem to be enough to help the Roma people. What is amiss is not the path towards integrating them into the host country in domains like education and housing but the path towards understanding their cultural aspects and changing the perception of them. Social integration is an important aspect of integration and it needs to be

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<sup>55</sup> Ullrich Fichtner, “Sarkozy’s War Against the Roma,” *Spiegel Online*, 15 September 2010, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,717324-2,00.html> (accessed 8 April 2011).

tackled on a European level, and not just on a national level. The current scenario where most of the implementation of various integration policies is left in the hands of the member states needs to be reconsidered.

Given the problems that Roma people face, this paper concludes on the necessity of the EU to become a true polygamy of place by integrating minorities. If Roma people do not feel at home and secure in another member state, then the EU has not yet achieved its goal of ensuring that each and every citizen of the Union is able to feel at home in many places.

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