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## Representation and Visibility. Roma in the Media

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**Abstract:** This article is divided into three main parts. The first is an overview of the situation of the Roma minorities in Slovenia and Poland. The second part of the article presents minority broadcast media and the main elements of the legal and institutional framework they operate in. Finally, this article focuses on the visibility of Roma in the media. This article draws attention to cultural pluralism and how cultural pluralism is implemented by the public service broadcasters in Poland and Slovenia, particularly in the context of the presence of Roma minorities in the media. The research is based on 15 interviews carried out in Slovenia and Poland between 2006-2009 with journalists, editors, researchers, workers of NGOs, government representatives and Roma minority leaders. This study is also based on policy documents, reports of governments, NGOs and international organisations, academic literature and content analysis of Roma minority media.

**Keywords:** Roma minority, media pluralism, public service broadcasters, minority representation, Roma broadcasts

### Roma in Poland and Slovenia

In the case of the Romany people we are dealing with multiculturalism in more than one sense of the word. Firstly, they constitute the largest ethnic minority in Europe and in addition, there is the context of their “internal” cultural diversity (local, language, religious and occupational). The Romany people, therefore, constitute a very specific “multi-cultural” group. They are still dispersed, internally divided, isolated from others and often unwilling to integrate with other groups. They are a typical example of a “non-territorial” society, which does not have its own national territory (Łodziński, 2004: 20).

The Romani language is not the language of all the Romany people. It is a spoken, not a written language, therefore in many communities it is disappearing. It is worth remembering that for many years they were denied the opportunity to cultivate their language or culture in Poland and in Slovenia. As they are dispersed they admit that they seldom use the language of the whole community, more often tending to use local dialects. In recent years attempts have been made to codify the Romani language. A notable success for their activists regarding its recognition as

a non-territorial language was its addition to the European Charter of Regional and Minority Languages (Mirga & Gheorghe, 1998: 41).

In recent years the Romany people have done a lot in order to build their cultural identity. The International Romani Union (IRU), which is the official representative of the Roma in the whole world since 2007, has been in existence for 35 years. It has become a sort of political force, which lobbies for the rights of the Romany people. Milewski stresses that the IRU has set in motion a process which may be termed “nation-building”. The IRU has established a national anthem, a flag and special anniversaries (e.g., 8 April: International Romany Peoples’ Day; 2 August: the anniversary of the liquidation of the Gypsy section at Auschwitz). An attempt has also been made to standardise the Romani language (Milewski, 2006: 11). A number of associations, foundations and societies working for the Romany cause have also had some impact. Particularly in the countries of East-Central Europe, numerous support programmes, including government sponsored ones, have concentrated on the Romany people’s cause.

This is connected to a process of creating a new group of leaders and activists. These Roma leaders are drawing attention not only to the ethnic mobilisation of their group but also to a political mobilisation. Roma organisations and societies are being established and they represent the Roma people at a local, regional, national level and beyond. This is a new stage in the “awakening” in the social and group awareness of the Roma. Setting up new activists and representatives is of great importance in the process of articulating and defending one’s interests. However, as Mirga and Gheorghe have noted, the mobilisation of the Roma is a new phenomenon, which still needs time to develop (Mirga & Gheorghe, 1998: 76). According to Zoltan Barany, a Hungarian researcher of Romany matters, the improvement in the situation of the Romany people is less the result of pressure from the Romany people and more the pressure of international organisations on the governments of the countries in question.

Thus, the Romany people in Poland and Slovenia, as well as in many countries of East and Central Europe have become a legally recognised minority. In 1993, the Council of Europe recognised the Romany people as a “European minority” in the Resolution 1203. I use, as many researchers do, the term “ethnic minority”. However, I am aware of the fact that we can find different terms. Barany uses the term „transnational people” (Barany, 2002). Stanisław Stankiewicz, one of the most important leaders in the Romany community in Poland uses the term “transnational nation” (Nowicka, 2004: 10).

The Romany people are the largest ethnic minority in Europe numbering about 10 million (Baclijsa, Brezovsek, Hacek, 2008: 230). Two thirds of this group live in the countries of East and Central Europe (mainly the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary) and Southern Europe (Rumania, Bulgaria and the countries of former Yugoslavia). The Romany people themselves have problems in precisely defining their number. Firstly, during population censuses, they are unwilling to reveal their identity out of fear of persecution. Secondly, they do not have coherent sense of ethnicity both in terms of culture or awareness of community. Divisions stem from internal cultural differences. Thirdly, this problem is connected to the fact,

that in the past in many countries the Romany people were not treated as a separate ethnic minority, but defined rather as an ‘ethnic problem’. It was felt that as they did not have their own country, they do not constitute a significant social force and that they are not a partner for the state authorities (Łodziński, 2004: 20-22).

In this context, the purpose of this paper is to analyse the image of the Roma in the media in Poland and Slovenia, and their representation as transnational people in the media.

In Poland and in Slovenia the Romany communities are among the most recognisable ethnic minorities, because their behaviour, customs, lifestyle, appearance are usually different from the majority of the population. For example, research conducted by the CBOS research organisation, indicates that 41% of Poles listed the Roma among the national and ethnic groups who live in Poland (just behind the Germans and Ukrainians). At the same time, however, 59% of the respondents indicated a dislike for them, with only 14% indicating they liked them (CBOS, 2005, 2007).

A survey conducted by *Gazeta Wyborcza*, a Polish daily paper, indicated negative stereotypes of Romany people among the Poles. Respondents were asked who they would be unwilling to see as a prospective son-in-law or daughter-in-law. Over half of the respondents – 51%, indicated that they would be unhappy to see a Romany person in his role (just behind a same-sex partner, an ex-drug addict, a sobering alcoholic and an ex-convict) (Pacewicz, 2007: 2). Hence, the Romany people are somewhat like a “well-known stranger”. According to Anna Lubecka, “one may risk to venture the opinion that unknown strangers are less likely to fall prey to negative stereotypes and that it is easier for them to find their place in a new environment. Paradoxically, the Gipsy distinctiveness, partly known and partly unknown, often seen as a fascination with the lifestyle of this ethnic group, in the end always works against the Gipsies” (Lubecka, 2005: 66-67).

This is partly due to the way the Romany people are perceived in society. Their lifestyle in closed and separate groups is observed skeptically by Poles and Slovenes. These factors contribute towards a negative image of the Roma, with a perception that their income is dishonestly earned, and that they get away with illegal actions. Compared to the non-Roma citizens, this negative image leads to a worse treatment of the Romany people by officials, at work and at school. As a result, most of them live in difficult circumstances, often unemployed and most have not even completed primary education. Thus, the problem of a lack of education and the resulting high unemployment level is one that affects the Romany population. There are towns in Poland and Slovenia where almost 90% of the Roma population are unemployed (Soszka-Różycka, 2007, 2009). It is worth noting that often the Roma themselves are passive in seeking employment. Not all Roma children go to primary school in the respective age group (Soszka-Różycka, 2007, 2009).

## ***The Roma population in Poland***

According to the Census of Population from 2002 acknowledged minorities make up 1.3 per cent of the Polish population<sup>1</sup>.

The Law on national and ethnic minorities and regional languages recognises:

- nine national minorities: German, Russian, Belorussian, Lithuanian, Czech, Slovakian, Ukrainian, Jewish, Armenian,
- four ethnic minorities: Roma, Karaims, Lemko and Tatars,
- one language minority – Kashubian<sup>2</sup>

Many other ethnic communities do not have the status of an official minority. Examples of such groups are the Asian communities or the Greek minority in Poland. Thus, the actual size of minorities' population in Poland is about 3-4%.

The 2002 census in Poland showed that there are 12,855 people who define themselves as Roma, which constitutes 0.03% of the population. In addition, 3,000 people declared that they use the Romani language at home. Most of them (99%) are Polish citizens and live in urban areas (92.5%). The Romany population is dispersed around the country. The largest concentrations of the Roma live in the Małopolska, Lower Silesia and Silesia regions. The actual size of Roma population in Poland is unknown – some sources talk of about 35,000-40,000. In Poland the Roma population can be divided into four groups.

- Polish Roma: The largest group of Roma minority in Poland, although there are major fractions within this group into about a dozen sub-groups. Their ancestors came to Poland from Germany and many influences of the German language are noticeable in their dialect. They came to Poland in the 15th century.
- Carpathian Roma, or so-called Bergitka Roma: They came to Poland in the 15th century, mainly from Hungary, Slovakia and Wołoszczyzna.
- Lowarzy: They came to Poland from the territories that make up contemporary Romania and Hungary, in the 19th century. They engaged in horse trading and textiles.
- Kełderasze: They first came to Poland in the 1860s, mainly from Romania. Their main occupation was pot making.

The Roma are the only minority in Poland with a special programme, addressing only this population – “The Programme for the Roma Community”<sup>3</sup>. It aims to improve the lives of the Roma and to bridge the gap separating them from the rest of society. It covers different spheres of life, including health care, living

<sup>1</sup> Census of Population, in: [www.stat.gov.pl/gus](http://www.stat.gov.pl/gus).

<sup>2</sup> Official Journal *Dziennik Ustaw* 2005, No. 17, item 141.

<sup>3</sup> In 2001, the ‘Government Pilot Programme for the Roma Community in the Małopolska region for 2001-2003’ was started. From 2004, the Programme for the Roma Community was extended to cover the whole country.

conditions, education and combating unemployment. The most important element of this programme is education. Another aim of this programme is to widen knowledge about the Roma providing undertakings in the cultural sphere in order to maintain and reinforce the cultural identity of their community. The basic idea of this programme is to integrate but not to assimilate this minority.

The media are not directly involved in the programme but are often an important partner in its implementation. This involvement of the press and electronic media is visible, but in my opinion insufficient. Within the context of this programme, the Roma are to get to know their civic rights and duties, which they are entitled to as an ethnic minority. This programme can be described as a form of positive discrimination of this minority. Such examples of positive discrimination can also be found in Slovenia, where this group has also been recognised as an ethnic minority. In particular, discrimination is visible regarding the case of Roma's participation at the local level. Changes to the legislation have granted this minority the possibility to elect their own representatives in the municipal councils of municipalities with a larger number of Roma inhabitants. In each of these municipal councils, there is a minimum of one Roma councilor (Baclija, Brezovsek & Hacek, 2008: 232).

### ***The Roma population in Slovenia***

According to the 2002 census, the total population in Slovenia is 1,964,036. 83.1% of the population of Slovenia declared themselves as Slovenians, 1.8% as Serbs (35,642), 1.6% Croats (32,189), 0.4% as Bosniacs (8,062), 1.1% as Bosnians (21,542), 0.3% as Hungarians (6,243), 0.3% as Albanians (6,186), 0.2% Macedonians (3,972), 0.2% as Romany (3,624), 0.1% as Montenegrins (2,667) and 0.1% as Italians (2,258)<sup>4</sup>.

But the actual size of Roma population in Slovenia is also unknown. Between 7,000 and 10,000 members of the Roma ethnic community are estimated to live in Slovenia (Baclija, Brezovsek & Hacek, 2008: 230). Most of them live in two areas of Slovenia. The Roma who live in the Prekmurje region (north-east Slovenia) came from Hungary, while the ancestors of the Roma who live in the Dolenjska region (southern Slovenia) came from Croatia or other ex-Yugoslav countries and a small group of Sinti came from Austria.

In the constitution of the Republic of Slovenia the Italian and Hungarian communities are recognised as indigenous national minorities (Article 64). In the constitution, special attention is also paid to the Romany community as ethnic minority. Article 65 states: "The status and special rights of the Romany community living in Slovenia shall be regulated by law"<sup>5</sup>. The so-called "new

<sup>4</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, Census of Population, [www.stat.si/popis2002/gradivo/si-92.pdf](http://www.stat.si/popis2002/gradivo/si-92.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> The Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia, [www.dz-rs.si](http://www.dz-rs.si). The Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia was adopted and entered into force on 25 June 1991 (Official Gazette RS Nos. 33/91-1) and the amendments were adopted in 1997, 2000, 2003, 2004 and 2006 (Official Gazette RS Nos. 42/97, 66/2000, 24/03, 69/04, 68/06). Art 64: "The autochthonous Italian and Hungarian national communities and their members shall be guaranteed the right to use their national

minorities” – namely groups from former Yugoslavia – do not have the status of an official minority.

### **Roma in the media: self-representation as transnational people**

The Broadcasting Act in Poland contains the requirement that public broadcasters “take into account the needs of national and ethnic minorities and those of communities, which use a regional language, including the broadcasting of programmes in the languages of national, ethnic minorities and those regional languages”<sup>6</sup>. The right of access to the media was also included in the law on national and ethnic minorities and regional language.

TVP (Polish Public Service Television) broadcasts regular, cyclical and special programmes for and about the ethnic minorities in Poland. Most of these programmes are broadcast in regional centers of TVP. The national and ethnic groups in Poland have no separate channels<sup>7</sup>.

The Roma still have problems getting full access to the media both in Poland and Slovenia. In particular, there is a shortage of Roma journalists, publishers and

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symbols freely and, in order to preserve their national identity, the right to establish organisations and develop economic, cultural, scientific, and research activities, as well as activities in the field of public media and publishing. In accordance with laws, these two national communities and their members have the right to education and schooling in their own languages, as well as the right to establish and develop such education and schooling. The geographic areas in which bilingual schools are compulsory shall be established by law. These national communities and their members shall be guaranteed the right to foster relations with their nations of origin and their respective countries. The state shall provide material and moral support for the exercise of these rights. In order to exercise their rights, the members of these communities shall establish their own self-governing communities in the geographic areas where they live. On the proposal of these self-governing national communities, the state may authorise them to perform certain functions under national jurisdiction, and shall provide funds for the performing of such functions. The two national communities shall be directly represented in representative bodies of local self-government and in the National Assembly.

The position of the Italian and Hungarian national communities and the manner in which their rights are exercised in the geographic areas where they live, the obligations of the self-governing local communities for the exercise of these rights, and those rights which the members of these national communities exercise also outside these areas, shall all be regulated by law. The rights of both national communities and their members shall be guaranteed irrespective of the number of members of these communities.

Laws, regulations, and other general legal acts that concern the exercise of the constitutionally provided rights and the position of the national communities exclusively, may not be adopted without the consent of representatives of these national communities.

<sup>6</sup> The Broadcasting Act, Official Journal *Dziennik Ustaw* 2004, No. 253, item 2531.

<sup>7</sup> When we speak of programmes for national and ethnic minorities on the public service media in Poland, we speak of two categories of programmes. The first are broadcast in the language of the given group and the second in Polish, but deal with subjects of national and ethnic minorities. The first category of programmes is covered by certain clauses of the Broadcasting Act, which make provision for the needs of national and ethnic minorities and the broadcasting of programmes in their languages. These programmes are to protect and help maintain the cultural identity of these communities. The second very significant category of programmes is aimed at the majority and is meant to help build a civil society and to sensitize the majority to the needs of the minorities. Unfortunately, many years after the transformation in Poland, it has not been possible to create a single model of programmes for the minorities in their language neither on television nor in the radio. When using the term ‘model’ I have in mind a structure of financing, journalistic structure and a formula for the programmes.

camera operators.

On Polish public TV – on programmes broadcast nationwide – the Roma have no permanent programmes. Regional centers of TVP produce programmes on Roma issues with the Roma participating. It must be stressed, however, that only one centre, TVP Białystok, broadcasts programmes about the Roma. In Białystok a 7-minute programme entitled *We, the Roma* is produced and broadcast once a month in Polish language. The Union of Polish Roma also has a weekly radio magazine and news programme broadcast on Radio Koszalin (regional centre of Public Service Broadcasting Radio).

Sporadically, the Roma are also the subject of reports broadcast on public radio and television. An example of such a programme is a report by Anna Łoś from Polskie Radio Kraków, entitled *Mahrimeo – an unusual story*, broadcast as part of a cycle of programmes on Polish Radio III. The heroine is a Roma, whose name is Elżbieta, who, highly unusually for a Roma, is a nurse. The author of the report talked, with remarkable openness about her childhood, education and difficulties she faces in connection with her job. This programme aroused considerable interest among listeners.

The Roma community in Poland has no own TV or radio station. They publish their own magazines, but I would like to stress that access to the public media provides access to a wider audience, not only to a minority audience. Their own publications are a very important element in shaping the ethnic identity of the Roma but are of greater importance within the community itself. The public broadcaster, in fulfilling its public service remit, must draw attention not only to the political but also to the cultural variety in society.

The case of Roma in the Polish media shows that we have a new form of marginalisation, so-called media and information marginalisation (Dyczewski, 2007: 37).

In Slovenia, RTV (Radio Television Slovenia) broadcasts two national TV and three national radio channels. Radio and TV programmes are produced also from the regional centres Koper/Capodistria, Maribor and Lendava. The Public Service Broadcaster in Slovenia (RTV) prepares regular radio broadcast for the Roma ethnic community since 2007 and television programme since 2008. This development had been eagerly awaited by the Roma community in Slovenia. In 2007, RTV organised empowerment workshops to select Roma candidates for journalists and operators. A dozen representatives of the Roma community took part in the project. They were trained in radio and TV journalism for six months (Nahtigal, 2007).<sup>8</sup>

Miha Lampreht, director of Radio Programmes in RTV and coordinator of the Roma Project, noted that the Roma population who lives in Slovenia uses different languages and has different traditions. “But at the beginning of this project we certainly did not want to make a ghettoised programme, restricted to recipients

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<sup>8</sup>The duty to implement such measures was placed on public broadcasters by the Media Act amended in 2005.

limited to the Roma community” (Lamprecht, 2007). Finally, in addition to this workshop, the First Radio Programm in Slovenia started to broadcast the Romany programme *Naše Poti/Amare Droma* once a week in December 2007. This programme is produced by Roma people in cooperation with Slovenians, mainly in the Slovenian language. Since 2008, RTV also broadcasts the television programme *So vakeres?/Kaj govoriš?* twice a month. It is also produced in a cooperation of Roma and Slovenians and features four different dialects of Roma used in Slovenia (Sandreli, 2009).

There are also several radio and television broadcasts for the Roma community in Slovenia, but they are mostly broadcast by local studios only in areas populated by Roma. The local radio stations *Murski Val* in Murska Sobota and *Studio D* in Novo Mesto have for many years produced broadcasts in both the Slovene and Romani languages. The programmes mainly focus on current information about the life and work of the Roma, report on culture, sports and other events, including lots of Roma music and original texts by the Roma. Both radio programmes get financial support from the Slovenian Government Office for National Minorities (Baluh, 2007). The television broadcasts for the Roma community in Murska Sobota and Novo Mesto are produced by two local television stations (Žagar, Komac, Medešek & Bešter, 2006: 147-148)<sup>9</sup>. In 2003, the Union of the Roma of Slovenia established the Roma Information Centre (ROMIC)<sup>10</sup> - a documentation centre, which combines a library and radio production facilities. At the moment, *Radio Romic* produces and offers programmes to several radio stations in Slovenia (Petković, 2007: 120).

Despite these developments, there seems to be a lack of participation by the Roma themselves. Sometimes financial and organisational difficulties are the factors which lead to a very limited level of activity by the Roma in the media. It must not be forgotten that financial problems and a lack of education mean that the Roma can not invest in their own media. Furthermore, it is difficult to find private investors who are interested in this particular ethnic group. Thus, foundations, social institutions and NGOs often help. In the countries of East and Central Europe most programmes for the Roma are produced in the language of the majority and not in the language of the Roma. This is the result of the great variations in the language of the Roma or due to the fact that they do not speak it at all any more. Thus, some broadcasters produce bilingual programmes, which are addressed to different groups of recipients. The Roma are also not very active in the private media. Hence, an initiative by one of the private stations is all the more interesting (Gross, 2006).

### ***Case Study: To be a Roma***

In 2007, a regional commercial station, *TV Tede* in Wrocław (Lower Silesia) in Poland, received financial support within The Programme for the Romany

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<sup>9</sup> Programmes about Roma and for Roma are produced also by several more ‘open-minded’ radio stations such as Radio Marš (Maribor’s student radio).

<sup>10</sup> See also: [www.romic.si](http://www.romic.si).



Community to produce a cycle of 12 ten-minute parts of a programme titled '*To be a Roma*'<sup>11</sup>. The programme had a regular slot on prime-time and was re-broadcast a number of times. The participants in the programme were people who had been active in the Roma community for many years, and were aware of its problems, and, most importantly, its culture, tradition and history. Most of the parts of the programme were devoted to problems connected with education. The programme featured teachers and headmasters who knew the Roma community well and enjoy a good relationship with the Roma. Most of them were fascinated by this community and, most importantly, their commitment for Roma children exceeded the job-related duties. The opinions articulated in the programme were based on academic knowledge, but also on daily contacts within the classroom and beyond. In the programme, the "difference" of teaching Roma children was not presented as a "social problem". On the contrary, the teachers who appeared in this programme confirmed unanimously that they constantly had to face the need to change the children's attitude to school. One teacher explained that 'these children do not have the same point of reference as other pupils do. They can't say my father who is a doctor or my uncle who is an engineer.' As a result, the teachers face a constant struggle to encourage the Roma students to continue their education beyond the primary level, take matriculation exams and go on to university. However, both the teachers and their Roma teaching assistants, who appeared on the programme, drew attention to a changing attitude of the parents who are increasingly aware of the benefits of their children's education. Unfortunately, Roma children still have lower grades. Thus, the Roma teaching assistants may be particularly helpful.

The participants of the programme also raised the question of pre-school education. In the Roma tradition, the mother cares for the children and, particularly in small towns, it is unthinkable for them to send children to nursery school. This can be seen as a negative influence on the degree of integration of Roma children in society.

Apart from the question of education the programmes touched on the subject of the media image of the Roma, their culture, the first Roma comic book and the extermination attempts of the Roma during World War II. The variety of subjects presented drew the attention of different age groups. During the discussion on the comic book, the problem of the different languages and dialects used by Roma came to the fore. Their first comic book dealt with the history of Poland and was translated into the languages of the two largest Roma communities living in Poland - Polska Roma and Bergitka Roma. The subject of the comic book was not chosen by coincidence. Those behind the idea wanted Roma children to become familiar with the history of the country they live in. It can also be viewed as a teaching tool. Robert Bladycz, who translated the comic into Bergitka Roma, drew attention to the fact that the comic book and the language used should serve to reinforce the Roma identity and the integration of the community. Bladycz indicated that many children use Romani heavily laced with Polish or even do not

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<sup>11</sup> This research is based on content analysis of the programme and 9 interviews carried out in Wrocław in May 2007.

speak Romani at all. The comic book was translated and designed in cooperation with the Roma organisations.

In the part of the programme devoted to Roma culture, it was possible to show them in a way that most of the audience was less familiar with. Contemporary Roma culture – as was presented in the show – went beyond the traditional and featured new areas such as poetry or sculpture. While this presentation tries to change the perception of Roma in the society, it is also connected to a form of “awakening” of the community<sup>12</sup> (Bladycz, 2008).

Analysis of *To be a Roma* confirms what Anna Lubecka writes in her book, claiming that the hitherto silent minorities want to be noticed and heard. Moreover, they want to talk about their own affairs. Communities – to be able to talk about themselves – they first have to discover their own identity and learn how to communicate it to others. “Silent minorities” always differed in their culture in terms of ethnicity, gender or occupation. They were pushed out to the margins of society, formed ghettos and were isolated from mainstream society. However, research has shown that in the last few years, certain barriers have been broken and a lack of confidence among minorities has vanished enabling these groups to mark their presence within the majority (Lubecka, 2004: 72-74). As Roman Dzwonkowski claims, the political processes, which were meant to lead to a gradual disappearance of ethnic differences have led to an opposite effect, i.e. a greater level of activity among ethnic minorities. What is noticeable is an increased level of activity amongst the Roma, which are becoming a real pressure group within the state (Dzwonkowski, 2005: 13).

### ***Transnational people in cyberspace***

The internet is beginning to play a significant role in the awakening of the Roma. Firstly, the internet can be used to build a shared identity of the Roma population in Europe. Secondly, the internet provides the opportunity to introduce the Roma to the international public arena. Certainly the biggest group of users are the Roma who live in Western Europe. Many Roma organisations and societies in Central Europe are increasingly aware of the need to use the internet.

Manuel Castells says that, “although the media have indeed become globalised, and programmes circulate on the global web, we do not live in a global village, but in huts adapted to the tastes of particular clients, produced globally and distributed locally” (Castells, 2008: 348). These virtual communities may have a lot in common with imagined communities. The former are established on the basis of common interests or ideas but, at the same time, can have little in common with real communities. At the same time, as Castells writes, they can serve to strengthen real social groups. I also refer to the concept of imagined communities described by Benedict Anderson: “The members of even smallest nations will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of

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<sup>12</sup> The term awakening indicates the enforcement of the understanding among the Roma that they have to be active protagonists of their culture

them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their community” (Anderson, 1997: 6). This process of social imagining is mainly implemented via the media and the education system. These imagined communities can create and participate in virtual communities, which can strengthen their identity (Castells, 2008: 362-369).

The internet has been used by many Roma leaders to shape the identity of this community. It is also meant to be the first step to make the Roma question the subject of a European debate. The internet has played a special role in the intensification of communication between different Roma groupings. The web plays a significant role in their strategy of civic mobilisation, hence they have labeled themselves a “virtual nation”. The internet is therefore seen increasingly as the adequate instrument of a community as varied and dispersed as the Roma.

Thus, this virtual nation is conducting a diplomatic and public relations campaign via the internet. The Roma on the internet use both the language of the country they live in and English (Witkowski, 2008: 125-127). The Roma who meet on the internet are forming imagined communities. For example the analysis of 12 websites in Poland and Slovenia has shown that the sites are dominated by information about the given Roma community, its culture, customs and organisation.

Generally, nations thrive in cyberspace, and the internet has become a key technology for keeping nations and other communities together. Nations which have lost their territory or nations which are for political reasons dispersed or nations with large temporary diasporas overseas, appear in many forms on the internet – from online newspapers to semi-official information sites and “virtual community” homepages. Typically, the internet is used to strengthen, rather than weaken national identities (Eriksen 2006: 1).

Voices critical of the activity of the Roma on the internet are also beginning to surface. These voices claim that, paradoxically, the internet is bringing to the fore new divisions among the Roma. This criticism stems from the fact that the Roma have unequal access to the internet with only a small group using it regularly.

### **Media image as a part of a broader marginalisation of Roma in both societies**

Unfortunately, the Roma are still presented in the media almost always in connection with problems – journalists use such expressions as “Romani issues” or “Romani problems”. The media are not interested in their difficulties unless they turn into a conflict that also threatens to affect the majority population. The media concentrate on particular ‘negative traits’ of the Roma, for example cultural differences, deviation and the apparent threat they pose to the majority population (Erjavec, Hrvatin & Kelbl, 2000; Nahtigal, 2009). Petković pointed out that in public debates about the Roma in the media, “handy (racist) arguments imputing a specific (criminalised) cultural pattern and the (innate) social inferiority of the Roma people appear time after time” (Petković et al., 2006: 148). Using

generalisation and stereotyping, Roma people are presented as culturally different (they are lazy and rely on social aid), deviant (stealing is presumably their inherent trait), and as being a threat to our cultural pattern and in turn to the majority population. Roma only rarely appear in the media as individuals. Petković et al., who analysed a parliamentary debate about elections of Roma representatives, found that the Roma voice was increasingly present in the media. They noted that this was a new and positive aspect of the debate about Roma identity in Slovenia, but they also pointed out that “journalistic practices and discourses that discriminate, criminalise and proclaim the Roma people as second-class citizens in a racially stereotypical way also persist in the expected places” (Petković et al., 2006: 148).

I would like to draw attention to another problem. Although, there are some media activities of the Roma as has been described above, the Romany people are not visible enough, because they often are not recognised in the mainstream media. They rarely get a chance to express their opinions in the media apart from the special programmes dedicated to minorities. “Even when topics linked with ethnic minorities are being discussed, the mainstream media usually rely on ‘official’ sources. The consequence of such a journalistic approach is a general lack of access to public discourse, which is an important factor of social power” (Žagar et al., 2006: 147-148; Nahtigal, 2009). Furthermore, prejudice and stereotypes, which can be found in the media are often a result of personal opinions of individual journalists. Some are not even aware of them, others are not willing to admit them.

In Poland, the media use a certain framework and certain stereotypical frameworks to present Romany groups:

1. The framework of conflict
2. The cultural framework (folklore)
3. The social framework (community)

An analysis of press publications and TV programmes in 2007-2009 shows that the framework of conflict is being used less. Earlier, the Roma had been presented as a fractious community unable to reach agreement with the majority in society. Information about conflicts within the community, with neighbours and hostility towards the Roma prevails. Journalists reported in detail the problems of the characteristic ‘difficult Roma neighbours’. It was clear how, in this context, very strong negative stereotypes surfaced. Currently the stereotypes of a folkloristic and a social framework prevail. As a consequence, we usually see the Roma as singers, dancers with their costumes and festivals. At the same time, they also appear as people who have problems with work, accommodation, stretching their hands out for benefits and allowances. According to content analysis, the dominant framework within which the Roma are presented is the social one. There is, however, a positive aspect to this as people become aware of the problems faced by the Roma. In observing a change in the attitudes of some journalists, who no longer see the Roma as a source of “cheap sensationalism” one can see that they

are trying to support this community. This undoubtedly stems from greater knowledge about the Roma and a change in the stance of the Roma themselves.

Unfortunately and despite many changes, there are still different forms of discrimination of the Roma. In some publications we can even speak of “hate speech” towards the Roma. Mirga wrote that “the language that the authorities use in making public statements in cases of violence against the Roma is usually ambiguous and sometimes biased against them. Usually the decisive role is played by the majority media, which reinforce stereotypes and prejudices, and which also stoke up fear, mistrust and hostility towards the Roma. They justify the collective violence and accuse the victims” (Mirga & Gheorghe, 1998: 65).

In 2007, the Helsinki Human Rights Foundation drew attention to one additional ‘language’ problem: The publication of ethnic origins of accused persons in the media. This happened after an article in *Gazeta Wyborcza* and a magazine called *Uwaga* (Attention) on the TVN TV station reported about a Roma gang recruiting Poles for work in Sweden. While it did not want to trivialise the undoubtedly serious problem raised in the article and the TV programme, the Helsinki Human Rights Foundation argued that giving information about someone’s ethnic or national origin was a very sensitive issue because the label is connected with a particular stereotype. The publication of ethnic origins can reinforce this stereotype.

Finally, I would like to draw attention to the final report of the project “Training and education for combating discrimination in Slovenia”, which was published in 2006. This report presents the views and opinions of the representatives of ethnic minorities in Slovenia (both recognised and unrecognised minorities in the Slovenian Constitution).<sup>13</sup> All representatives of the minorities agreed that discrimination in Slovenia does exist in various areas, for example related to employment or to the media. However, the unrecognised minorities experience the difficulties in a different way than the constitutionally recognised ones. According to them, the accessibility to the respective native-language-media differs for the particular minorities as well. Although some have access to daily papers or foreign TV stations, all constitutionally unrecognised minorities miss special emissions on the public TV Slovenia designed for them (Klenovšek, 2006).

And finally, in writing about the image of the Roma in the media it is impossible to leave the question of labeling, which gives rise to a lot of misunderstandings. In a number of countries, including Poland and Slovenia some Roma organisations ask not to be called Gipsies as they feel this has negative connotations. Jerzy Bralczyk from Warsaw University claims that it is not the word itself but its connotation that is important: “When we change a word we are admitting defect. We are also admitting that the word carries the negative luggage. Therefore the word ‘Gipsy’

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<sup>13</sup> The representatives of ethnic minorities took part in the seminar in Rogaška Slatina on the 13th and 14th of May and on the 1st and 2nd of July in 2006. 27 representatives of the following minorities took part in the interviews: 5 representatives of the Serbian minority, 1 of the Montenegro minority, 4 of the Bosnian minority, 1 of the Albanian minority, 2 of the Croatian minority, 2 of the Macedonian minority, 2 of the German minority, 6 of the Hungarian minority and 2 of the Roma minority.

should be saved but attention drawn to all sort of positive associations, to talk of Gipsy culture, Gipsy language, Gipsy melodies and Gipsy customs thus equipping the word with as many positive elements as possible” (Bralczyk, 2008: 133-134).<sup>14</sup>

## Conclusion

According to Charles Husband, minority media play three very important functions. Firstly, that's the access to information, secondly, through their own media minorities can have access to a broad range of debates and interpretations of information, so that they will be able to convey their opinion. And finally, their own media provides them with the capacity to recognise themselves and their aspirations in the range of representations offered in mainstream media (Husband, 1994: 6).

In this context it is really necessary to support the concept of responsible journalism, which should reflect the diversity of societies. According to Milica Pesić from the Media Diversity Institute, „inclusive journalism contributes to build bridges between mainstream and minority communities. It strengthens the minorities' feeling of belonging and strengthens unity, which are two important principals of a stable and open society” (Pesić, 2007: 154).

The Romany people in Poland and in Slovenia constitute a very specific “multi-cultural” group. They are still dispersed, internally divided, isolated from others and often unwilling to integrate with other groups. The Romani language is not the language of all the Romany people in these two countries. They use very different local dialects and they speak Polish or Slovenian respectively. In Poland and in Slovenia, the Romany communities are among the most recognisable ethnic groups.

In both countries, Poland and Slovenia, the governments, NGOs, minority organisations and the media have developed examples of good policies and practices which aim to contribute to media integration of minorities: better access of minorities to media, better representation of minorities in the media, and abolition of discriminatory media reporting about minorities.

Nevertheless, the Roma still have problems getting full access to the media both in Poland and Slovenia. Most of all, there is a shortage of Roma journalists, publishers and camera operators. But there is a difference between both countries regarding the access to the media. On Polish public TV (TVP) and public Radio (PR), the Roma have no permanent programmes among those broadcast nationwide. The Roma community in Poland has no own TV or radio station. On the other hand, the Public Service Broadcaster in Slovenia (RTV) prepares regular

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<sup>14</sup> Jerzy Bralczyk quoted in: Rozmowa z prof. Bralczykiem (2008). in: Weigl B., Formanowicz M. (eds.) Romowie 2007. Od edukacji młodego pokolenia do obrazu w polskich mediach, Warszawa: Academica SWPS, pp. 133-134.

radio broadcasts for the Roma ethnic community as well as a television programme. There are also several radio and television broadcasts for the Roma ethnic community in Slovenia on the local level. Some broadcasters produce bilingual programmes. However, it is noticeable in both countries that there is a lack of public participation by the Roma themselves. It must not be forgotten that financial problems and a lack of education means that the Roma can not invest in their own media. It is also difficult to find private investors who are interested to cooperate with the Roma minority. Here is where foundations, societies and NGOs often help.

A new opportunity to generate participation is the internet, which has been used by many Roma leaders trying to shape the identity of the community. The Roma space on the internet enables the forming of imagined communities. But paradoxically, the internet is introducing new divisions among the Roma because of their unequal access to the internet.

Notwithstanding these developments of self representation, research shows that the Roma are still presented in the media almost always in connection with problems – journalists use such expressions as “Romani issues” or “Romani problems”. The media concentrate on particular “negative traits” of the Roma. Thus, on a more abstract level, in Slovenia and in Poland there is a need to discuss multiculturalism, which should be integrated in many other systems, for example in the political and social spheres. This process includes the problem of minorities’ access to the media as well as the question of their representation in the public sphere. This discussion is strongly connected with aspects of cultural pluralism in the media.

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