ROMA COMMUNITIES ON THE BALKANS: HISTORY AND IDENTITIES

Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov

Abstract

The processes of identity development and identity changes in the Roma communities living in the Balkans observed nowadays have their old historical roots. These processes are documented as early as in the time of the Ottoman Empire, they acquired new dimensions and directions in the new independent states, and today in the conditions of post-socialism, their controversial development is activated once again. The main trends in the identity development among the Roma in the Balkans can be summarized as follows: a) internal development of the community; b) development of the community as part of the respective nation; c) development of preferred ethnic identity; d) the construction of a new ethnic identity. These trends are constantly intersecting, moving from one to another, sometimes even going in reverse direction. They are influenced by a number of "external" factors related to the specific situation in the region and in the individual countries framed by historical and geopolitical circumstances, and nowadays also by the common processes of pan-European integration and globalization. The processes of identity development and identity change in the Roma communities are constantly flowing and it is impossible to predict now which direction they will acquire in more near or distant future.

Keywords: Balkans, identity, Roma, Ottoman Empire, Albania, Yugoslavia, European integration.

1.- Introduction.

The collapse of the Communist regimes in Central, Southeastern and Eastern Europe in the 1990s was accompanied by an explosion of nationalistic ideologies

and by sharp exacerbation of interethnic relations that reached their most extreme forms in the collapse of Yugoslavia.

In this common social and political context, Roma communities living in the Balkans since centuries are not an exception. Among them also occurred stormy processes of identity development. These processes which flows among them similarly to other peoples living in the Balkans have their historical roots. Therefore, in order to understand correctly the processes of development of the Roma identities in the Balkans that are currently under way, their history should be briefly presented.

2.- History.

The first mass penetration of the ancestors of Roma in Balkans is connected to the Ottoman invasion and the establishment of the Ottoman Empire in the region during the 14th –15th centuries. Some of them were directly involved in the conquest participating in auxiliary army units or as craftsmen serving the army, or by being among the population which accompanied the invasions (Marushiakova and Popov, 2001:26). These newcomers along with the existing Roma population in the newly conquered territories figure in various official documents dating from this period, mainly in the particularly rich archives of the Ottoman government and local administration under the names of *Kıbtı* (i.e. Copts) and/or *Çingene*.

The Ottoman social, political and economic system was an extremely complex and interlocking military-based administrative, economic and religious structure – hierarchical and under the firm control of the centralised power. The inhabitants were also classed hierarchically into various categories, the main two being the "true believers" (the Muslims) and the "infidels" (conquered Christian population) divided in further sub-categories. These categories were treated differently, the members of each one having a different status and varying obligations towards the central state, as is the case with Roma in the Ottoman Empire too.

The very first mention of the *Çingene* in the tax documentation of the Ottoman Empire dates from 1430 and is found in the Register of timars (land tenures) for the Nikopol *sanjak* (territorial administrative unit) (Rumen Kovachev, 1997). An important and most comprehensive historical source, recording the presence of a substantial number of Roma in the Ottoman Empire as well as their social standing, is the collection of laws and regulations relating to the population in the province of Rumelia dating from 1475 – the time of Mehmet II Fatih. The province of Rumelia comprised almost the entire Balkan peninsula, with the

exception of regions with various forms of special status. From this collection of laws it is clear that all Roma at that time, regardless of whether they were Muslim or Christian, pay poll-tax (*kharaj* or *jizya*) only payable by non-Muslims in principle, with some tax benefits for Roma Muslims (Marushiakova and Popov, 2001:28). The system according to which the tax was collected from the nomadic Roma was also specified – the magistrate (*qadi*) must give the power of attorney to a person who would travel with the Roma and be responsible for the payment of taxes. In reality the power of attorney was probably given to a representative coming from the Roma community itself.

Certain categories of Roma were exempt from this poll-tax, including those involved in providing services for the army – for example the Roma who lived in fortresses and maintained them, the blacksmiths making or repairing different kinds of arms, the military musicians and other auxiliary troops. The practice of certain tax exemptions for Roma in the service of the Empire was kept up until much later, especially in some regions with special status, like Bosnia.

A further, special register has been preserved concerning Christian Roma who had to pay the poll-tax. In all probability, these Roma had settled in the Balkans before the Ottoman conquest. It covers the period to 1487-1489 and records Christian Roma living in the districts of Istanbul, Viza, Gallipoli, Edirne, Chirmen, Yanboli (now Yambol), Filibe (now Plovdiv), Sofia, Nikopol, Vidin, Kustendja (now Kyustendil), Kruševac, Smederevo, Yeni Pazar (now Novi Pazar) and Bosnia – total 3,237 households in all plus a further 211 widows' households. Therefore, the tax registers recorded only these two categories regulation dating from 1491 attached to it which gave the amount of tax due, and also specified further taxation – a land tax (*ispençe*), and a charge on the first night of marriage (Marushiakova and Popov, 2001:27).

The data from the tax registers gives a clear idea of the demographic data of the Roma population and of areas of settlement. The 1489-90 tax register of Filibe recorded 33 households and 5 widows' households; in 1516 the Roma households numbered 175; ten years later there were already 283, of which 90 were Muslim and 193 Christian. In 1516 in Plevne (now Pleven) 11 Roma households were registered; in 1550 they numbered 36, while in 1579 there were 44 households. This data also gives an idea of the relative percentage of Roma in comparison with the rest of the population – e.g. in 1526-28 in the district of Eski Zaara (now Stara Zagora) of 2450 households, 61 were Roma households; in 1595 in the town of Yanboli of 529 households only seven were Roma households (Marushiakova and Popov, 2001:28).

The next specialised tax register, which deserves particular attention dates from 1522-1523 and is entitled *Comprehensive roll of the income and taxation of the "Gypsies" of the province of Rumelia*. The register recorded 10294 Christian and 4203 Muslim Roma's households (in the total were included a further 471 widows' households). Apart from the above, there were a further 2694 Muslim households in the "Gypsy *sanjak*". According to some calculations, this made a total of about 66000 Roma, of which about 19000 were Muslims, and about 47 000 Christians. According other calculations, the total of 17 191 Roma's households in what became the territory of the present-day Balkan states were distributed as follows: Turkey – 3185, Greece – 2512, Albania – 374, former Yugoslavia – 4382 and Bulgaria – 5701, while the exact locality of 1037 households is uncertain (Stojanovski, 1974:33-76).

Additional evidence can be deduced from the previously mentioned tax register of 1522-23. In spite of the variety of taxes that had to be paid, ultimately, as far as these taxes were concerned, there was no essential difference between the Christian Roma and the Muslim Roma – for example, the Christian heads of households had to pay 25 *ak*çe for their land tax, while the Muslims paid 22 *ak*çe for the equivalent land tax for Muslims (*resm-i çift*). The remaining financial obligations were either the same or very similar, including various charges and fines for crimes and infractions (Stojanovski, 1974:33-76).

Roma in the Ottoman Empire worked at a range of occupations. In the tax register of 1522-1523 they were most often recorded as musicians (*sazende*). In some cases, entire tax communities consisted of musicians. It is really surprising that in the quoted tax register only one person was listed as a blacksmith and only four as various kinds of ironworkers. Undoubtedly, a large number of the craftsmen included in the so called "Gypsy *sanjak*" were indeed blacksmiths, but their work served the army only, and not the population of the Empire as a whole. In the 1522-1523 tax register, among the recorded occupations of Roma, there are also tinsmiths, farriers, goldsmiths, sword-makers, stove-makers, shoemakers, slipper-makers, makers of clout-nails, leather workers, tailors, carpet-makers, dyers, ironmongers, halva-makers, cheese-makers, butchers, kebab-makers, gardeners, muleteers, guards, prison guards, manservants, couriers, monkey-breeders, well-diggers and others, including occasionally army officers, janissaries, policemen, doctors, surgeons, monks (Stojanovski, 1974:33-76).

An important source in this respect are the notes of the renowned traveller Evlia Çelebi, who had the opportunity to make use of the list of craftsmen's guilds (*esnaf*) in Istanbul – a list made on the orders of Sultan Murad IV (1623-1640). At that time Roma were living in the neighborhood Ayvansaray in the Balata quarter.

The list contains 57 of guilds Roma are mentioned for the first time in the 10th *esnaf*, that of the bear-trainers, which consisted of 70 men in total. The 15th *esnaf* is of horse-traders (*cambaz*) consisting of 300 men. The 43rd guild that of the musicians, consisted of 300 people, also mostly "Gypsies". The 45th guild comprised the actors, mime artists and boy dancers. This guild had 12 sub-divisions, the first one of which consisted of 3,000 persons, most of them Roma; the second sub-division included 300 boy dancers, and according to Evlia Çelebi's hints, involved in "lewd practices"; in the other 10 sub-divisions of this guild there were some Roma, but not many (Evliya Çelebi, 1967:207-336). As seen from this source one can see clearly the place of the "Gypsies" in overall guild system of the empire, as well as beginning of the ethnic divide within it, which led later in 19th century along with general processes of ethnicization of the Empire also to the ethnicisation of the very guild system (Marushiakova and Popov, 2016:76-89).

The special *Law concerning the "Gypsies" in the province of Rumelia* (*Kanunname-i Kıbtıyan-i vilayet-i Rumili*), issued by Sultan Suleiman I the Magnificent in 1530 helps us to a better understanding of the information gleaned from the tax registers. This law demonstrates once more the special place of the Roma in in the social structure of the Ottoman Empire, among the category of *rayah* (tax-paying lower class in the Empire, including the Christians). The Muslim Roma (heads of households and unmarried men) still paid 22 *akçe*, while the 'infidel' (i.e. Christian Roma) paid 25 *akçe*. Furthermore, both categories paid the marriage charge and fines for crimes and wrongdoings as "the rest of the *rayah*", i.e. in this respect there was no difference between them. Also, the discrepancies between the different categories of Roma, with the exception of those included in the "Gypsy sanjak" (Marushiakova and Popov, 2001:32-33).

This law confirms the special administrative legal status and the extended rights to taxation self-government for those Roma Muslim, which living in the so-called "Gypsy *sanjak*" (*Liva-i Kıbtıyan*). There was also a special law from 1541, *Law concerning the leader of the "Gypsy sanjak"*, which on the whole repeats and gives in more detail the main points of the law quoted above. In this case the term *sanjak* is not used in the usual sense of a territorial unit but in the sense of a certain group of population, which was involved in a number of auxiliary activities in the service of the army. The head of this *sanjak*, the "Gypsy *sanjak-başı*", was based in the town of Kırkkilise (now Kırklareli), and it comprised Roma households from regions of cities Hayrabolu, Viza, *Keşan, Çorlu,* Pınarhisar, Fere, Dimotika (now Didymoteicho), Gyumyurjina (now Komotini), Eski Zaara, Yanboli and other areas, mainly in what is Thrace. For their service the companies (*yamak*) of Roma, included in the *sanjak* (numbering 543) received land properties, 449 in total,

situated in 17 regions of Rumelia. This institution originated in Anatolia but was modified to suit the Roma in the Balkans in particular – the members of the companies undertook auxiliary military duties, but not active military service (Marushiakova y Popov, 2001:34-35).

With time, the practice of sub-contracting the collection of taxes due from Roma (as well as from the entire population of the Empire) began to be established. The accepted practice was that the responsibility for the collection of taxes was down not only to the agent, who had bought the right to collect taxes, but also to the representatives of the Roma themselves. According to the decree of Sultan Murad IV Ghazi in 1638, for the sub-contracting of the collection of the poll-tax from Roma, for each 50 taxpayers (heads of households) one person, called *çeri-başı*, was appointed to be in charge (Marushiakova and Popov, 2001:41).

Very often the question has been posed as to what the general civic status of the Roma in the Ottoman Empire was, but this question cannot be answered simply. The problem is complex because in reality the Roma occupied a peculiar place in the overall social and civil structure of the Ottoman Empire. In the first place, they were subject (or if we may use the contemporary terminology 'citizens') of the Empire since its establishment. They had however also their specific statute and were differentiated on the base of their ethnicity. There was not a strong differentiation between Muslim and Christian Roma, between nomads and settled. On the whole, they were closer to the local conquered population on the Balkans, with some privileges for Muslim Roma, and considerable larger benefits for those in the service of the army. This ethnic differentiation of the Roma is not connected with the so-called "Millet System", which regulates the rights of the various non-Muslim religious communities in Ottoman Empire (Inalcık, 1973; Braude and Bernard Lewis, 1982; Shaw, 1976). This system began to acquire ethnic dimensions from 19th century, with reference to the efforts for reforms in the Empire. The Roma in the Ottoman Empire always were differentiated through their ethnicity, a rare case in the laws of the Empire.

This separation of the Roma probably was accompanied by the general feeling of the rest of Ottoman population towards them. Many sources reveal the evident contempt felt towards them by the local population who considered them to be a lesser category of people, a long-standing social stereotype, which has survived in the Balkans to this day. In spite of these persistent social attitudes, and perhaps because of them, the Roma had the opportunity under the Ottoman Empire to preserve many of their ethnic and cultural characteristics, and ultimately to remain as an ethnic community. On the whole, however, the civil status of the Roma in the Ottoman Empire was much more favourable than it was for their

cousins in Western Europe, where, during the same historical period (the Middle Ages), the "Gypsies" were subjected to very cruel, mass persecutions. Perhaps this explains why at the present time the number of Roma on the Balkans is much higher than in Western Europe.

In fact, the problems in the Ottoman Empire seem to have frequently arisen from the way the laws were applied rather than from the legislation itself. This principle is also valid in respect of Muslim Roma. On the one hand, the authorities in the Ottoman Empire, without resorting to violent measures promoted in various ways (mostly through tax incentives) the adoption of Islam by Roma. On the other hand, in fact Roma were often not accepted as "true Muslims", for which there are many historical evidences. One of most outspoken examples is the case from Bosnia, where in 1693 the Rom by name Selim, the son of Osman, a baker, in 1693 turned to the court in Sarajevo with the request to be exempt from the payment of the poll-tax "as an infidel". In the request, he stated: "I am the son of a Muslim and I am a Muslim. I live in the Muslim quarter and along with my co-residents pay the tithe when I can manage it. Moreover, along with the Muslims I pray five times a day and send my children to the religious school to learn the Koran along with the rest of the children. I work on my baking orders, and my lawful wife avoids strangers." With his request, he enclosed his wedding certificate and a circular letter from the Sultan, dealing with the payment of taxes by Muslims. According to the final decision of the court the claimant was exempt from the payment of poll-tax (Marushiakova and Popov, 2001:34).

The last available comprehensive evidence concerning the Roma in the Ottoman Empire dates from 1695 when in Anatolia and Rumelia 45 000 "Gypsies" in total were registered. Of these 10 000 were Muslims paying 5 *kuruş* poll-tax per person, while the rest were Christians paying 6 *kuruş* (Marushiakova and Popov, 2001:56). Demographic data for Roma in the Ottoman Empire in the 18th and 19th centuries indicated, that the ratio between Roma Muslims and Roma Christians continue to change constantly. In spite of unsecure demographic data, we can state that during the 19th century the balance is already radically altered and the Roma Muslims were in the majority. The ratio of Roma Christians to Roma Muslims has been variously calculated by different authors as 1:3 or 1:4. From the numbers available we can conclude that there was a continuing trend over the centuries to adopt Islam (Marushiakova and Popov, 2001:63-64).

The sources reflect ethnicity of the Roma communties but don't entail information about their actual or prefered self-identification, they indicate only indirectly the flowing processes of identity change directed towards accepting the

identity (Turkish/Muslim) of the ruling population as expression of desire of equality and improvement of social standing.

In the 19ᵗʰ century the Ottoman Empire is in permanent socio-economic and political crisis that is accompanied by the rapid development of national ideas and emancipatory movements among Christian peoples. As a result, on the Balkans arose new ethno-national states (Serbia, Greece, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Romania). The processes of formation of new Balkan states ended after World War I when the Ottoman Empire ceased to exist (in 1923) and in the Western Balkans were created next new independent states (Yugoslavia and Albania). In this new historical context begins the active development of Roma identities, which will be presented here.

3.- Identities.

When it comes to the Roma identities in the Balkans and their development, it is imperative to proceed from two important, principled axioms:

- Identity is a complex, multidimensional structure built on different levels that operates in a contextual way. This means that, in a different socio-cultural context, one of its levels can be leading one and can overlap the others (which, however, do not cease to exist).

- Identity is not a biological category genetically embedded in humans, but a socio-cultural construction that is historically variable. This means that there are no eternal and unchangeable identities. Identities are formed, developed and can be hybrid and complex, shifted and changed in historical development at community level (or even at individual level)

The identity development is not uniform and in unilineal but under the influence of various factors it can take on different paths and eventually lead to a variety of results.

From a historical perspective, four main directions of identity development for Roma living in the Balkans can be summarized:

a) Internal community development. Roma, like any other people, are not static and unchangeable unit - neither as an ethno-social structure nor as ethno-cultural characteristics nor as identities. Upon arriving in Europe, Gypsies were already an heterogeneous internally segmented community. During the centuries and under influence of various factors among them flow constantly processes in different directions, velocity and frequency. These processes can be reduced to two main contradictory and correlated tendencies - segmentation and consolidation. On

one hand – a process of segmentation of the group into separate subgroup divisions formed according to family and/or territorial factors is running. On the other hand - the separate subgroup divisions are consolidating gradually into one group, or separate groups are consolidating into one metagroup community. And in both cases the new-formed communities are gradually accepting the dimensions of a new, unique group (Marushiakova and Popov, 2004:145-191).

A main scientific category, which is traditionally used by the Romani studies' scholars, is "the Gypsy Group" and respectively its subgroup divisions and metagroup units, which under different circumstances can take leading level in general structure of Roma identity. This means that in a certain life context (for example, among Roma who belong to one and the same group) the subgroup (or extended family) identity may be the leading one; in another situation (e.g. among Roma from different groups) leading will be the group identity, in a third situation (e.g. during encounters between Roma and non-Roma) leading may be the ethnic identity, etc (Marushiakova and Popov, 2001b:33-53).

In the present, the mosaic of the Roma communities in the Balkans is extremely rich and diverse. The historical development of their identities demonstrates high importance of the "external" factor, namely the influence of the majority society, to which the Roma belong, on the "internal" development of these communities. In the modern era, after the collapse of the old empires (Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian) and the emergence of the new ethno-nation states in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a new level of Roma identity was born (the identity of a Roma community within the respective ethno-nation) (Marushiakova and Popov 2001b:33-53). The same principle also applies to existing federalist states (namely former Yugoslavia), where identity is expressed in frames of the general supranational scheme. Moreover, this level of identity persists after the break-up of Yugoslavia, among the Roma in the new ethno-nation states, as well as among the Roma emigrants in Western Europe, where often self-definitions such as "Yugoslavian Roma" can be heard (Marushiakova and Popov, 2013:227-244)

In the last decades of the 20th century a new level of identity of the Roma community was born and developed - the global Roma identity. As a beginning of this process is considered the establishment of the International Romani Union in 1971 in London, although there are also some sporadic earlier manifestations of striving for global Roma identity. For International Romani Union, the concept of unity of all Roma in the world as a trans-border community is already the leading one. This however does not deny the belonging of individual Roma communities to the respective nations of countries where they are living (Kenrick, 2007: 293). One can find this point of view elaborated in the article of one of the most renowned

Roma leader at that time Slobodan Berberski "Ni sme cigani već nacija" from 1969, where the desire of Yugoslav Roma to obtain a national status according to country constitutional norms is clearly expressed (Acković, 2001:12-19), and was expressed by creation of the Roma Association (*Društvo Rom*) on 20th of April 1969, and building up numerous other Roma associations (cultural, sports, etc.). In the 1970s over 60 Roma organizations existed and their number was constantly on the increase (Acković, 2001:12-19). The concept of all-Roma unity with simultanous belonging to their respective nation-states was reinforced at the Fourth IRU Congress in Warsaw in 1990 which adopted the concept that the Roma are citizens of the countries in which they lived but had to seek nevertheless their own place in the future of united Europe (Marushiakova and Popov, 2005:433-455). Over time, however, the idea of the Roma as a "nation without a state" (proposed for the first time by a non-Roma, Paolo Pietrosanti) emerged and become the priority in the activities of the Romani Union following the Fifth Congress of the Union in Prague in 2000 (Acton and Klimova, 2001:157-226).

The attempts to obtain international recognition of the "Roma nation" however appeared unsuccessful, and after the accession of most of the countries in Eastern Europe to the European Union, the Romani international movement increasingly make use from the concept of the Roma as an "European minority". The debate "nation without a state" or an "European minority" however largely remains at an abstract theoretical level, limited to a narrow circle of Roma activists, without affecting the real identity structure within the Roma community (Marushiakova and Popov, 2005:433-455; Klimova-Alexander, 2005).

b) Development of the community as part of the respective nation. This is a relatively recent process related to the modern age. The first expressions of the struggle of the Gypsies for civil emancipation date from the times of the Ottoman Empire. In 1867, in the Bulgarian newspaper "Macedonia", published in Istanbul, appeared a "Letter to the Editor" signed by "One Egyptian" from Prilep. This letter reflects the aspirations of the Roma (or at least of some their representatives), following the example of the other Balkan peoples, to have the right to have their own church in which the services will be in their own language, and in the perspective to be able establish their own state (Marushiakova and Popov, 2017:33-36).

However, it is only in the first half of the 20th century that real development of these processes can be talked about in the context of the new ethno-national countries where the Roma aspire to become equal citizens in the new social realities. An expression of these aspirations is the Roma public campaign from the

beginning of the twentieth century in Bulgaria to obtain suffrage (Marushiakova and Popov, 2017:38-42). The striving for equality is, in fact, the main strategic goal of all Roma organizations that have been created during this period (the 1920s and 1930s) in the Balkans, documented in their statutes and publications.

The first historical source in this direction is a statute of officially registering a Roma public organisation, written in the town of Vidin in 1910. This was, in all likelihood, the first Roma civic organisation in the world. The published registration document, entitled *Statute of the Egyptian Nation in the Town of Vidin* (Ustav na Egiptyanskata narodnost, 2010). designates Roma as "Egyptians". In 1919 in Sofia an organisation was created named the *Sofia Common Moslem Educational and Cultural Mutual Aid Organisation "Istikbal – Future"*, which ceased its existence after 1923, and was restored on 7 May 1929 headed by famous Rom from Sofia, Shakir Pashov; till 1930 the organisation was joined by several Roma organisations of different kinds, e.g. mutual-aids, cultural, educational and sport. In 1931 Shakir Pashov himself headed the new association, named *Mohammedan National Enlightening Cultural Organisation,* and on behalf of the organisation started publishing a newspaper *Terbie* (Upbringing) (Marushiakova y Popov, 2015:197-199)

In Yugoslavia, *Prva srpsko-ciganska zadruga za uzajmno pomaganje u bolesti i smrti* (The First Serbian-Gypsy Association for Mutual Assistance in Sickness and Death), headed by Svetozar Simić, was inaugurated in 1927. In 1935, the *Udruženja Beogradskih cigana slavara Tetkice Bibije* (Association of Belgrade Gypsies for the Celebration of Aunt Bibia) was established. In 1930, the newspaper *Romano lil / Ciganske novine* (Roma Newspaper / Gypsy Newspaper) was published, while *Prosvetni klub Jugoslavske ciganske omladine* (The Educational Club of Yugoslavian Gypsy Youth), which grew into *Omladina Jugoslavo-ciganska* (Yugoslavian-Gypsy Youth), also took shape (Acković, 1994:43-59).

In Romania in 1933 were established *Asociatia Generala a Ţiganilor din Romania* (General Association of the Gypsies in Romania) and *Uniunii Generale a Romilor din Romănia* (General Union of the Roma in Romania); in the 1930s, the newspapers *O Rom* (*The Roma*), *Glasul Romilor* (*Voice of the Roma*), *Neamul Ţiganesc* (*Gypsy People*) и *Timpul* (Times) were published (Achim, 1998:127-132).

In Athens, the *Panhellenios Syllogos Ellinon Athinganon* (Panhellenic Cultural Association of the Greek Gypsies) was founded in 1939 (Liegeois, 1994:251-252).

All these Roma organizations were established independently of the state, as a rule were not supported by it, and often their main goals or actions were in controversy (more or less) with existing state policies. These social organizations of

Gypsies have become the heralds of the movement for civil emancipation of the Gypsies, paying attention at the same time to the safeguarding and development of the ethno-cultural traditions of the community. This development of the Gypsy movement demonstrates unambiguously that the actual objective was not to depersonalize the Gypsies as an ethnic community, but that the struggle was to be recognized as a fully-fledged part of the respective ethno-nations and be able to execute its rights (i.e. the two levels of identity, community and society, do not contradict, but on the contrary, complement and enrich one another). This is may be most clearly expressed in case of the Romanian Roma organisations, which strived for equality through demonstrations of loyalty, collaboration with political parties (Achim, 1998:127-132), and in the same time developed their Roma identity project. Already in the Constitutive Act of Statute and Regulations of General Union of Roma in Romania (*Uniunii Generale a Romilor din România*) is noted that the organization will be actively promoting that "our fellow citizens do not to call us *ţigani* (Gypsies), but *romi* (Roma) – our real name, meaning "human", who loves freedom" (Nastasă and Varga, 2001:118) and will act "for the improvement of our Roma people's fate, to be able to stay next to our co-nationals without being ashamed"[1].

The so-called "socialist era" exerted a particularly powerful impact on the processes of social integration and their imprint on the common structural identity of the Roma in Eastern Europe (starting from the period after the end of WWII and lasted until the 1990s). It won't be exaggerated to say that this period became a key factor in the development of Roma community in Eastern Europe. In spite of the circumstance that the attitudes of authorities towards organised Roma movement in different countries and different periods of time during the communist rule varied extensively, from support to ban, it was the entire social and political context in those countries that created number of opportunities and guaranteed for relative equal participation of Roma in public life and the development of their civil awareness (Marushiakova and Popov, 2015:5,21). The outcome of these processes for Roma in Eastern Europe in the envisaged period stands out clearly against the fate of their fellow brethren living in other parts of the world as regards the extent of social integration, which in this region is definitely greater.

That is why the awareness of belonging to a respective nation-state among Roma in Eastern Europe, is more pronounced (compared to the Roma in Western Europe or in other parts of the world) and occupies a central place in the general structure of their identity. It is no coincidence that Roma from the former

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[1] cf Viorel Achim. 'The Roma organizations and their relations with the Romanian politics in the 1930's'. Academia Romana, Nouvelles etudes d' histoire, XII, 2010, p. 89.

Yugoslavia often define themselves as "the last Yugoslavs", which reflects certain directions in the development of their identity (Marushiakova and Popov, 2013:227-244).

There is something else that has to be underlined in particular - these cases do not refer to a civil type of identity i.e. awareness of belonging to a civil type of nation, which of course is also present in Roma communities, but is not discussed here. In this case, it is rather about various levels of their ethnic identity. Roma from Eastern Europe both on the level of community and society are aware of themselves as "Roma" (in the former case as an ethnic community; in the latter - as an ethnic minority within the respective ethnic nation), and there are no significant controversies between the two identity levels.

c) Development of the preferred ethnic identity. The processes of the development of the identity in that direction are common among large segments of Roma communities in Eastern Europe that possess (or at least demonstrate in public) a different, "non-Roma" identity. These processes are in direct connection with the phenomenon of ethnic mimicry, i.e. cases where Roma declare publicly another non-Roma identity, preserving their Roma identity for use only in their environment. The reasons for these are the widespread negative attitudes and stereotypes regarding the Roma, and also the desire to avoid some discriminatory policies and practices. Over time, ethnic mimicry passes into preferred identity, i.e. Roma people begin to think about themselves (and experience themselves) as non-Roma.

The processes of development of preferred identity have their old historical roots also since the times of the Ottoman Empire. This is expressed in the frequently reciprocal correlation between religion and ethnic identity, which is often observed among the "Turkish Gypsies"; the term Turkish implies that they are Muslims and vice versa, and that is why large parts of Muslim Roma become Turkish-language speakers and declare themselves as ethnic Turks (Marushiakova and Popov, 2015:27-33).

The struggle for integration into the Turkish minority communities not only persist, but also expand and develop further among large segments of the Gypsy Muslims in the circumstances of the new ethno-national states in the Balkans in the 20th although the Turks are already a minority. It is not only due to the mixture of religious and ethnic, and the replacement of the former with the latter, but also because the Turkish minority has a more prestigious public image than the Roma - it is the heir of a great empire, with its own national state, whereas in the eyes of the macro-community the Roma are another type of community, on

lower standing and their social prestige is also much lower. This explains why the language change continued, at least in some regions (e.g. Northeastern Bulgaria), where for several generations large parts of the so-called "Turkish Gypsies" have changed their mother tongue from Romani to Turkish.

As a final outcome of these processes in Bulgaria today about one third of people with undoubted Roma origin are Turkish-mother tongue speakers and with preferred Turkish identity, in spite of their perception by their surrounding population as "Gypsies" (Marushiakova and Popov, 2006:179-189). Similar processes take place elsewhere in the Balkans. In Western Macedonia (as well in Skopje) there is a population that other Gypsies call mockingly *Yalâm agalari* (i.e. half-lords in Balkan Turkish, *yarım ağalar* in standard Turkish) in Balkan Turkish, who are largely Turkish-speaking and with preferred Turkish identity. Similar is the situation in Greece, where in Western Thrace live the so-called *Turko-gifti* (Turkish Egyptians), who are Turkish-speaking; some of them refer to themselves by the ethnically neutral category "Muslims", but another big part of them demonstrates Turkish identity (Zenkines, 1994:27-33).

In the conditions of the Ottoman Empire, the development of preferred identity can be directed not only towards the Turks, but also towards the subjugated local population living together with Roma, i.e. towards other Balkan peoples. These processes have apparently flowing for centuries, and now we can judge about them on base of their final results. A typical example of this are the so-called *Ђорговци*, who live in southern Serbia and Kosovo, and are Serbian-speaking and with preferred Serbian identity (Zlatanovic, 2006:133-151). Similar is the case with the Dzhorevtsi, who live in Central Western Bulgaria, who are Bulgarian-speaking and with preferred Bulgarian identity (Marushiakova and Popov, 1997:35-36). Both communities are perceived by their surrounding population as "Gypsies," including by other Roma groups, and are probably the descendants of an older Roma migration, settling in the Balkans probably even before the Ottoman invasions. Similar is the situation with the Greek-speaking Roma living in Greece (mainly in the Peloponnese), who call themselves *Gyftoi* (Egyptians), and large parts of them have a preferred Greek ethnic identity.

A specific case in themselves represent the Romanian-language speaking Gypsy communities who name themselves *Rudari/Ludari* in Bulgaria, Romania (Oltenia and Muntenia) and East Serbia, *Bâeši/Beaši/Bojaši/Bajaši* in Romania (Transylvania), Hungary, Slovakia and Croatia, *Karavlasi* in Bosnia, *Banjaši* in Serbia (Vojvodina), *Lingurari* in Romania (Moldova) and the Republic of Moldova (in Bulgaria *Ligurari* are a subdivision of the *Rudari/Ludari*) (Sikimić and Ašić, 2017:51-60). These communities resettled from the lands of present-day Romania

in the second half of the 19th c. - the first half of the 20th c., and their surrounding population perceives (and treats) them as "Gypsies". In the Balkans, their identities are quite diverse and vary between self-consciousness as a separate ethnic community; Gypsy or Roma identity, and often they may have also a preferred Vlach/Romanian identity. Their identity change is ongoing, as can be illustrated by a popular legend, which trace their origins from an ancient kingdom of the Dacians in the Balkans, after the defeat of which a part of the population crosses the Danube and laid the foundations of the Romanian people, while its true direct descendants remain in the Bulgarian lands, and that are the today's Rudari (Marushiakova and Popov, 2015:39-44; Marushiakova and Popov, 2017:51-60).

Nowadays there are flowing processes of changes in the direction of their preferred identity.

In Bulgaria, this is illustrated in the ideology of the political party named Democratic Movement *Rodolyubie* (love of one's kind), registered in 1998. According the Party chairman the term Rudari, originated from Bulgarian word *rod* (in meaning clan, family), because we came from "the first Proto-Bulgarian families living in these lands who settled there together with Khan Asparuh at the foundation of the Bulgarian state". Another Political Party called Rodolyubie 2000, established in 2001 according it statutes and electoral messages is "Party of Vlaxs-Rudari", i.e. in this case the preferred identity is a multidimensial and ethnically not very clear (Marushiakova and Popov, 2000:81-93).

d) Construction of a new identity. This trend in the development of Roma identities is in direct relation to the former. Preferred identities exist since centuries, and in the last few decades, in parts of the Balkan Roma they have reached their completed forms, i.e. full or almost full assimilation into preferred community. In many more cases, the communities preferred by the Roma are unwilling to accept them as their integral part, and thus Roma remain for generations in ambiguous situation of not willing be Roma anymore but not accepted by other ethnicities. The categorical refusal to accept Roma by the "others" can lead to new, third way of identity development, this is a search for and construction of a new, non-Roma identity.

In some cases, these trends remain at the level of potential future development as is in the case of Turkish-speaking Gypsies with preferred Turkish self-consciousness in Bulgaria who define themselves with the ethnically neutral designation Millet (i.e., people) or only with term Muslims.

In other cases, the processes of searching for a new identity are becoming more and more evolving, as is the case with the so-called Usta-Millet (in meaning

of people of blacksmiths masters) in Northeastern Bulgaria, who are currently creating on an oral, folkloric quasi-historical level their own historical narrative. According this narrative they are descendants of a blacksmiths' tribe from Afghanistan, who were the most famous weapons masters during the Ottoman Empire, who made the sword of the Prophet Mohammed.

Another variation of these quests of origin is observed among some representatives of Xoraxane Roma in the same region who consider themselves heirs of Arabs form the Koreysha clan who lived in Bulgaria in the 13th century (Marushiakova and Popov, 2000:81-93).

The development of processes in this direction can eventually lead to full change in community identity. At different places in Bulgaria today can be found Bulgarian-speaking communities, called by the surrounding population ironically "Asparuh's Bulgarians" after the name of Khan Asparuh, who was a ruler of Proto-Bulgarians in the second half of the 7th century and is credited with the establishment of the First Bulgarian Kingdom in 680/681. The most far reached the processes in this direction in the region of Stara Zagora, where they declare themselves to be descendants of the clan Dulo (ie the ruling dynasty in the creation of the Bulgarian state) who are calling the ethnic Bulgarians with term 'Slavs' (as opposition to themselves who consider themselves Proto-Bulgarians, and even there were attempts for the establishment of a mass organization (People's Democratic Movement "Khan Asparuh") (Marushiakova and Popov, 2015:35-36).

The processes of searching for new identities are usually based on existing historical data, which is freely interpreted (to put it mildly). For example, the small community of the "Madzhari" (i.e. Hungarians), who live in a dozen villages in the Pazardzhik region of Bulgaria, and their lifestyl(and ethno-cultural characteristics (including language) are hardly different from their surrounding Bulgarian population, are considered "Gypsies" by their surrounding population. Based on data drawn from historical publications, they declared themselves to be descendants of participants in the crusade of Hungarian King Andrew II, who passed on this land on his way back from Jerusalem in 1219 (Marushiakova and Popov, 2000:81-93).

Reaching the final stage in identity development and the building of own identity along with the corresponding shaping of own historical narrative is observed in the case of the mostly Albanian-speaking community of the Balkan Egyptians in the Republic of Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro. This community too has been perceived for centuries by their surrounding population as "Gypsies". The beginnings of their identity quest date back to the early 1970s in Ohrid (Macedonia), when they made the first attempts to gain the right of a single

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column of "Egyptians" in the population census of Yugoslavia. These processes catalysed and gain new dimensions in the general context of the breakup of Yugoslavia and the setting up the new states and nations. The establishment of the *Египќани* (Egyptian) Association in Ohrid in 1990 and other such associations in Kosovo and Serbia and Albania (the first one there was established in Korçë in 1992), and of the Balkan Union of the Egyptians in 1998 in Ohrid – all these are stages in the development of a new-constructing ethnic community (Marushiakova and Popov**,** 2001:465-477; Sigona, 2012:1213-1232; Lichnofsky, 2013:20-59). Moreover, this community gained its official legitimacy in the Republic of Kosovo, where its existence was reflected in the 2008 constitution, as well as in the law on the protection of national minorities in Albania, adopted in 2017. The explanations of the emergence of this new ethnic community varied, including some quite naive and burdened by geopolitical biases (e.g. claims that Milosevic's secret services are at its core (Dujzings, 1997:194-222). However, if processes are put in the context of the development of Roma identity in the Balkans, the processes of constructing the new community of Balkan Egyptians become much clearer and easier to understand.

Moreover, these processes are not unique, and other communities are already running along this road. The example of the Albanian-speaking Ashkali from Kosovo is indicative - in recent years, especially after Kosovo's independence, where their existence as a separate community was confirmed through their explicit inscription in the constitution of the new state, different naive quasi-historical versions of their new non-Roma origin, e.g. from the bible city of Ashkelon or from the city of Askale in Asia Minor. It is through these versions that the foundations for a future, non-Roma social construction is laid. This is supported by the fact that there have already appeared authors who adopt this contemporary historical folkloristic mythology as an authentic source from the oral history of the community, revealing the "truth" about its origins (Polansky, 2006:59-68).

4.- Conclusion.

The outlined main trends in the development of Roma identities in the Balkans are constantly intersecting, passing from one to another, and sometimes even going backwards.

An example of such a return to own "roots" can be found today, when under the influence of various factors, the development of a Roma non-governmental sector and the many programs and projects for the Roma, and to a much greater extent under the influence of the new Roma evangelical churches, a

large number of Turkish-speaking Roma Muslims return to their Roma identity and even revive their Romani language. The described trends in the development of Roma identity are influenced by a number of "external" factors related to the specific situation in the individual countries of the Balkans as well as by the common processes of pan-European integration and world globalization.

Therefore, the presented picture is not a final one and at this stage it is difficult to predict what specific dimensions the described processes will acquire in the near or farther future and how the development of the Roma identities will look like.

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