

**Interethnic Conflict and Violence in Contemporary Hungary:  
Context and Morphology of Violent Incidents Between Roma and Non-Roma**

By

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## **Introduction**

The focus of this thesis is a newly emerged, yet crucial social phenomenon. I am intrigued not only to take a closer look at it, but to examine it from different aspects – that is, the increasing tension, threatening with or accompanied by violence, between mainstream Hungarian society and the Roma minority, the latter facing various disadvantages that appear to be rather prone to different attempts aimed at eliminating them.

As a background of recent cases of violence against Roma, some level of inter-ethnic tension has been perceivable during the last two decades, and the deterioration of the relationship between Roma and the majority population was observed by the mid-nineties by international minority-protection monitors. However, the emergence of physical violence is a worrisome development in interethnic relations in Hungary. In the last two-three years – in different parts of Hungary – a series of violent incidents became public which were confirmed as "ethnically motivated" by the annual reports of the Parliamentary Commissioner for National and Ethnic Minority Rights, and were also the focus of academic surveys.

The first part of my thesis provides a comprehensive overview of the context of current interethnic tensions, on the one hand by describing to the socio-economic situation of the Roma in Hungary, the relevant legal framework (concerning both minority protection and equal treatment), targeted policies, socio-psychological aspects and the political climate; on the other hand, by attempting to enumerate the main fields where the Roma suffer from disadvantages (e.g. the labour market, housing, education) and the most salient forms of abuse against the Roma (e.g. police abuse, violations of reproductive health rights, violent attacks directed against Roma individuals).

As concerns the situation of the Roma in Hungarian society, an allegorical approach might shed some light on it, presented in Ernest Gellner' outstanding book, *Nations and*

*Nationalism*<sup>1</sup>. In the chapter on "Social Entropy and Equality in Industrial Societies", the author invites the reader to imagine a society with a certain number of individuals who are pigmentationally blue, and suppose that – for a reason or another – most of them stubbornly persist in occupying places near the bottom of the social scale in that society. Blueness might be considered as a 'social-entropy-resistant' trait: because of that ineradicable condition, whatever their personal merit, the 'blues' are treated as dirty, lazy and ignorant, as these traits are associated with the occupancy of lower positions in they society. Knowing the current situation of the Roma in Hungary, there is reason to consider Gellner's observations, since despite attempts aimed at improving the situation of the Roma, despite various anti-discrimination and minority protection legislation, the social integration of the Roma is as of yet far from resolved.

The research question of the thesis is related to a supposedly important factor of the current interethnic situation in Hungary, namely to the paramilitary, proto-fascist formation, the Hungarian Guard – established in 2007 –, as my interest lies in the consequences of power demonstrating forces' direct occurrence, affecting local interethnic tensions and conflict situations. My thesis statement is that *even the passive involvement of an external, possibly violent force may modify the power balance in a dangerous way – or at least, result in a hard-to-heal damage –, in terms of the opportunities of the community to ease the tension, to handle the conflict(s), to prevent further violent incidents, and to find a peaceful compromise, aimed at sustainable interethnic cohabitation .*

In order to test this hypothesis, I identified two rural settlements in Hungary – both venues characterized by interethnic tensions and conflicts, resulting in personal injury or the direct threat of violence –, with the aim of comparing a place where the Hungarian Guard has already shown up, with another place (and community), which has not yet experienced the

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<sup>1</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983).

direct involvement of the Hungarian Guard. My main aim was to investigate whether the quality of discourse, the type of accounts of conflict, and the sorts of social compromises that are proposed vary from one place to the other.

The chosen venues – Nagybörzsöny and Verőce – are in Pest County (in the central region of Hungary, not far from the capital city, Budapest), and a common feature is that both municipalities participated recently in a state-funded crime prevention program, co-ordinated by the Crime Prevention Committee of the Hungarian Ministry of Justice and Law Enforcement, aimed at diminishing tensions and tackling criminality by using the method of mediation. Both proposals, submitted jointly by the municipalities and NGOs, indicated 'ethnic tensions' or 'ethnic conflicts' in the first place on the list of worrisome features characterizing the settlement's life.

As regards explicit interethnic conflicts, a violent incident (fierce fighting between Roma and non-Roma men involving weapon-like tools like baseball sticks) took place in Verőce in December 2008 – a few months prior to the crime prevention program – resulting in serious personal injuries (and a still ongoing law enforcement case), and was followed by a threat against a Roma family by unidentified outsiders. Verőce was chosen in part because it exhibited two main possibly relevant conditions: on the one hand, Verőce is the venue of the annual 'Hungarian Island'<sup>2</sup> event (which is a rightist-nationalist alternative of the mainstream music and cultural festival 'Island'<sup>3</sup>, which is held annually in Budapest), and on the other hand, the Hungarian Guard organized an excursion to the village in March 2009, during the implementation of the crime prevention program.

Concerning the other venue, Nagybörzsöny, salient criminality rates were reported, including mainly burglaries, but for example blackmailing as well, frequent (minor) violent

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<sup>2</sup> Magyar Sziget.

<sup>3</sup> Sziget.

conflicts among the members of the Roma community, and extreme tensions between the Roma and non-Roma inhabitants, without actual outbursts as of yet, but manifested in dangerous, almost violent face-to-face scenes. However, the Hungarian Guard – or other external forces aside from friends and relatives from neighboring villages – had not been involved yet, until now.

In the detailed description of the two case studies of the second part of the thesis – after presenting a brief ethnographical description about Nagyörzsöny and Verőce – I will draft the local context of the tensions, the interpretations of the incidents, and the prospects of the communities – based mainly on the accounts of local people, as collected through semi-structured interviews (and in some cases, by informal conversations) during the field research, conducted in the above -mentioned villages. Among the interviewees, there were key actors and leaders of the communities, besides local individuals, who were involved in certain conflicts to some extent. Consultations with the co-coordinators and researchers of the crime prevention projects – i.e. with insightful outsiders – turned out to be very profitable, as well.

In the concluding part of the thesis, I will discuss the relevance of the main research question, as well as the pertinence of the thesis statement in light of the findings of the case studies, all the while not losing sight of the fact that the scope of my field research was rather limited (encompassing only two communities), therefore keeping in mind that the results might serve only the purpose of preliminary testing of the thesis statement, as the gained experiences do not allow more to be derived than concluding notes.

# **1. Factors of tension between Roma and non Roma in Hungary**

## **1. 1. The context of inter-ethnic tensions at the national level**

### **1. 1. 1. The situation of Roma in Hungary**

Concerning basic data on the Roma living in Hungary, I refer to the latest data available: first of all to the outcomes of a comprehensive social survey, which took place in February–March of 2003 in Hungary, aimed at mapping some aspects of the situation of Roma living in the country, based on a representative sample of the Roma population of Hungary (1% of the estimated total population), focusing on demographic tendencies (geographic aspects, population growth, birth rates, age distribution), linguistic distribution (mother tongues of different groups) and ethnic identity. The research report about the outcomes of the survey was published István Kemény and Béla Janky ("About the Gypsy Survey in 2003"<sup>4</sup>). A longitudinal study "Roma Population of Hungary, 1971–2003"<sup>5</sup> was also published by the same authors, based on representative surveys carried out in 1971, 1993, and 2003 (above-mentioned survey). The study aimed to describe the situation of the Roma population regarding the following aspects: regional distribution, mother tongue; housing, migration; education; employment, income. (These surveys covered the entire Roma population of Hungary, and the data provided by them is disaggregated into the three main linguistic groups.)

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<sup>4</sup> István Kemény and Béla Janky, "A 2003. évi cigány felmérésről" (About the Gypsy Survey in 2003), in *A magyarországi cigány népesség helyzete a 21. század elején* (The Situation of the Gypsy Population in Hungary at the Beginning of the 21. Century), edited by Ernő Kállai, 7–26 (Budapest: MTA Etnikai-Nemzeti Kisebbségkutató Intézet, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> István Kemény and Béla Janky, "Roma Population of Hungary, 1971–2003," In *Roma of Hungary*, edited by István Kemény, 70–225. East European Monographs, No. DCCII. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

### 1. 1. 1.1 Demographic situation of the Roma

The Hungarian Minority Act lists 13 ethnic and national minorities in Hungary<sup>6</sup>: among these the Roma comprise the largest group (the Roma of Hungary are also one of the largest Romani populations in Central-Eastern Europe). According to the estimations of minority rights' NGOs, the number of Roma in Hungary is 400–600,000, which is approximately 4-6% of the country's total population. However, according to the last population census (2001), there were only 190,000 Hungarian citizens – less than 2% of the population – who declared themselves as Roma (the divergence can be interpreted in part as a reaction to the prejudices and hostility of the current social environment, as well as the legacy of permeating fear concerning ethnic registration resulting from the Holocaust).

There are three main groups (and twenty-seven subgroups) of Roma in Hungary, in cultural and linguistic terms<sup>7</sup>: the Romungros (86,9%), who are linguistically assimilated, and speak Hungarian as a mother tongue, the Boiash (4,6%) who speak a language which is based on an ancient version of Romanian, and the speakers of different dialects of the Romani language (the most widespread version being Lovari) constitute 7.5% of the Roma population.<sup>8</sup> Despite strong tendencies of linguistic assimilation during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Roma make up the most sizeable linguistic minority in contemporary Hungary: about 55,000 people speak some dialect of the Romani language and approximately the same is the size of the Boiash-speaking Roma.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For data on the minority populations in Hungary, see Table 1, in Appendices.

<sup>7</sup> István Kemény, "Linguistic Groups and Usage Among the Hungarian Gypsies/Roma", in *The Gypsies and the Roma in Hungarian Society*, edited by Ernő Kállai (Teleki László Foundation, Budapest, 2002): 28–35.

<sup>8</sup> István Kemény and Béla Janky, "A 2003. évi cigány felmérésről" (About the Gypsy Survey in 2003), in *A magyarországi cigány népesség helyzete a 21. század elején* (The Situation of the Gypsy Population in Hungary at the Beginning of the 21. Century), edited by Ernő Kállai, 7–26. (Budapest: MTA Etnikai-Nemzeti Kisebbségkutató Intézet, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> István Kemény, "Nyelv és oktatás. Asszimiláció és szegregáció (Language and Education. Assimilation and Segregation)," in *A romakérdés az integráció csapdájában. A romák integrációs lehetőségei Magyarországon* (The Roma-question in the Trap of Integration. The

The Roma population is significantly younger in comparison to the overall Hungarian population, due to lower life expectancy (the average life expectancy of a Roma is approximately 10 years lower than the mainstream average, due to health problems closely related to low socio-economic status), as well as fertility rates of Roma<sup>10</sup> being higher than those of the general population in Hungary.<sup>11</sup> Compared to the current 4-6% ratio of the Roma population in general, the proportion of Roma children is significantly higher: while in the mid-60s, 6% of newborn babies in Hungary were of Roma origin, this proportion increased to 10% in the 90s, and according to reliable estimates, in 2002, the share of Roma among all newborns in Hungary was 15 %.<sup>12</sup>

### 1. 1. 1. 2 Socio-economic situation of the Roma

In present-day Hungary, primarily two groups face the risk of – or already live in – poverty: the elderly (those without relatives or significant social connections), and the Roma, independently of age. Indeed, ethnicity plays a crucial role in perpetuating poverty in Hungary, as Roma are well over-represented among poor people, and a significant proportion of poor Roma families (especially large families with small children) are living in deep, multi-dimensional poverty. Because of the limited role of social capital in the case of socio-economically disadvantaged Roma, the role of income – or the lack of income – is of primary importance for them. Even social transfer-based incomes are unable to promote the economic

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Opportunities of the Roma in Hungary to Integration), edited by Jenő Böszörményi and Márta Józsa (Budapest: EÖKIP, 2000): 105.

<sup>10</sup> István Kemény, "A magyarországi cigány népesség demográfiája" (The Demography of the Roma Population in Hungary), *Demográfia*, no. 3–4 (2004): 343.

<sup>11</sup> Currently, the Total Fertility Rate (TRF) of Hungarian women is approximately 1,3.  
Source: Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH),  
[http://portal.ksh.hu/pls/ksh/docs/hun/xstadat/xstadat\\_eves/tab11\\_01ia.html](http://portal.ksh.hu/pls/ksh/docs/hun/xstadat/xstadat_eves/tab11_01ia.html)

<sup>12</sup> Kemény, István and Béla Janky. "Roma Population of Hungary, 1971–2003." In *Roma of Hungary*, edited by István Kemény, East European Monographs, No. DCCII. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.)

situation of Roma families: "despite the greater role of benefits, the Roma remain significantly poorer than non-Roma".<sup>13</sup>

Roma in Hungary are suffering extensively from unemployment,<sup>14</sup> and a significant proportion of Roma families have no other income besides various welfare and childcare assistances. Regarding this phenomenon, we should consider the role of the low levels of schooling of Roma (which are related to socio-economic disadvantages and to discrimination against Roma in the education system as well), labor market discrimination, and their regional underdevelopment (most of the poor Roma lives in economically depressed, underdeveloped rural regions of Hungary, where members of the majority society are also deprived from job opportunities).

When comparing the situation of the Roma to the other groups living in poverty, mainly to poor elderly people, who have not necessarily lived in scarcity their entire lives, one of the main differences lies in housing. The available data illustrate the inferior quality of housing quality of Roma<sup>15</sup>, both in terms of density (expressed per capita square meters) and amenities (for example, tap water supply is 72% in Roma homes, compared to the total Hungarian population, where it is 90%; bathroom supply is approx. 60% in Roma households, compared to the total 90%; water toilet supply is slightly higher than 50%, compared to the total 90%). However, as the outcomes of an international study show, differences between neighboring Roma and non-Roma households in the same localities are relatively small – compared to

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<sup>13</sup> Zsuzsa Ferge, Katalin Tausz and Ágnes Darvas. *Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. Vol. 1. A Case Study of Hungary*. Budapest: International Labour Office, 2002:32–33.

<sup>14</sup> Gábor Kertesi, *The Employment of Roma – Evidence from Hungary*, Budapest Working Papers No 1. (Budapest: Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Economics – Corvinus University, Department of Human Resources, 2004).

<sup>15</sup> See István Kemény and Béla Janky, "Roma Population of Hungary, 1971–2003," In *Roma of Hungary*, edited by István Kemény, 70–225. East European Monographs, No. DCCII. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Ferenc Babusik, *A szegénység csapdájában. Cigányok Magyarországon – szociális-gazdasági helyzet, egészségi állapot, szociális, és egészségügyi szolgáltatásokhoz való hozzáférés* (Trapped by poverty. Gypsies in Hungary – socio-economic situation, health status, access to welfare and medical services) ( Budapest: Delphoi Consulting, 2004).

other Central-Eastern-European countries –, which suggests that inequalities regarding housing tend to correlate with spatial disparities.

## **1. 1. 2. Attempts by the state to address Roma issues in the last two decades**

### **1. 1. 2. 1. The Minority Act and other relevant laws**

Concerning the Roma as a minority group, one of the most relevant elements of the Hungarian legal framework is the Law on the Rights of Ethnic and National Minorities, passed in 1993<sup>16</sup>. The law provides an enumeration of thirteen ethnic and national minorities in Hungary, based on the following criteria: "Every group of people is to be considered an ethnic or national minority which: has been living in Hungary for at least 100 years, constitutes a minority in terms of numerical size its members are Hungarian citizens, has a distinct language, culture and traditions, and proves to have a sense of togetherness, aimed at safeguarding the above-mentioned distinct characteristics and articulating and protecting the interests of the historical community."<sup>17</sup> In addition to the 100-year-rule (which might be considered as an exclusionary and discriminatory principle as regards new minorities, such as immigrants), another quantitative condition is that in order to register a new minority group, a popular initiative, signed by at least 1.000 Hungarian citizens, has to be submitted to the Speaker of the Parliament.

As regards the background –and adequacy – of the Minority Act, it is important to note that the Hungarian approach to ethnic and national minority rights has always been defined by a

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<sup>16</sup> 1993. évi LXXVII. törvény a nemzeti és etnikai kisebbségek jogairól.

<sup>17</sup> See Article 1 (2) 1 of the Hungarian Minority Act : "E törvény értelmében nemzeti és etnikai kisebbség (a továbbiakban: kisebbség) minden olyan, a Magyar Köztársaság területén legalább egy évszázada honos népcsoport, amely az állam lakossága körében számszerű kisebbségben van, tagjai magyar állampolgárok és a lakosság többi részétől saját nyelve és kultúrája, hagyományai különböztetik meg, egyben olyan összetartozás-tudatról tesz bizonyosságot, amely mindezek megőrzésére, történelmileg kialakult közösségeik érdekeinek kifejezésére és védelmére irányul."

more or less subliminal reference to ethnic Hungarians' Diaspora-rights (in the neighboring states), and the legal and political consequences of this stance are debated.<sup>18</sup> While an uninformed outsider would assume that fierce internal ethnic tensions shaped the process of minority legislation and the establishment of the institutional framework of minority protection, in reality these features are not the result of persistent demands of ethnic and national minorities of Hungary, but rather are the initiatives of the Hungarian state, intended to show benevolence – and to provide good practice on the international level – by guarding the cultural heritages of the (mostly over-assimilated) national minorities of Hungary.

Among the (currently) thirteen minority groups of Hungary, usually only the Roma minority is considered to be an 'ethnic' minority. (As there is no clear explanation available for the terminology, supposedly minorities without a kin-state and/or an established, common cultural-linguistic heritage qualify as being ethnic. Hereby, sometimes the Ruthen minority – which lacks kin-state background, too – is mentioned together with the Roma as an ethnic minority). However, the use of this distinctive terminology does not have any practical impact in itself, as the Hungarian Law on Ethnic and National Minorities gives ethnic and national minorities the same rights, and regulates ethnic and national minority institutions in the same manner.<sup>19</sup> It should be noted that the twelve national minorities of Hungary are overwhelmingly assimilated to the mainstream society, even though they may maintain some kind of cultural identity, as encouraged by the Hungarian legal environment, the institutional systems of minority self governments and policies.

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<sup>18</sup> See András László Pap, "Minority Rights and Diaspora Claims. Collision, Interdependence and Loss of Orientation", in *Beyond Sovereignty: From Status Law to Transnational Citizenship?* Slavic Eurasian Studies No. 9, edited by Osamu Ieda et al., 243–254. (Sapporo: Hokkaido University – Slavic Research Center, 2006).

<sup>19</sup> Balázs Majtényi and György Majtényi, "Romakérdés és állami politikák" (Roma-question and State-policies), in *Kisebbségek kisebbsége. A magyarországi cigányok emberi és politikai jogai* (Minority of Minorities. Human Rights and Political Rights of the Roma in Hungary), edited by Mária Neményi and Júlia Szalai (Budapest: Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó, 2005), 422.

The Ombudsman Act<sup>20</sup>, which was passed in the same year as the Law on Ethnic and National Minorities, in 1993, provides the legal background of the position of the Parliamentary Commissioner for National and Ethnic Minority Rights, a.k.a. Minority Ombudsman (a position which is currently held – since 2007 – by a person of Roma origin).

In 2003, the Law on Equal Treatment and Anti-Discrimination came into force<sup>21</sup>, which prohibits the unequal treatment of individuals on the basis of their origin or affiliation to an ethnic or national minority – among other grounds of discrimination.

### **1. 1. 2. 2. Minority self-government system**

The Law on Ethnic and National Minorities prescribes the establishment of minority self governments<sup>22</sup> – a relatively potent and autonomous institutional framework – on three levels: on the local, regional and national levels. (At the local level, minority self-governments co-exist with municipalities; the recently-established regional level means – for the time being – county-level institutions; while national councils function as a quasi-minority parliaments). However, in the case of the Gypsy minority, the adequacy of this framework<sup>23</sup> and the volume of the sources provided for its maintenance are questionable. Additionally, while the role of the Roma minority self-government system is undoubtedly significant, the content of this role is doubted: one of the main problems regards the relationship and labor division between minority self-governments and

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<sup>20</sup> 1993. évi LIX. törvény az állampolgári jogok országgyűlési biztosáról.

<sup>21</sup> 2003. évi CXXV. törvény az egyenlő bánásmódról és az esélyegyenlőség előmozdításáról.

<sup>22</sup> Article 1 (21) 4 of the Hungarian Minority Act commands about the establishment of minority self-governments.

<sup>23</sup> Ernő Kállai, "Cigány kisebbségi önkormányzatok Magyarországon – kutatási gyorsjelentés" (Gypsy Minority Self-Governments in Hungary – Preliminary Research Report), in *A magyarországi cigány népesség helyzete a 21. század elején* (The Situation of the Gypsy Population in Hungary at the Beginning of the 21. Century), edited by Ernő Kállai (Budapest: MTA Etnikai-Nemzeti Kisebbségkutató Intézet, 2003): 31

the local municipalities<sup>24</sup>, and related to this basic problem, the ambiguous interpretation of the role Gypsy self-governments as actors mandated to improve the socio-economic equality of the Roma (besides operating as a body aimed at safeguarding cultural heritage)<sup>25</sup>.

### 1. 1. 2. 3. Ethnic data handling

Despite the existence of the Law on Ethnic and National Minorities and the Law on Equal Treatment and Anti-Discrimination, the Hungarian legal framework makes it difficult to approach ethnicity-related issues. While the the Minority Act defines and identifies ethnic and national minorities in Hungary, data protection laws strictly limit the collection and processing of data on national or ethnic origin, since – according to the Data Protection Act<sup>26</sup> – these kind of data are to be considered sensitive<sup>27</sup>. The Data Protection Act provides that “[Sensitive] data may be processed if a) the data subject has given his explicit consent in writing, b) prescribed by treaty, or if ordered by law in connection with the enforcement of some constitutional right or for national security or law enforcement purposes, or c) ordered by law in other cases.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Marianna Zsebéné Dobó, ”Diszkriminatív viszonyulás? A települési és a kisebbségi önkormányzatok kapcsolata” (A Discriminative Attitude? The Relationship Between the Local Municipalities and the Minority Self Governments), in *Lejtős pálya. Antidiszkrimináció és esélyegyenlőség* (Slippery Slope. Anti-discrimination and Equal Opportunities), edited by Balázs Majtényi (Budapest, L’Harmattan, 2009).

<sup>25</sup> Ernő Kállai, ”Tehet-e valamit egy cigány kisebbségi önkormányzat a romák esélyegyenlősége érdekében?” (Is There Something That a Gypsy Minority Self Government Can Do, Aimed at Improving Equal Opportunities of the Roma?), in *Lejtős pálya. Antidiszkrimináció és esélyegyenlőség* (Slippery Slope. Anti-discrimination and Equal Opportunities), edited by Balázs Majtényi (Budapest, L’Harmattan, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> 1992. évi LXIII. törvény a személyes adatok védelméről és a közérdekű adatok nyilvánosságáról.

<sup>27</sup> See Articles 2(2) of the Data Protection Act (”különleges adat: a) a faji eredetre, a nemzeti és etnikai kisebbséghez tartozásra ... vonatkozó adat”).

<sup>28</sup> See Article 3(2) of the Data Protection Act (”Különleges adat akkor kezelhető, ha a) az adatkezeléshez az érintett írásban hozzájárul, vagy b) a 2. § 2. a) pontjában foglalt adatok esetében, az nemzetközi egyezményen alapul, vagy Alkotmányban biztosított alapvető jog érvényesítése, továbbá a nemzetbiztonság, a bűnmegelőzés vagy a bűnüldözés érdekében törvény elrendeli; c) egyéb esetekben azt törvény elrendeli.”)

This regulation on data handling leads to irrational and illegal practice in the area of criminal justice. The Criminal Code<sup>29</sup> acknowledges ethnically motivated crimes, such as “violence against members of national, ethnic or racial minorities and religious groups”<sup>30</sup> or “incitement against community”<sup>31</sup>. (as well as “genocide”<sup>32</sup> and “apartheid”<sup>33</sup>). However, law enforcement agents often reject even the recording of ethnic or racial violence victims, while prosecutors and courts are not willing (given the absence of clear and binding instructions for the identification of racial motivation) to recognise racial motivation behind crimes, referring to the Data Protection Act, even though it does not prohibit the determination of perceived racial origin, which is relevant in these cases (and not data on racial origin, national and ethnic minority affiliation). It is important to note that there are no special bodies to investigate, prosecute or monitor the incidence of ethnically/racially motivated crimes in Hungary.

Another controversial element of the Hungarian framework relates to the lack of adequate legal guarantees regarding individuals’ minority affiliation, which “gives rise to what is commonly known as ‘ethno-business’ or ‘ethno-corruption’, that is, the abuse of remedial measures for private gain in a manner contrary to the legislators’ intentions.”<sup>34</sup>

#### 1. 1. 2. 4. The hate speech debate

In Hungary, there is a still ongoing debate about the initiative to amend the Criminal Code in order to penalise ‘hate speech’ (which, in the Hungarian context, usually affects first and foremost

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<sup>29</sup> 1978. évi IV. törvény a Büntető Törvénykönyvről.

<sup>30</sup> Article 174/b of the Criminal Code (“nemzeti, etnikai, faji vagy vallási csoport tagja elleni erőszak”).

<sup>31</sup> Article 269 of the Criminal Code (“közösség elleni izgatás”).

<sup>32</sup> Article 155 of the Criminal Code (“népirtás”).

<sup>33</sup> Article 157 of the Criminal Code (“apartheid”).

<sup>34</sup> András László Pap, “Human Rights and Ethnic Data Collection in Hungary, *Human Rights Review*. 9, no. 1 (March 2008): 112.

two groups: Jews and Roma), but so far no changes have occurred. Some argue that the legal framework has to be revised in order to prevent such extremist actions, others oppose the modification of relevant legal provisions, and warn that it would limit basic rights such as the freedom of speech. According to the latter, the way to combat hate speech is rather the development of publicly accepted values and norms which would make such actions intolerable.

In 2008, significant media and public attention was drawn to racist, anti-Semitic, anti-Roma extremists. As a reaction, the Minority Ombudsman called on the National Association for Content Providers<sup>35</sup> to set up a Code of Ethics aimed at reducing the propagation of hate speech on the Internet.

In the same year, the Parliament passed a hate-speech amendment to the Criminal Code, but the Government did not support the amendment. (According to this new law, a two-year prison term could be handed down for using inflammatory expressions about specific ethnic groups or the ‘offending the human dignity’ of the members of those groups.) Due to constitutional misgivings (i.e. a supposed ‘curtailing the freedom of speech’), the President of the Hungarian Republic sent the law to the Constitutional Court for preliminary review<sup>36</sup>. In a widely debated decision, the Constitutional Court ruled two amendments to the law unconstitutional (an amendment to the Civil Code allowing civil suits to be brought in the cases of ‘inflammatory speech’ against a person’s religious or ethnic belonging, and another amendment qualifying hate speech as a criminal offence). The Court held that both amendments unduly restrict freedom of expression, and that only natural persons may have their dignity protected, while communities or groups cannot.

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<sup>35</sup> Magyarországi Tartalomszolgáltatók Egyesülete.

<sup>36</sup> Previously, the Constitutional Court has already ruled hate-speech amendments to the Criminal code unconstitutional for a several times (i. e. Decision no. 30/1992, Decision no. 36/1994, Decision no. 21/1996.)

In 2009, the Minority Ombudsman published a proposal concerning hate speech<sup>37</sup>. According to the argument of the document, the already existing legal framework should be used instead of drafting new legislation, and hate speech should be considered as falling under the Equal Treatment Act. The Minority Ombudsman proposed the amendment of the Act to extend its application regarding hate speech to the media and to public demonstrations, and at the same time, called to extend the Minority Ombudsman's mandate to include the investigation of complaints related to hate speech.

At this current point in time, the hate speech debate has not yet been settled in Hungary.

### **1. 1. 2. 5. Policies**

During the years of the EU-accession process in Hungary (as well as in the other CEE countries with a significant Roma population), special attention was paid to the situation and the problems of Roma (social exclusion, discrimination), since the European Union set strict conditions for the applicant countries regarding their minority issues, with an emphasis on the Roma in the region.

During the accession process, the Hungarian government established the Coordination Council for Gypsy Issues in 1995, adopted a comprehensive Roma action programme in 1997, established the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Gypsy Issues and proposed a medium-term strategy on Roma issues in 1999, established the Anti-Discrimination Network of Legal Aid for Roma and proposed a long-term strategy on Roma issues in 2001, created a position for a Prime Ministers Office State Secretary in Charge for Roma issues and established the Roma Coordination Council 2002.

However, the situation of the Roma has not changed much over the years, especially in terms of hostility against them, while there was enough evidence, provided by different actors: minority rights activists, scholars and the Minority Ombudsman – suggesting that ethnically

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<sup>37</sup> <http://www.kisebbsegiombudsman.hu/hir-356-egyuttmukodesi-megallapodas-es.html> (Last accessed: May 3, 2009.)

motivated violence may become a serious problem in Hungary. After Hungary's accession to the European Union, the governmental efforts aimed at improving the situation of Roma started to fade visibly, leaving more space for right-wing extremist political forces, and an anti-Gypsyist climate of and public opinion to develop.

### 1. 1. 3. Mainstream society's attitudes towards the Roma

Prejudices against Roma are pervasive in Hungarian society. Referring to a survey<sup>38</sup> where almost 40 percent of the respondents professed that he/she is "averse to the Gypsies", the 2007 Country Report of the Political Capital Policy Research and Consulting Institute states that "prejudice against the Roma is a living and easy-to-activate element of thinking in the Hungarian society"<sup>39</sup>, and since the proportion of the Roma in the Hungarian population is increasing, more tense inter-ethnic antagonisms are to be expected.

In 2001, a survey was conducted (with a representative sample) about the perceptions, attitudes, and stereotypes about different (minority and deviant) groups in Hungarian society, with a focus on Roma.<sup>40</sup> The main issues covered in this survey were: social proximity measures; perception of Roma as an offensive group; perception of the links between Roma and poverty; discrimination; the factors of social success of the Roma. According to this study, the tenseness of the situation can be even be depicted by numbers, as the members of the majority tend to notably overestimate the size of the Roma minority: according to a public opinion survey in the same year (2001), the average estimation of the proportion of Roma in the total population was 22%

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<sup>38</sup> Data provided by the Gallup Institute.

<sup>39</sup> Political Capital Institute. *Országjelentés. Politikai Kockázat Index 2007* (Country Report. Political Risk Index 2007) (April 28, 2008): 24.  
[http://www.orszagjelentes.hu/sajto/orszagjelentes\\_sajtoanyag\\_polrisk\\_080429.doc](http://www.orszagjelentes.hu/sajto/orszagjelentes_sajtoanyag_polrisk_080429.doc)  
(Last accessed: May 3, 2009.)

<sup>40</sup> Mária Székelyi, Antal Örkeny and György Csepeli, "Romakép a mai magyar társadalomban" (The Perception of Roma in Today's Hungarian Society), *Szociológiai Szemle*, no. 3 (2001): 19-49.

(compared with the actual 4-6%). An explanation for this phenomenon may be that the Roma are perceived as an offensive group, since scholars found a significant correlation between prejudices towards Roma and the tendency of overestimating the size of the Roma population.

The relatively high fertility rates of the Roma are usually interpreted by the mainstream society as a “strategy”. In the media, Márta Gyenei was the first to use the term of “strategic child”<sup>41</sup> (who is presumed to be born in order to contribute to the income of his/her family through child-specific welfare benefits) in the 1990’s, examining the economic survival strategies of poor families, both Roma and non-Roma. If it comes to Roma (specifically poor Roma, as the fertility rates of well-off Roma are decreasing in Hungary), right wing political rhetoric tends to use the term “offensive” instead of “strategy”, as high fertility is interpreted as an ambitious project of Roma to outnumber “Hungarians” in Hungary.

One widespread stereotype is the close linking of criminality to Roma ethnicity. According to a survey in 2006, almost two thirds (62 %) of the adult population of Hungary agreed fully or to some degree with the following statement: “The tendency to commit crime is in the blood of the Roma”<sup>42</sup>. During the past few years, several serious criminal acts, connected to Roma offenders, further stoked up hatred against the Roma, not just at local levels. The first outstanding tragic incident happened in October of 2006, when in the village of Olaszliszka a non-Roma man – a teacher from a nearby city – was lynched by local Roma before the eyes of his young daughters. (The man hit a Roma child who wanted to run through the road with his car, the child left the scene of the accident with minor injuries). In November of 2008, in Kiskunlacháza, a 14-year-old non-Roma girl was raped and killed. The perpetrators have still not been identified, but many of the locals connect the case to the members of the Roma community, which has influenced the

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<sup>41</sup> Márta Gyenei, “A ‘stratégiai gyerek’, avagy miért növekszik nálunk a csecsemőhalandóság” (The ‘Strategic Child’, or Why Does Infant Mortality Increase in Our Country), *Népszabadság* 56, no. 14. Nov., (1998): 24-25.

<sup>42</sup> See <http://www.tarki.hu/kozvelemeney/kitekint/20060201.html> (Last accessed: May 3, 2009.)

public opinion at the national level as well. The most recent tragic case which generated a public outcry (even at the international level, as it involved a victim of foreign – Romanian – nationality) was the killing of Marian Cozma, an athlete in the a handball team of Veszprém, Hungary. While the details of the case are as of yet far from clarified, the suspects are of Roma origin, which raised again the issue of the "inherent criminality" of the Roma, and some voices in the discourse also implicated the "common responsibility" of the Roma<sup>43</sup>.

#### 1. 1. 4. Emergence of anti-Gypsy political forces

In contemporary Hungary – like in other Central Eastern Europe countries with a significant Roma population – Roma constitute "the main enemies within the state but outside of the nation"<sup>44</sup>. Although the leading right-wing party in the 1990's in Hungary, MIÉP<sup>45</sup>, included anti-Gypsy elements into its political rhetorics, party leader István Csurka's obsessive anti-Semitism seemed to prevent him – and his comrades – from "playing the 'Roma card' more regularly"<sup>46</sup>. While MIÉP (founded in 1993) won 5.5% of the votes in the 1998 parliamentary elections, giving them 14 seats in the parliament for that legislative cycle, four years later (in 2002) they won only 4.4%, which is below the threshold needed for parliamentary representation. However, as the support of voters and sympathetics started to decrease, it became obvious that anti-Semitism

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<sup>43</sup> Livia Járóka, Hungarian MEP of Roma origin, commented the homicide in Veszprém in a press release ["A jövő csak együtt képzelhető el" (We have to plan our future together)]: "Magyarként, cigányként és anyaként is megrendüléssel értesültem a tragédiáról és külön fájdalom, hogy a kegyetlen elkövetők cigányok voltak. Marian Cozmát cigányok ölték meg, de nem 'a' cigányok." (Being a Hungarian, being a Gypsy and being a mother, I was shocked by the news about the tragedy, and for me, it makes this more painful, that the ruthless offenders are Gypsies. Marian Cozma was killed by Gypsies, but not by 'the' Gypsies.) February 12, 2009. <http://jarokalivia.hu/hu/cikk/188/> (Last accessed May 3, 2009):

<sup>44</sup> Cas Mudde. *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 86.

<sup>45</sup> MIÉP – Magyar Igazság és Élet Pártja (Hungarian Justice and Life Party).

<sup>46</sup> Cas Mudde. *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 87.

in itself proves not to be a binding political ideology after the democratic change in Hungary, especially in the rural parts of Hungary, given that there, due to the Holocaust, the members of the mainstream society hardly meet any Jews personally.

In 2005, MIÉP joined forces with the Jobbik Party<sup>47</sup>, and a party formation was registered under the name MIÉP-Jobbik Third Way Alliance of Parties<sup>48</sup>. Later, the influence of MIÉP faded within the coalition, and as a consequence of basic political and personal clashes, nowadays Jobbik is again acting as an independent political force.

As the current leading extreme right-wing party, Jobbik has built on the experiences about the failures of MIÉP, as the founders of the party claimed in 1999 (the date of the establishment of the party) that "there is a need for a younger, more up-to-date, more buoyant party"<sup>49</sup>. Opinion leaders of the party found that anti-Gypsism is a timely issue to gain popularity and power by putting it on the agenda: during its 10-year-long existence, Jobbik reintroduced and reconfirmed the term "gypsy-criminality" into the political discourse. (It is to be noted that between 1971–1988, there were official data on ethnicity collected and kept by the police and by the prosecution offices, but this practice was judged later as unacceptable in a democratic state.) As for Jobbik's platform, the representatives of the party stand up (verbally) for the rights of Hungarian minorities in the neighbouring countries, and claim to be ready to use "law and order" in order to crack down on crime. However, without a clearly shaped political program, Jobbik still remains on the level of emotional rethorism, using also frequent references to Christianity.

Till now, encouraging and utilizing anti-Gypsyism seems to be an effective political strategy, as Jobbik has a strong camp of supporters, not just in rural areas of Hungary (for example in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County – a stronghold of the Jobbik party –, where a

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<sup>47</sup> Jobbik Magyarországért Párt (Party for a Better Hungary).

<sup>48</sup> MIÉP–Jobbik A Harmadik Út Pártszövetség.

<sup>49</sup> Szilvia Varró, "A Jobbik mint harmadik erő. I. – Egy sörözőben összejöttek"" (The 'Jobbik Party as the Third Power, Part 1 – They Gathered in a Pub), *Magyar Narancs* 21, no. 6 (February 5, 2009): 10.

significant proportion of the population is Roma), but also in the capital city: in the first round of the by-election in January, 2009, Jobbik gained 8,5% of the total votes in the 9<sup>th</sup> district (Ferencváros) of Budapest, giving them the third strongest result, while the liberal party reached only 5%. The target group of Jobbik's supporters is found in the Hungarian middle-class, lower middle class and working class; while the typical Jobbik-voter is male, aged between 20 and 40, employed or a student.<sup>50</sup> As described by an investigative journalist, Szilvia Varró, who conducted a series of interviews among them, the Jobbik-supporters' political awareness is much higher than the average level of young people in Hungary, they tend to be especially interested in history, they can be mobilized by issues related to the Hungarian minorities living in the neighbouring countries, they profess anti-Gypsy – and partly anti-Semitic – views. The young people who join the party are primarily attracted by the political intactness, the mythical nationalism and the explicit rhetoric of the Jobbik, as well as the sense of community provided by the party”.<sup>51</sup>

#### 1. 1. 4. 1. The Hungarian Guard

Jobbik is to be considered as a direct antecedent of the proto-fascist, paramilitary organization of the Hungarian Guard<sup>52</sup> – with the full legal name Hungarian Guard Tradition Protection and Cultural Association<sup>53</sup> –, established in 2007. This extreme right-wing

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<sup>50</sup> Szilvia Varró, "A Jobbik mint harmadik erő. II. – A tiszták" (The 'Jobbik' Party as the Third Power, Part 2 – The Clean Ones), *Magyar Narancs* 21, no. 7 (February 12, 2009): 10.

<sup>51</sup> Szilvia Varró, "A Jobbik mint harmadik erő. II. – A tiszták" (The 'Jobbik' Party as the Third Power, Part 2 – The Clean Ones), *Magyar Narancs* 21, no. 7 (February 12, 2009): 10: "Politikai jártasságuk felülmúlja kortársaikét, különösen érdeklődnek a történelem iránt, megmozgatja őket a határon túli magyarok ügye, cigányellenes és részint antiszemita nézeteket vallanak. A Jobbikhoz csatlakozó fiatalokat a párt politikai érintetlensége, misztikus nacionalizmusa, szókimondása és a párton belüli közösség vonzza elsősorban."

<sup>52</sup> Magyar Gárda.

<sup>53</sup> Magyar Gárda Hagyományőrző és Kulturális Egyesület.

nationalist, irredentist political force – with an even growing, uniform-wearing membership – is an intimidating opponent of the Roma minority, as in 2008, a series of rural inter-ethnic incidents (i.e. crimes or offences attributed to Roma perpetrators) were followed by power-demonstrating marches of the Hungarian Guard, throughout the country.

Besides the Hungarian Guard, some other rightist-extremist formations (i.e. the "Gentile Motor Bikers"<sup>54</sup> and the "Nationally Sensed Bikers"<sup>55</sup> and other motor bikers' groups) are occasionally also involved in intimidating power demonstrations, targeting not just Gypsies, but also Jews, LGBT people and liberals in general, as well, sometimes in co-operation with the Hungarian Guard.

Based on anti-Roma speeches delivered by Hungarian Guard leaders, in 2008 the National Prosecution Service asked the Court to disband the association behind the paramilitary rightist radical formation, as it is irreconcilable with the rule of law and violates Roma rights. Several organisations, among them the Alliance of the Jewish Communities of Hungary<sup>56</sup>, and the National Gypsy Minority Self-Government<sup>57</sup> participated in the trial as litigating parties, while the World Federation of Hungarians<sup>58</sup> and the Jobbik Party (and other organizations) supported the defendant, the Hungarian Guard. During the trials, guardists were demonstrating near the court building, and at a certain point of the trial – after receiving several anonymous phone calls – the judge stepped down from the case, which caused a setback in the process. Eventually, the Municipal Court of Budapest ordered the dismantling of the Hungarian Guard in December, 2008 – in a first instance, non-binding decision –, for racial discrimination against the Roma minority, holding that the Hungarian Guard Tradition

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<sup>54</sup> Gój Motorosok.

<sup>55</sup> Nemzeti Érzelmű Motorosok.

<sup>56</sup> MAZSIHISZ – Magyar Zsidó Hitközségek Szövetsége.

<sup>57</sup> OCÖ – Országos Cigány Önkormányzat.

<sup>58</sup> Magyarok Világszövetsége

Protection and Cultural Association, 'aims to create a climate of fear, while its activities – the marching of its members in Roma-populated settlements and the speeches of its leaders – constitute a breach of the rights of other citizens'.

However, the Association appealed the decision, and claimed at the same time that the Hungarian Guard Tradition Protection and Cultural Association is not the same as the Hungarian Guard Movement<sup>59</sup> – which is a legally non-existent entity –, the actual paramilitary formation, which was thereby considered to be unaffected by the decision (and remained active). The Guard continues to recruit new members, including youngsters and children as well. The declared number of the (uniform-wearing) full-members of the Hungarian Guard was 1,300 in July, 2008, while (according to internal estimations) the number of the active supporters was approximately 5-6,000 – it is presumed that these numbers are significantly higher in 2009. Power demonstration marches are still organized throughout the country, in settlements from which a call is received by the Hungarian Guard, as the marches are 'delivered' following the request of the local (non-Roma) inhabitants.<sup>60</sup> (According to Gábor Vona, the leader of the Jobbik Party, the occurrence of the Hungarian Guard is an indicator of the impotence of a municipality, as "there are settlements where the inhabitants consider their lives unlivable, and they send out a call for help"<sup>61</sup>.)

The Hungarian Guard is already over an internal clash: in September, 2008, a group of members – calling themselves the 'Keeper Wing'<sup>62</sup> and professing explicit anti-Semitic views

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<sup>59</sup> Magyar Gárda Mozgalom.

<sup>60</sup> Ferenc Szlazzsánszky, "A gárda hívásra házhoz megy" (Hungarian Guard for Home Delivery), *Hetek* 12, no. 30 (July 25, 2008). <http://epa.oszk.hu/00800/00804/00543/68659.html> (Last accessed: May 3, 2009.)

<sup>61</sup> Ferenc Szlazzsánszky, "A gárda hívásra házhoz megy" (Hungarian Guard for Home Delivery). *Hetek* 12, no. 30 (July 25, 2008). <http://epa.oszk.hu/00800/00804/00543/68659.html> (Last accessed: May 3, 2009.): „Vannak olyan települések, ahol a lakosság nagy része élehetetlennek érzi az életét, és segélykérést ad.”

<sup>62</sup> "Őrző szárny".

– left the formation, led by a former captain of the Guard, István Dósa. (This formation is also active in certain parts of Hungary.)

Remarkably, the professed recruitment policy of the Hungarian Guard is not exclusionary against the Roma: everyone can join, theoretically, whatever her/his origin, whether or not she/he is 'of Hungarian identity'. According to the rhetoric, the Hungarian Guard is not aimed at opposing the Roma, but tackling crime and disorder. (Supposedly, without reliable data, the volume of the accession of Roma individuals to the Guard might be sporadic, if at all existent.)

Meanwhile, partly as a reaction to the Hungarian Guard-phenomenon, the Ministry of Justice and Law Enforcement<sup>63</sup> proposed a series of amendments to several public order and public safety laws. (According to the bills, group gatherings in public places with an intimidating impact – through speech acts or uniforms worn, etc. – would amount to a petty offence sanctionable with a fine.) Eventually, in December 2008, an amendment to the Criminal Code was passed by the parliament which broadened the scope of the provisions regarding violence against members of certain communities, and defined as disorderly to conduct those forms of otherwise peaceful assemblies which might 'cause fear' among the members of certain communities, or intimidate other people. It is to be noted that there is an ongoing debate whether law amendment or law enforcement is needed, since, according to some voices, even the current legal framework could be applied in a much more effective and narrow way in different cases, involving (supposed) racist motivation. (A telling example is a recent case, which occurred in Nagykanizsa in May, 2009, when unidentified offenders painted swastikas on houses inhabited by Roma families, but since the legs of the swastikas were counter-clockwise – by mistake, it is assumed –, the police did not consider the case as a 'forbidden use of an authoritarian symbol', which is illegal according to Hungarian law.)

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<sup>63</sup> Igazságügyi és Rendészeti Minisztérium.

Recently, in March, 2009, a new initiative was started by the Jobbik Party, aimed at establishing so-called "National Associations"<sup>64</sup>, representing the supporting "civil force" – or the third pillar besides the political one (the Jobbik Party itself), and the paramilitary one (the Hungarian Guard). Reportedly, the number of small National Associations has reached 200 in May, 2009.

Regarding the above-mentioned paramilitary pillar of the Jobbik Party, a worrisome sequel is that, after operating as a passive-reactive, only "possibly violent" force, the Hungarian Guard initiated an organized action against riot police in April, 2009, during demonstrations against the re-arrangement of the Hungarian government.

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<sup>64</sup> "Nemzeti Egyletek".

## 1. 2. Maltreatment and abuse of Roma

### 1. 2. 1. Discrimination in the labour market

In Hungary, discrimination might affect the lives of the members of the Roma minority in many aspects<sup>65</sup>, for instance in terms of their employment opportunities. The very poor economic conditions which affect the significant proportion of Roma is related to extremely high unemployment rates, which is related – among other factors such as lower educational level and regional causes – to labor market discrimination: most of the discrimination cases regarding the labor market dealt with by the Hungarian Equal Treatment Authority involve Roma victims.<sup>66</sup>

A recently published representative survey,<sup>67</sup> conducted in 2006, found that approx. 20% of companies (especially those in sectors where highly qualified labor is needed) were deeply discriminatory against Roma, as well as towards labor market entrants, handicapped people and women, while another nearly 10% of the companies also tended to reject the employment of the above-mentioned groups, albeit on a lower scale. (To illustrate with data: while only 1,8% of the “deeply discriminatory” companies employed Roma, 25,6% of the latter group of enterprises had Roma employees).

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<sup>65</sup> See Open Society Institute, *Monitoring the EU Accession Process: Minority Protection. Report 2001* (Budapest: Open Society Institute, 2001) and – Open Society Institute, *Monitoring the EU Accession Process: Minority Protection. Report 2002* (Budapest: Open Society Institute, 2002).

<sup>66</sup> Judit Demeter, “Az egyenlő bánásmód sérelme miatt indult hatósági eljárások tapasztalatai” (Experiences of Authority Procedures in Cases of the Violation of the Principle of Equal Treatment), in *Lejtős pálya. Antidiszkrimináció és esélyegyenlőség* (Slippery Slope. Anti-discrimination and Equal Opportunities), edited by Balázs Majtényi (Budapest, L’Harmattan, 2009): 76.

<sup>67</sup> Ferenc Babusik, *A romák foglalkoztatási diszkriminációja a munkaerő-piacon. Egy empirikus vállalatkutató eredményei* (Discrimination of the Roma regarding employment, on the labor market. The outcome of an empirical enterprise survey), (Budapest: Delphoi Consulting, 2008). [http://www.delphoi.hu/download-pdf/roma\\_fogl\\_diszkr.pdf](http://www.delphoi.hu/download-pdf/roma_fogl_diszkr.pdf) (Last accessed: May 3, 2009).

The dramatic unemployment rates among the Roma results not only in poverty, but also in an ever-growing social distance between the Roma and non-Roma. While before the political transition in 1989, in the era of ‘full employment’ (or more precisely, in the era of ‘indoor unemployment’), Roma and non-Roma workers often had shared social spaces, in the last twenty years, Roma and non-Roma are essentially lacking occasions of personal contact with each other.

### **1. 2. 2. Social exclusion in the field of housing**

As the outcomes of a recent comprehensive study<sup>68</sup> indicate, on the basis of available information it can be clearly stated that the housing situation of Roma in Hungary, given especially its territorial dimensions (namely the concentration of the Roma population in smaller settlements and in economically disadvantageous regions), is not only a strong factor in the social exclusion of Roma, but also threatens to accelerate and perpetuate this exclusion and to allow the intergenerational transmission of socio-economic disadvantages.

Concerning Roma housing, the most worrisome – and difficult to approach – characteristics are the different forms of segregation (colonies, micro-regions subject to ‘ghettoisation’, urban slum areas). According to reliable estimations, approximately half (45–55%) of the Roma population lives in segregated environments. Regarding access to social housing, provided by municipalities, some structural characteristics determine low status families’ (e.g. squatters’) access to public housing, and as reported, cases of maladministration might negatively affect the Roma as well. While there is no systematic information concerning the private housing market, the discrimination of the Roma is commonly known to be an existing practice.

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<sup>68</sup> Lea Kőszeghy, *Housing Conditions of Roma and Travellers in Hungary*. RAXEN Thematic Study (March 31, 2009), RAXEN National Focal Point – Hungary, 8. [manuscript].

### 1. 2. 3. Educational disadvantages of Roma children

Concerning cultural disadvantages of the Roma, the symptom is the still significantly lower level of education – even illiteracy among elderly members of the minority. The causes behind this may lie in the limited access to quality education, and the segregation in lower levels of education<sup>69</sup>, not to mention the harmful practice of putting mentally healthy Roma children into 'special' classes for the slightly mentally handicapped.

In the Hungarian context, the main dilemma concerning education-related issues of the Roma originates in the uncertainty whether the human/political rights or the minority rights aspect should dominate Roma issues.

In the first case, the application of the human/political rights approach implicates the conviction that Roma issues should be treated similarly to the racial equality issues in the U.S.<sup>70</sup>; acknowledging that desegregation (in every field of social life) serves the interests of the discriminated members of the society. Regarding equality in education, a historical development took place in November 2008, when the Hungarian Supreme Court partially reversed the appellate court's decision and ruled in the favor of the strategic litigator NGO Chance for Children Foundation<sup>71</sup>, which asked the court to rule that the education authority of the city of Hajdúhadház and two local primary schools discriminated against about 500 Roma children by unlawfully enrolling them in separate classes and school buildings.

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<sup>69</sup> Lilla Farkas, *Segregation of Roma Children in Education. Addressing Structural Discrimination through the Race Equality Directives* (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2007):

<sup>70</sup> Owen Fiss, "School Desegregation: The Uncertain Path of the Law", in *Equality and Preferential Treatment*, edited by Marshall Cohen, Thomas Nagel and Thomas Scanlon (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977).

<sup>71</sup> CFCF – Chance for Children Foundation (Esélyt a Hátrányos Helyzetű Gyerekeknek Alapítvány.)

On the other hand, the European-style 'national minority' approach focuses on the Roma as a group, by claiming cultural rights and being aimed at sustaining the distinctiveness of the Roma – while having, of course, equal status in society. According to this dichotomy, education-related issues of the Roma might fall into the scope of authority of the minority protection system (manifested first of all in the Parliamentary Commissioner for Ethnic and National Minority Rights), or into the scope of equal treatment system (e.g. the Equal Treatment Authority), noting that these systems are difficult to overview and characterized by a level of overlap in some aspects.

The aims of Roma minority education are not well articulated, which leaves room for misuse in practice. As it is shown by some cases – investigated by the Minority Ombudsman –, the educational framework aimed at promoting the identity of cultural minorities can be used as a tool for segregating socio-economically (already) disadvantaged Roma children. In certain cases it is reasonable to suspect that Roma parents are not always fully informed about the aim and the actual content of the Roma minority education program (which may still mean in practice not just an inferior infrastructural environment, but also an under-trained teaching staff and poor curricula, since effective evaluating mechanisms are missing on this field) when they are convinced by school headmasters to sign the „Minority Education Requiry Forms”.

The divergent, often hidden practices of educational segregation – i.e. disguised segregation through minority education, in-class segregation etc. – might result in situations where Roma do not have any contact with mainstream society, as given the unemployment rates of Roma adults, common educational institutions would serve as the only remaining possibility of inter-ethnic communication, for children and parents as well.

Segregated or not, Roma pupils often suffer humiliation and racial discrimination in the educational system.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, any potential well functioning co-operation between the school and Roma parents – aimed at the promotion of their children’s advancement and opportunities of the children for quality higher education – might be impeded by the prejudices on the part of the teachers, or discouraged by the parents’ own negative childhood experiences concerning discrimination, failures and conflicts at school.

#### **1. 2. 4. Ethnic profiling and maltreatment by the police**

According to the outcomes of various surveys, a significant proportion of Hungarian police officers can be considered to be deeply prejudiced against the Roma. According to the outcomes of a comprehensive study in 1997, 54% of police officers thought that the criminal lifestyle is a key element of Roma identity, and only 11% stated that ethnicity plays no role in criminality (the most prejudiced policemen were those who served in small rural settlements, where a significant proportion of the inhabitants is Roma).<sup>73</sup> As a recent study revealed, in 2008 almost 80% of the participating policemen opined that the Roma do not respect the law, and 60% agreed that “poverty is just an excuse for criminality”<sup>74</sup>. A few years earlier, in 2005, a survey was conducted among students of the Hungarian Police Academy and found that 69% of the students profess that the

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<sup>72</sup> See Claude Cahn et al., *Roma in the Educational Systems of Central and Eastern Europe* (European Roma Rights Center, Summer 1998); or Gábor Havas, István Kemény and Ilona Liskó, *Cigány gyerekek az általános iskolában* (Gypsy Children in the Elementary Schools), (Budapest: Oktatáskutató Intézet – Új Mandátum, 2002).

<sup>73</sup> György Csepeli, Antal Örkeny and Mária Székelyi, “Szertelen módszerek” (Insubstantial methods), in *Szöveggyűjtemény a kisebbségi ügyek rendőrségi kezelésének tanulmányozásához* (Collection for the Examination of How the Police Handle Cases Involving Minorities”), edited by Klára Csányi, 130–173. Budapest: OSI-COLPI, 1997.

<sup>74</sup> See János Bólyai, “A rendőrség és a cigányság viszonya Magyarországon” (The Relations Between the Police and the Gypsies in Hungary), in *Szöveggyűjtemény a kisebbségi ügyek rendőrségi kezelésének tanulmányozásához* (Reader for the Study of Police Handling of Minority Issues), edited by Klára Csányi (Budapest: OSI-COLPI, 1997): 221.

Roma are "a danger to the majority society", and the latter should be "protected from the Roma"; more than 70% declared that "the Roma should be forced to be obedient."

A comparative empirical study<sup>75</sup> conducted on behalf of the Open Society Justice Initiative between 2005 and 2006 showed that, in Hungary, the Roma are discriminated against in the context of stops and searches by the police, especially in the case of pedestrians. Statistical evidence proves that Roma are subject to pedestrian stops significantly more often than non-Roma: while 23% of the total Hungarian adult population was stopped by the police in 2005, among the Roma respondents 57% were stopped as pedestrians (typically at entertainment venues), compared to non-Roma respondents, among whom only 22 percent reported being stopped at such venues. Data from another study, collected in 2007–2008,<sup>76</sup> show that Roma are three to four times more likely to undergo police stop and search than non-Roma: 22 % of those stopped were Roma (compared to the approx. 6% share of the Roma in the total population of Hungary), although the biased practice seems to be gratuitous as there is no difference in the frequency of subsequent substantial measures (21–22 % of stops, concerning both groups).

The latest report of the Parliamentary Commissioner for National and Ethnic Minority Rights of Hungary (from 2008) – which focuses on the guarantees and shortcomings of the equal treatment of minorities by the police<sup>77</sup> – gives a broad overview of the prejudices of the police officers concerning the Roma, and the way in which the Hungarian police deals with issues related to Roma, including explicit maltreatment or abuse of Roma by the police.

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<sup>75</sup> See András László Pap, Bori Simonovits, Anna Balogi and Lili Vargha, *Research Report for Hungary. Results from the research project. A Comparative Study of Stop and Search Practices in Bulgaria, Hungary and Spain* (Budapest: TÁRKI, 2006).

<sup>76</sup> András Kádár, Júlia Körner, Zsófia Moldova and Balázs Tóth, *Control(led) Group. Final Report on the Strategies for Effective Police Stop and Search (STEPSS) Project* (Budapest: Hungarian Helsinki Committee, 2008).

<sup>77</sup> Parliamentary Commissioner for National and Ethnic Minority Rights of Hungary, *Jelentés a rendőrség kisebbségekkel kapcsolatos egyenlő bánásmódjának biztosítékrendszeréről és annak hiányosságairól* (Report on the Guarantees and Shortcomings of the Equal Treatment of Minorities by the Police), edited by Judit Tóth. Budapest: OBH, 2008.  
<http://www.kisebbségiombudsman.hu/data/files/126395090.pdf> (Last accessed May 3, 2009.)

In January 2009, the police chief of Miskolc (the third largest city of Hungary, in the North-Eastern part of the country, with a significant proportion of Roma inhabitants) made statements which are to be considered not just morally or politically controversial, but worrisome from the aspect of the handling of data<sup>78</sup> concerning the criminality of the Roma. Although he avoided to use the buzzword "Roma crime", at a press conference he claimed that every single one the burglaries in the last two months involved a perpetrator of Roma origin, and professed a series of prejudices about the inability of Roma of "normal cohabitation".<sup>79</sup> When the he was asked about the basis for his statements regarding the ethnicity of criminals, the chief police answered that although there are no police records on race or ethnicity, the suspects may provide information regarding their ethnicity voluntarily, and while data on origin is not officially included in the police files, it may be still used in a criminal procedure. Following these statements, the police chief was removed from his post by the Minister of Justice and Law Enforcement, but a couple of days later he was reinstated as a result of strong local backing (for example from the city's mayor). A – peaceful – demonstration in support of the police chief wash held on the main square of the city with an estimated number of 1500 participants, many of them wearing the uniform of the Magyar Garda.

### **1. 2. 5. Violations of reproductive rights**

Romani women often face discrimination and mistreatment in the Hungarian health care system when using medical services related to pregnancy and childbirth, which can affect not just their dignity but also their reproductive rights and health. There were

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<sup>78</sup> Balázs Majtényi and Pap András László, "Cigány-e vagy? Eltérő attitűdök az etnikai adatok kezelésekor" (Are You a Gypsy? Diverging Attitudes Concerning Ethnic Data Handling), *Élet és Irodalom* 53, no. 7 (2009).

<sup>79</sup> Péter Niedermüller, "Gondolatok a roma integrációról" (Thoughts on the Integration of the Roma), *Élet és Irodalom* 53, no. 18 (2009).

several reported cases of forced sterilization of Romani women – performed without the informed consent of the patient – however, this illegal practice is suspected to be widely used in Hungarian hospitals<sup>80</sup>. (In one of these cases, in 2006 the UN CEDAW Committee found the Hungarian government to be in violation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.)

### 1. 2. 6. Intimidation and violent attacks

There have been cases of ethnic conflicts (widely covered by the media<sup>81</sup>) resulting in the abuse of the Roma already around the beginning of the 2000's. In more recent history, one of the first landmarks of threatening acts and violent offences against Roma were the "retorsive" acts carried out after the killing of a non-Roma teacher by Roma perpetrators in the village of Olaszliszka (see above), in 2006, which included the burning down of a house inhabited by Roma, another Roma-owned building being shot at with firearms, and the windows of several Roma families being broken by stones. After the establishment of the Hungarian Guard in 2007, intimidating marches of the uniform wearing 'Guardists' started to follow various kinds of rural inter-ethnic conflicts and incidents, including more minor incidents of jealousy between Roma and non-Roma men, or cases of thievery with Roma suspects.

During especially the last year (2008), obvious signs and actual cases of violence emerged in the context of tension between Roma and non-Roma in Hungary concerning a series of criminal

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<sup>80</sup> European Roma Rights Centre, *Written Comments of the European Roma Rights Centre Concerning Hungary For Consideration by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women at its 39th Session. (July 23-August 10, 2007)* <http://www.errc.org/db/03/7A/m0000037A.pdf> (Last accessed: May 3, 2009.)

<sup>81</sup> Vera Messing, "Egymásnak kiszolgáltatva. Interetnikus konfliktusok és a média" (At the Mercy of Each Other. Interethnic Conflicts and the Media), in *Kisebbségek kisebbsége. A magyarországi cigányok emberi és politikai jogai* (Minority of Minorities. Human Rights and Political Rights of the Roma in Hungary), edited by Mária Neményi and Júlia Szalai, 316–352 (Budapest: Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó, 2005).

cases during 2008 – almost all of them still open – in which ethnic motivation was apparent, or at least not excludable. According to the statistics given by the Chief of the Hungarian Police, there were numerous cases of attacks against Roma people, in 2008. This includes 14 cases of attacks with Molotov cocktails: in Fadd – two houses were set on fire with Molotov cocktails, both cases happened in April, 2008 and caused significant material loss; Pátka – in June 2008, 3 houses, inhabited by Roma, were burnt with Molotov cocktails on the same day; Piricse – in August, 2008 Molotov cocktails were thrown at two Roma houses, a woman was shot into the leg when she ran out of the house; Tarnabod – in September, 2008 Molotov cocktails were thrown at 4 houses of Roma, there were no injuries; Kőszárhegy – in October, 2008 unknown perpetrators threw a Molotov-cocktail onto the roof of a house, inhabited by a Roma family; Nagycsécs – in November, 2008 a 43-year-old Roma man and a 40-year-old Roma woman were shot dead while fleeing firebomb attacks against two houses in the village; Debrecen – in November 2008, a Molotov cocktail was thrown at a house of Roma people, no one was injured; Pusztadobos – in November, 2008 unknown perpetrators threw a Molotov cocktail on the home of a large Roma family, while there were 4 adults and 8 children in the house, but no one was injured as the bomb exploded outside the building. There were also several shootings: Galgagyörk – in July 2008, 10-15 shots were fired at three Roma houses, no one was injured; Nyíradony/Tamásipuszta – in September 2008 unknown perpetrators shot several times into a house inhabited by Roma, there were no injuries; Alsózsolca – in December, 2008 a young Romani man was shot at two times when he went to chop wood in his yard, he suffered life-threatening injuries (his partner was also injured). Lastly, there were 2 cases of hand grenade attacks: Siófok – in September 2008, with no personal injuries; Pécs – in November 2008, which resulted in the death of a Roma couple on the spot, and injured their 3-year-old and a 5-year-old children.. Besides these cases,

numerous physical offences were reported against persons of Roma origin as well as vandalism to property of Roma.

During the first month of 2009, among numerous attacks against property of Roma, two tragic cases – resulting in the loss of three human lives – were especially shocking to the majority of the Hungarian public, as well as internationally. The first happened in Tatárszentgyörgy (the site of fierce ethnic tensions which has already experienced the marching of the Hungarian Guard), where as of yet unidentified offenders killed a young Roma father and his four-year-old son (and injured the six-year-old daughter of the man) with dozens of bullets, while they were escaping from their burning home which the attackers had set on fire with Molotov cocktails. The especially shocking element of this case– and one which which might, according to the hopes of Roma activists, increase the level of solidarity with the Roma in the broader society – was that the attackers directly targeted children.

The next tragic incident happened in April, 2009, in Tiszalök, when a middle-aged Roma man was shot dead while he was about to leave home for work. As activists from Roma rights NGOs commented, this case also have the effect of increasing solidarity with Roma within the mainstream Hungarian society, as the victim was reported to have been a proper worker who was employed in his entire adult life (as a counterexample to the stereotype of the Roma in general as work-avoiding, welfare-dependant parasites).

As regards the attacks against Roma, the effectiveness of the police and the investigative authorities proved to be very poor, and this is frequently criticized by Roma rights NGOs and activists an (especially in the tragic Tatárszentgyörgy case, as a joint report of relevant NGOs reveals<sup>82</sup>). During the last 1.5 years, only in a few cases were the

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<sup>82</sup> European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), Nemzeti és Etnikai Kisebbségi Jogvédő Iroda (NEKI) and Társaság a Szabadságjogokért (TASZ), *Jelentés a 2009. február 23-án, Tatárszentgyörgyön történt kettős gyilkosság körülményeiről és az eljáró hatóságok munkájáról* (Report on the Circumstances of the Double Murder in Tatárszentgyörgy, February 23, 2009, and on the Work of State Authorities Involved), (Budapest, May 7, 2009).

perpetrators identified, or at least the range of possible perpetrators narrowed down. One of the few cases with identified perpetrators happened in August, 2008 in Székesfehérvár, where a group of young boys threw stones at a house of a Roma family and thereby fatally injured a 12-year-old girl (the police captured the perpetrators, who declared themselves "skinheads"). Aside from this case, the police knows that the three perpetrators who threw 6 Molotov bombs on 3 houses of Roma families in June 2008, in Pátka, were members of the volunteer police guard ('polgárőrség') of the village, but the persons have not been identified.

Concerning the ethnic motivation of the crimes, it was found by the court in only one case in 2008: in Szigetvár (January), five young men abused a middle-aged Roma woman and her 16 year-old-daughter.

## **2. The cases of two villages in Pest County**

For the examination of inter-ethnic the context and morphology of tensions between Roma and non-Roma in rural communities, with a special focus on the involvement or the absent of 'outer' forces like the Hungarian Guard, I chose two villages in Pest County: Nagybörzsöny and Verőce.

The definitive reason behind these choices was that both municipalities participated recently, in 2008–2009, in the Social Crime Prevention Program of the Hungarian Ministry of Justice and Law Enforcement (coordinated by the National Crime Prevention Committee<sup>83</sup>), by implementing projects in the category of "Settlement Mediation"<sup>84</sup>. According to the brief statement provided by the National Crime Prevention Committee, the "comprehensive aim of these projects is to find non-violent solutions for the conflicts occurring in small rural settlements, by exploring and strengthening local sources, by managing conflicts with the active involvement of the parties, and by raising awareness concerning responsibilities"<sup>85</sup>, within the framework of the National Crime Prevention Program, which is "a joint movement of professionals and the civil society, involving governmental support, based on the cooperation of different social actors (local and central governmental organizations, municipalities, NGOs, different non-profit and for-profit actors, actors of the economic life, citizens and communities of citizens, churches, etc.)"<sup>86</sup>.

In terms of the comparability of the two settlements, both Nagybörzsöny and Verőce listed inter-ethnic issues as the number-one leading concern in the short presentations about the the projects, (in the case of Verőce, the reference was to 'ethnic tensions', and in the case

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<sup>83</sup> OBMB – Országos Bűnmegelőzési Bizottság.

<sup>84</sup> See: <http://www.bunmegelozes.hu/index.html?pid=1555> (Last accessed: May 3, 2009.)

<sup>85</sup> See: <http://www.bunmegelozes.hu/index.html?pid=1402> (Last accessed: May 3, 2009.)

<sup>86</sup> See: <http://www.bunmegelozes.hu/index.html?pid=446> (Last accessed: May 3, 2009.)

of Nagybörzsöny to 'conflicts concerning cohabitation of Roma and non-Roma'). As for further similarities – in addition to the perceived ethnic tensions and to the attempts to find solution with external help (mediation), both villages are in Pest County, with a similar sized Roma population (there is a Gypsy minority self government in Nagybörzsöny, and there used to be one in Verőce as well, until it ceased its operation a couple of years ago), and there are signs of more or less existing German cultural traditions in both places (including functioning German minority self governments).

However, some differences between Verőce and Nagybörzsöny are significant, even at first sight, for example regarding the public climate's level of permeation by politics.

The rightist political atmosphere of Verőce – which is easy to access from the capital city, and a number of wealthy families moved to the village during the last decade – is noticeably explicit, given for example the ethno-symbolic messages of the newly developed village center (decorated with ancient Hungarian ornaments, statues etc.) Verőce serves as the venue of the annual event of 'Hungarian Island' (which a rightist-nationalist alternative to the multicultural/mainstream 'Island' festival, held each year since 1993 in Budapest), and on the other hand, the Hungarian Guard organized a visit to the village (and hiking in the surrounding hills) in March 2009. As for the involvement of external forces into local conflicts, according to Roma leaders, a regional gang of extreme rightist bikers was invited during the time of a violent conflict between a Roma and non-Roma group in Verőce with the aim of intimidating the Roma and to demonstrate support for the non-Roma side.

Concerning Nagybörzsöny, which is rather a remote place given the insufficient public transport infrastructure, with the newcomers from Budapest nowadays usually only buying weekendhouses in the village – the community's interest in politics is perceivably lower. As a key figure of the local non-Roma youth of indicated – with a modicum of disapproval – the local youngsters *'do not know anything, do not care about politics or the elections, and they*

*have no idea for whom to vote*'; for example, one of the key public figures in the village, a highly educated young adult, was not even aware of the existence of the organized, extremist motor bike gangs (like the Gentile Motor Bikers). Moreover, according to the testimonies of locals, the invitation of external non-Roma support – friends – from neighboring villages, aimed at power demonstration at the time of a recent peak point of an interethnic tension, lacked direct political content, and apparently was not connected to far-reaching ideologies.

Through the field research I conducted in Verőce and Nagybörzsöny, I was intrigued to grasp the local context of the tensions, the interpretations of the incidents by local people, and their views on the prospects of the communities. As a preparation for the planned empirical research, I consulted with the leaders and coordinators of the crime prevention projects: not just the preliminary overview provided by them, but also their insightful aspects proved to be beneficial for my work.

The actual empirical research was based mainly on semi-structured interviews, but in certain cases, informal conversations served better the purpose of the research. In the case of Verőce, I contacted the following actors: the leader of the crime prevention project (living in Budapest), three local coordinators, the mayor of the village, an officer of the municipality, the vice principal of the local elementary school, a local Roma leader, two Roma political leaders from Pest county, and a relative of one of the non-Roma participants of a violent incident (fighting between Roma and non-Roma). As for the Nagybörzsöny case, I spoke with the leader and coordinators of the project (non-locals), with local volunteers of the project, with the mayor of the village, with the chief of the civil police guard, with a representative of the Gypsy self-government, and with local youngsters.

## 2. 1. Nagybörzsöny

Nagybörzsöny is a 'dead-end village' in the northern part of Pest County, only a few kilometers from the Slovak border. The nearest city is Esztergom, which used to serve as the regional centre for Nagybörzsöny and other nearby villages . However, because of the curves of the Hungarian-Slovakian border, currently there are no direct logistical connections with it. The local centre, Vác, is accessible by public transportation only through Szob (it takes almost 40 minutes to get to Szob by bus, and an hour from Szob to reach the capital city, Budapest). The village lies beside the Duna-Ipoly National park, surrounded by hiking pathways. The main attraction for tourists is a narrow gauge railway.

According to the mayor of the village, the number of inhabitants of the village is almost 800<sup>87</sup>. The second piece of information to be told regarding population is that, based on estimations (or on 'common perception') is that the proportion of Roma is almost 20%, which is significantly higher than the average in Hungary (ca. 6%). It is to be noted, that – according to the mayor of the village – mixed marriages are quite common, and "those non-Roma who are married to – or live together with – Roma, and who are not disassociatable from the Roma regarding their lifestyle, are perceived as Roma, too".

As for the socio-economic situation of the village, the main factor is the scarcity of local job opportunities. The main public employers in the area are a care center for the disabled in Ipolydamasd and the prison of Márianosztra. L Non-Roma locals hope that an upsurge of rural tourism will improve the economic situation and job opportunities in the village, but and as far as they (the non-Roma can see see), the main obstacle of this is the unrulyness and untidiness in the village, caused by the Roma.

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<sup>87</sup> According to the figures provided by the mayor of the village, the population was 795 (May 19, 2009).

The overwhelming majority of the Roma are unemployed, with the exception of the members of two or three families. The others live on welfare and childcare assistance, while many adults of younger generations have never had a job. Early childbearing – starting at the age of 14-15 – is not unusual among Roma (as well as among mixed Roma-non-Roma couples).

Besides the Gypsy minority self-government, there is a German minority self-government as well. The traditional local version of German<sup>88</sup> is not spoken anymore in Nagybörzsöny, except by some elderly people above 60 (and by the young mayor of the village, holding and MA in history and archeology, who learnt this language as an adult, motivated by his personal interest in the history and traditional culture of the settlement). Although German is not used by younger generations in the village, the local elementary school implemented the German national minority (linguistic and cultural) education program, which guarantees a , higher per capita funding for the school. All the pupils (altogether 36 pupils in the 8 classes, in 2009) participate in this program, including the Roma children as well (who constitute an even growing proportion of the pupils, currently almost 50%).

Since generations, the mother tongue of the Roma of Nagybörzsöny is Hungarian. However, the version of Hungarian language spoken by Roma families is perceived by non-Roma as 'reduced' (concerning both grammar and vocabulary) and as 'unpleasant', concerning intonation (i.e. reminiscent of Romani intonation).

The self-denomination of Roma in Nagybörzsöny is 'Gypsy'<sup>89</sup>, while referring to the local non-Roma as 'peasants'<sup>90</sup>. The non-Roma inhabitants of the village tend to call themselves 'whites'<sup>91</sup> (instead of 'Hungarians'), a term which could be interpreted with its racial connotation, but also as a reference to non-Hungarian traditions of the village.

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<sup>88</sup> 'Börzsönyies'.

<sup>89</sup> 'Cigányok'.

<sup>90</sup> 'Parasztok'.

<sup>91</sup> 'Fehérek'.

## 2. 1. 1. Historical clashes and demographical changes in a village

As an insightful observer summarizes,

Nagybörzsöny is an excellent example for the centuries-long cohabitation of people who belong to different nationalities and speak different languages. While their life together was not always peaceful, it was usually not their fault: foreign conquerors, greater politics and untalented, power tripping local leaders often interfered in their lives by way of wars, religious intolerance and evictions, and these brought to the surface, and strengthened the human weaknesses, misunderstandings and intolerance towards otherness.<sup>92</sup>

According to a 'newcomer'<sup>93</sup>, there are increasingly more and sharper clashes among the members of the population of Nagybörzsöny, „than is usual for an average village”. Actually, one of the frequently mentioned clashes are those between newcomers and 'natives', although it is considered to be as not too significant, and manifests itself mostly in mocking.

The enumeration of the existing clashes continues with the historical antagonism between Catholics and Lutherans (indicated by the phenomenon that, when the two church-run schools were merged into one state-run educational institution in 1948, the pupils, belonging to different religions, did not want to sit next to each other)<sup>94</sup>. The original majority of the village (before the Second World War) was German speaking, however, they did not share a common ancestor: a part of the village originated from Saxonian immigrants (professing Lutheran religion), while the ancestors of others came from the territory of Slovakia (and they belonged to the Roman

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<sup>92</sup> M. Ferenc, Horváth, *Nagybörzsöny* (Nagybörzsöny), Száz magyar falu könyvesháza (Library of Hundred Hungarian Villages). NKÖEOK, 2007.

[http://www.sulinet.hu/oroksegtar/data/100\\_falu/Nagyborzsony/index.htm](http://www.sulinet.hu/oroksegtar/data/100_falu/Nagyborzsony/index.htm)

'... kiváló példája annak, miként éltek Magyarország területén évezredek óta a különféle nemzetiségű és nyelvet beszélő népek egymás mellett. S ha közös életük nem is volt mindig békés, arról legtöbbször nem ők tehetek: idegen hódító népek, a nagypolitika és a tehetségtelen, felettük hatalmaskodó helyi vezetés sokszor beleszólt az életükbe háborúk, vallási türelmetlenség, kitelepítések formájában, s ezek mindig felszínre hozták, felerősítették az emberi gyengeségeket, a meg nem értést és a mássággal szembeni türelmetlenséget.

<sup>93</sup> 'Gyüttment'.

<sup>94</sup> See M. Ferenc, Horváth, *Nagybörzsöny* (Nagybörzsöny), Száz magyar falu könyvesháza (Library of Hundred Hungarian Villages). NKÖEOK, 2007.

[http://www.sulinet.hu/oroksegtar/data/100\\_falu/Nagyborzsony/index.htm](http://www.sulinet.hu/oroksegtar/data/100_falu/Nagyborzsony/index.htm)

Catholic church). However, as the importance of religion is decreasing, this antagonism seems to be fading away, but it has been reported that local parents disapproved mixed romances between Lutheran and Catholic youngsters even in the 1970's.

Another historical clash – still accounted among elderly people in the village – lies between 'removed' and 'replaced' families, as after the Second World War – according to the principle of collective guilt – about 70 families were exiled from the village, and replaced with families coming from the territory of Slovakia; then, later some of the exiled ones could return.

In the 1960's, the population of the settlement – which used to be about 2000 – started to decrease, since many young people chose to move away, given the scarcity of local job opportunities and the poor living conditions. Some of the old dwelling houses and press houses were sold as weekendhouses, which created yet another chasm, between the local citizens and the 'weekenders'. During the last decades, new immigrants came from Romania who are actually ethnic Hungarians, but still often referred to as 'Romanians' (which is somewhat stigmatizing in this context) by the other inhabitants.

Finally, the most sensible demographic change – which relates to the most significant clash – is the increasing Roma population in the village. However, the Gypsies have also had their own clashes for very long time, especially between two large families, and although exogamy is not rare, the antagonism is manifested by frequent fights and threats.

## **2. 1. 2. The emergence of local tensions**

During the last decade – along with demographical changes and the phenomenon of enduring unemployment – the village experienced a dramatic increase in crime rates, which in some areas of crime reached a four times higher level than the regional average<sup>95</sup>.

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<sup>95</sup> Foresee Kutatócsoport Nonprofit Közhasznú Kft, "Bűnmegelőzés és konfliktuskezelés alternatív utakon – Modellprogram Nagybörzsönyben" (Crime prevention and conflict

As concerns the main types of criminal acts, burglaries are common, targeting especially weekend houses, followed by receiving goods, blackmailing, and various attacks against local elderly people (and the property of elderly). A significant proportion of the committed crimes are ascribed to the Roma, except the cases of receiving. As for the (suspected) offenders, especially certain members of a large local Roma family are perceived to be „leading a criminal lifestyle.”.

Besides criminal offences – associated mainly with the Roma –, local non-Roma are irritated mostly by noisy Roma family reunions, involving dozens of guests, loud music and alcohol consumption. (As it was described, one of the main reasons behind the establishment of the civil police guard was that the police was not helpful in breach of the peace cases.) Besides nocturnal clamor, the main concern of the non-Roma in Nagybörzsöny – many of them interested somehow in the income generated by tourism – is the ‘usual’ and ‘disturbing’ phenomenon of drunken and noisy Roma individuals (fighting mostly with each other) on the main square of the village, before the eyes of the ‘other’ inhabitants and the tourists.

Although the atmosphere concerning the relationship between the Roma and non-Roma is perceived as ‘very tense’ by many of the inhabitants, , the community has not yet experienced direct interethnic violent cases (involving Roma and non-Roma individuals and resulting in personal injury or property loss). However, tensions have already manifested in almost-violent, face-to-face scenes a couple of times, in the period directly preceding the crime prevention program. According to eyewitnesses, in the last case external support (pals from neighboring villages, arriving in cars) was also invited by non-Roma participants of a clash, which is described to have been a direct result of a quarrel in a pub between a Roma and a

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management on new ways – Pilot program in Nagybörzsöny), Jogi Fórum (2009.04. 1). <http://www.jogiforum.hu/hirek/20280> (Last accessed May 3, 2009.)

non-Roma man. Axes, sticks and other weapon-like tools were displayed, but ultimately the incident remained at the level of (reportedly, more or less mutual) threatening.

### **2. 1. 3. "We Also Exist"<sup>96</sup> – a mediation program in Nagybörzsöny**

As the proposal of the crime prevention program indicates, the primary problems to be addressed in the village of Nagybörzsöny are the ‘cohabitation-conflicts’ of the Roma and non-Roma inhabitants, and the high criminality rates, as these phenomena risk the demographic and economic sustainability of the settlement (keeping in mind, for example, the prospects of the local school and the success of rural tourism).

The mediation project (organized within the framework of the crime prevention program of the National Crime Prevention Committee) was planned to be implemented by a consortium of numerous actors, including the Municipality of Nagybörzsöny, the local Gypsy Minority Self-government and German Minority Self Government, the educational institutes of the village, the local civil police guard association, and by NGOs.<sup>97</sup>

The aim of the project – which was actually a pilot program – was the elaboration and implementation of model of effective and adoptable, non-violent conflict-management methods at the local level. In the preparatory phase, a comprehensive survey was conducted, aimed at diagnosing the situation and identifying the problems, clashes, demands and needs –

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<sup>96</sup> The original title of the project is “Settlement Mediation in Nagybörzsöny” (“Települési mefuávió Nagybörzsönyben”), the title “We Also Exist” (“Vagyunk mi is”) was given to a short film which presents the project.

<sup>97</sup> Nagybörzsöny Község Önkormányzata, Nagybörzsönyi Cigány Kisebbségi Önkormányzat, Nagybörzsönyi Német Kisebbségi Önkormányzat, Nagybörzsönyi Polgárőr Egyesület, Tegyük Együtt Nagybörzsönyért Egyesület, Börzsönyvidéki Bölcsőde, Óvoda, Általános Iskola, Alapfokú Művészetoktatási és Egységes Gyógypedagógiai és Módszertani Intézmény tagintézménye, Mászág Alapítvány, Nemzeti és Etnikai Kisebbségi Jogvédő Iroda, Közösségfejlesztők Egyesülete – Közösségi Kezdeményezéseket Támogató Szakmai hálózat, PrimRose Kiadó, Tanácsadó és Kulturális Szolgáltató Kft.

and the possible key actors and institutions as well. The program itself consisted of a training for volunteers (prospective facilitators of mediation processes), conflict management initiatives, community building activities and various awareness raising programs. For example, as a part of the project, a Tolerance Day was held in the village – organized by one of the leading minority protection NGOs in Hungary, the Legal Defense Bureau for National and Ethnic Minorities<sup>98</sup> – with awareness raising activities related to the issues of stereotypes, prejudices, intolerance and racism.

Among the key actors of the program (active participants of the training and other activities) was the mayor of the village, the chief of civil police guard II, and a number of inhabitants who joined as volunteers (for example, for the tasks of organizing playgroups for Roma and non-Roma kids, or a club for young mothers). However, not everybody was willing to participate. One of them is a representative of the local municipality, who rejected every attempt aimed at involving him into the project. According to his wife, he claims himself to be a 'Nazi', he hates the 'Browns' (i.e. Gypsies), and he can not, and does not want to, forgive 'them' for all the sins and crimes they have committed, and he does not want to bother with their problems, to help them, or to improve his relationship with them – *'he just does not want to sacrifice even 10 minutes of his life for dealing with the Gypsies'*.

The key Roma actors of the village (for example, the representatives of the local Gypsy self-government) were also unresponsive towards the program, usually for unexplained reasons, but some of them made some hints, that their participation in the training and other activities of the program – together with mainly non-Roma people – would not be supported by the Roma community. In general, only very few Roma individuals became involved into the various activities, except in the playgroup events, which became very popular among Roma children (and appreciated by their parents, as well).

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<sup>98</sup> NEKI – Nemzeti és Etnikai Kisebbségi Jogvédő Iroda.

### **2. 1. 3. 1. Dismantling the ethnicized perception of youth affray**

The effective dialogue aimed at managing a fierce conflict between a local youth gang and the municipality is considered to be one of the success stories of the crime prevention program. Before the mediation (or rather, the dialogue), the vandalism in the village (breaking flowers, destroying benches on the main square) was ascribed to 'the Gypsies', although the inhabitants of the village were more or less aware of the composition of the gang, the suspected vandalizers of the common property of the village. Actually, when the members of the gang were identified (almost all of them undertook the offended deems during the dialogue process), it became clear that the youngsters were non-Roma (except for one boy, who is a half-Roma, coming from a socially integrated family).

According to the coordinator of the project, the inhabitants of the village – which is a dead-end village, untouched not just by the passing-by traffic, but from certain kinds of impulses and horizons as well – are just not aware of the outer world's problems, and do not realize that youth affray is a common social problem everywhere, especially where leisure facilities are not available (the youth club in the community centre of the village has not operated for decades – while middle-aged or elderly inhabitants of the village were given the opportunity to participate in organized leisure activities and parties in the youth club, the youngsters of today lack these kind of facilities on the spot, which might increase the risk of deconstructive behavior.) As a result of the successful dialogue, the youngsters signed an agreement with the municipality, and were given a room – which needs some renovation – in the community centre to use it for leisure purposes.

### **2. 1. 3. 2. The request of the Gypsy Minority Self-government**

As the coordinators of the mediation project concluded, their major disappointment, and maybe the biggest failure of the program, was that the planned mediation between the

municipality and the Gypsy self-governement did not work effectively. The planned aim of the mediation was to elaborate an agreement concerning financial issues, as the Roma representatives claimed their involvement into decisions related to the funding of the maintenance and activities of the minority self-government, with a special focus on planned children and youth programs. (The direct conflict behind the planned conflict managing dialogue was a dicordance regarding the pre-finance of a program for Roma children, when the representatives of the Gypsy minority self-government were suspected by the local municipality that they will *'give the money to themselves, never for the children'*).

Regarding the failure – i. e. that the dialogue broke down at the very beginning and no agreement was reached by the parties - interpretations of the Roma and non-Roma parties diverge significantly,. According to the non-Roma, the *'Roma are not ready to get involved into a dialogue as partners'*, as the *'Roma are non-cooperative'* and *'do not have the those communication skills and abilities'* needed for participation in a mediation process. On the other side, some members of the local Roma comunity mentioned cautiously that they did not feel safe, therefore they did not want to *'complain'*, *because 'it might cause trouble later'*.

Surprisingly, one of the Roma repretatives who spoke about her experiences regarding the project did not mention a real failure: as she perceives it, the situation has already changed a lot, in a positive way, towards a relationship based on mutual trust between the municipality of the village and the Gypsy minority self-governement (for example, the mayor has already allowed some payments for the Gypsy minority self-government in advance, for the purpose of a Roma youth programme).

#### **2. 1. 4. Internal conflict management versus the Hungarian Guard option**

A recent, almost ironic development– just around the end of the crime prevention program, at the beginning of May, 2009 –, was the occurance of the idea of inviting the

Hungarian Guard to the village on the weekend of the annual gastronomic festival of Nagybörzsöny, which is basically a tourist attraction, and a weekend when events related to the mediation project were also held. Ultimately, the Hungarian Guard did not come to the village that weekend. However, the opinions and considerations of the interviewees, regarding both the idea of inviting the Hungarian Guard to the village, and on the phenomenon of Hungarian Guard in general gave some meaningful insight into the dynamics of the local community.

Supposedly, the idea was not fully elaborated or thought-through, as the divergence of the accounts might indicate: different interviewees remember different dates (regarding the first, three-day-long weekend of May, including a national holiday), chosen for the Hungarian Guard visit. Apparently, not everyone of the interviewees was aware of the plan in detail – or was willing to volunteer information about it. Most of the local non-Roma reported that he/she 'heard that something was planned' concerning the Hungarian Guard, and after all, he/she feels that it was a good decision not to invite them, anyway. However, the representative of the Gypsy self-government rejected that she would have been aware of the plan, and emphasized by repeating her opinion again and again, that *'there is nothing wrong here, we live in peace here with each other, nothing went wrong, nothing needs to be improved regarding the cohabitation of the Roma and non-Roma'*.

In addition to the fragmented accounts concerning the Hungarian Guard, and the possible consequences of their visit, including arguments about the possible harmful effects on the cohabitation of Roma and non-Roma (especially the threat of retorsion from the side of the Roma); professed preferences regarding the peaceful, internal conflict management methods (learnt at the mediation training, for example); but also disapproving hints on the dissension of the local non-Roma community (i.e. there was no consensus on the Hungarian Guard issue); a most articulated argumentation was provided by the chief of the civil police guard,

who explained (besides the above-mentioned factors) a crucial aspect: that the media attention, which is usually accompanied with the Hungarian Guard presence, is an undesired feature, as the community – hoping that the flourishing of rural tourism would save the future of the village – intends to develop a peaceful and attractive image of Nagybörzsöny.

## 2. 2. Verőce – an urbanizing village

Verőce is considered to be in an advantageous situation, concerning not just its location (beside the Danube, surrounded by natural beauties, but still very easily accessible from the capital city: the train trip takes only 35 minutes from Verőce to Budapest), but also regarding various socio-economic aspects.

The current number of inhabitants is 3,260<sup>99</sup>, and the population is growing (which is not usual in cases of rural settlements in Hungary), due to the continuous inflow of newcomers – among them, wealthy families moving there from the capital city. According to a newcomer in the village – coming from Budapest – Verőce is not a typical Hungarian village anymore, as it is rather 'urbanized'.

According to the mayor's description of the demographical tendencies of the village, the proportion of the Roma is not increasing (which is again unusual for a Hungarian rural settlement), since '*during the last decade there weren't any Gypsies among the newcomers*'. . However, concerning the actual proportion of the Roma in Verőce, the estimates diverge significantly. According to the mayor's estimations, Roma constitute approximately 6-7% of the inhabitants – which is about the average on the national level, and which would translate into about 200 Gypsies in Verőce, as he notes. A similar estimate is given by a local social worker who is living near to a place inhabited by Roma. Surprisingly, a leading Roma politician (living in Pest County, too, and being familiar in Verőce) estimates the proportion of the Roma in the whole population to be only 1-2% (referring to approximately 40 Gypsies living there), which is about the same as the estimations of a newcomer intellectual, who is convinced that 'there could not be more than a few, smaller Roma families in the village, constituting about 1%' (remarkably, this person agrees with a relatively high estimation – 15% – regarding the proportion of the Roma country-wide.)

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<sup>99</sup> According to the data provided by the mayor of the village on May 10, 2009.

As for the public life of minorities in Verőce, while there is an operating German national minority self-government (active in organizing cultural events) in the village, there is no Gypsy minority self-government, since the last municipal elections, held in 2006.

### 2. 2. 1. The village of ethnosymbolism

A strong first impression about the village of Verőce includes not just the visible prosperity of the settlement, but a sort of Hungarian nationalist – or ethnocentric – spirit in the atmosphere as well. In 2005, a statue of Albert Wass<sup>100</sup> (Hungarian nationalist novelist) was erected in the village, which has become a pilgrimage destination for the reverents of the writer, and there are a series of other new monuments, related somehow to the 'glorious' Hungarian past. The main square of the village, which was re-built with EU-funding<sup>101</sup>, is decorated with a statue, representing ancient Hungarian fertility symbols.

Not just the public, but some semi-public spaces in the village are also charged with Hungarian national feeling: the displayed items on the walls of the office of the mayor are easy to associate with nostalgic irredentism (for example, a huge copy of the lyrics of the "Anthem of the Seclers"<sup>102</sup> or a historical map of 'Greater Hungary'). In the elementary school, the vice principal's rather puritan office is decorated with Hungarian folk music posters and a picture of Sándor Petőfi<sup>103</sup>, the poet of the 1848 Hungarian revolution.

Besides the display of ethno-nationalist symbols, the cultural and public life of the village is also permeated with a similar spirit: for instance, Verőce is the venue of the annual

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<sup>100</sup> Albert Wass (1908–1998), Hungarian novelist, born in Transylvania.

<sup>101</sup> László Rab, "Verőce, a szobrok faluja" (Verőce, the village of statues), *Népszabadság*, January 24, 2006. <http://www.nol.hu/archivum/archiv-391722> (Last accessed May 3, 2009).

<sup>102</sup> "Székely Himnusz".

<sup>103</sup> Sándor Petőfi (1823–1849), Hungarian poet.

'Hungarian Island' summer festival, which is a Hungarian/nationalist alternative to the multicultural/mainstream 'Island' annual festival in Budapest. (In 2006, members of the local Roma community reported abuses committed by visitors of the festival against Roma inhabitants of the village. Ultimately, these cases remained unconfirmed.)

Recently (March, 2009), members of the Hungarian Guard organized an excursion to Verőce, including a visit to the statue of Albert Wass.

### **2. 2. 2. "We Live Together"<sup>104</sup> – a mediation program in Verőce**

The crime prevention program in Verőce was implemented by two participating organizations: the MH Líceum foundation (which runs a secondary school in Budapest, called "Green Hancock School"<sup>105</sup>, especially for drop-out, deviant or disadvantaged youngsters) and the local municipality of Verőce.<sup>106</sup>

In a brief description contained in the project proposal, the main sources of social tension in Verőce were identified as follows: "ethnic tension, tension related to unemployment, generations-long antagonisms between families, integration of the newcomers, tensions related to modernization and to culture, clashes among generations, and political oppositions", while the main aim of the project was to teach and to facilitate the use of consensus-seeking conflict-management methods.

Although the proposal referred to the presence of 'ethnic tensions' in the first place, during the implementation of the project – as it turned out –, no ethnic issue was affected at all, and no Roma individual was involved into the activities. Answering the question about the

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<sup>104</sup> "Együtt élünk".

<sup>105</sup> "Zöld Kakas Tanoda".

<sup>106</sup> Verőce Község Polgármesteri Hivatala.

reasons for the absence of the Roma, it was mentioned that *"there are not many of them living here"* and that, *"supposedly, they live in a closed community"*.

### **2. 2. 2. 1. Roma pupils and school conflicts**

The local elementary school – run by the Reformed church – was represented in the crime prevention program by one of the classes of the school (involving the pupils, the parents and the teachers). Eventually, the content of the implemented activities (e.g. self-esteem building games) did not cover the issue of ethnicity or ethnic tolerance, though reportedly there were some conflicts between the school and certain Roma pupils (and their families as well).

The vice headmaster of the school – who neither was involved into the project activities himself, nor was aware of the content of the project himself – was willing to share his views on the issue of ethnic conflicts in the environment of the school. According to his estimations – based on perception – less than 10% percent of the pupils are Roma, which means an average 1-2 Roma pupils in each class (he also mentions that there are more Roma children in the village, but they are attending a 'special school' in Vác). As he explains, a part of the problems between Roma families and the schools is related to the absence without leave of the pupils (noting that this phenomenon occurs with non-Roma pupils as well). However, as he explains, the handling of unreverent Roma pupils became difficult since the Roma *'have the ethnic card to play*, in cases of simple discipline issues. According to his view, *'today's tensions originate from hypocrisy'*, as everybody is *'having all those liberty and human rights to refer to, and the traditional and effective ways of conflict management are forbidden now'* (i.e. physical discipline of the pupils, according to him, was a highly effective pedagogical method to solve certain kinds of problems in the school, and the use of physical force – fighting, for example – used to be beneficial in solving conflict among adult members of a local community). The vice-principal – as he himself reports – was accused a couple of

years ago for the maltreatment of a Roma student, but eventually, the parents withdrew the accusation, since they lacked sufficient testimony.

### **2. 2. 3. The conflict of December 2008**

In December, 2008 in Veróce, a quarrel in a pub escalated into fierce fighting and physical violence between Roma and non-Roma men, involving baseball sticks and other weapon-like tools, (the incident became a law enforcement issue, which is reportedly is still has not been resolved). Based on the available accounts, the timeline of the events might be drafted as such: , a couple of Roma men, living in the 'upper' part of the village (beyond the railway tracks) went to a pub which is located in the 'lower' part of the village (close to the river). The conflict began when some guests of the pub started to play 'skinhead' music, singing along the explicit anti-Gypsy lyrics. The fighting soon escalated, and – according to the account of a Roma – a rightist motor bike gang appeared on the scene, as they were called from the neighboring villages by youngsters among the non-Roma party of the conflict. Under still-unclarified circumstances, the incident resulted in serious personal injuries.

It should be noted that during night-time, there is no police watch or patrol in Veróce, therefore immediate police intervention was not expected. However, on the very same night – according to the account of a Roma politician who became involved in the conflict management process after the incident –commandos raided the home of the Roma family whose members were involved in the conflict (searching for guns, and causing significant property loss during the action, reportedly).

An interesting piece of information is that, according to an inhabitant of the village who is a relative of one of the injured non-Roma men, the key person of the affected Roma family, whose person is associated by the villagers with a series of crimes and disturbances, and who

participated on the side of the Roma in the conflict, is a non-Roma himself (a 'Hungarian'), married to a female member of the Roma family.

### 2. 2. 3. 1. The village assembly

Right on the following day after the violent incident, a village assembly was organized by the mayor of Verőce, aimed at listening to both parties before the inhabitants of the village. As a Roma leader from the county remembers, Roma politicians were also involved in the initiation of this meeting, what is more, both the president of the National Gypsy Government and the Parliamentary Commissioner for Ethnic and National Minorities intended to participate at the meeting (however, eventually they did not attend).

According to the minutes of the village assembly<sup>107</sup> – in addition to the mayor, the representatives of the municipality and the chief of the police – both parties of the incident were represented at the meeting. (Reportedly, more than 200 hundred people attended the meeting, Roma and non-Roma, including the lawyers of the affected Roma). The meeting – commonly considered as effective, or at least, useful – was led and moderated by the mayor, who phrased that he wants *"some guarantee, concerning the future, that no one will get into any kind of atrocity"* – then he professed that *"it is not an excuse, if you don't not like the music played in the pub. If you don't like the music, then you have to turn away, and leave the place!"*, and added that *"Of course, lyrics like 'every Gypsy must die' are not allowed to be sung in the pub"*. In his concluding sentences, the mayor claimed that he wants to see tendencies of not perceiving Gypsies and 'Whites' any more, as there are only two relevant categories: *"righteous people and non-righteous people"*.

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<sup>107</sup> Source: Jegyzőkönyv Verőce Község Képviselő-Testülete által tartott Falugyűlésről, 2008. 12. 03. 19:04.

### 2. 2. 3. 2. Negotiations between Roma leaders and the mayor

However, as a Roma political leader of Pest County reports, the story has not ended on the day of the village assembly, as the issue of the fierce commando raid (and the reported maltreatment of the Roma by the raid police) was not affected by the meeting, therefore the members of the affected family called external support to validate their interests. According to the Roma leader, who arrived to support the local Roma of Verőce, a closed meeting was conducted with the participation of the mayor (the chief of the police was also invited, but eventually he did not attend), which concluded with a reassuring agreement, that is, the mayor – who was reportedly unaware of the commando raid case – promised to show a protective attitude towards the Roma. (As the regional Roma leader professed, in cases like Verőce, where the Roma community is relatively small and defenseless, some external support might be needed from the side of the broader Roma community – for example, by threatening local authorities with the prospect of a Roma power demonstration march.)

The mayor of Verőce related yet another development, supposedly related to the violent incident: a couple of days after the village assembly, strangers arrived to the village – by cars with tinted windows – and verbally threatened the Roma family which had been involved in the conflict. When the case was reported to the mayor by someone from the neighborhood – not by the affected individuals themselves – the mayor visited the family personally, and while asking them to report such cases immediately (*'they have my cell phone number, as everyone else does in the village'*), he promised protection for the Roma from any kind of external danger. According to the mayor, his visit was highly appreciated by the family, and since that day *'everything is fine – nothing has happened'*.

In the Verőce case, apparently the external threat, coming from an (allegedly) unidentified source proved to be a key element concerning the emergence of a more trustful relationship between a populous Roma family and the municipality – at least according to the

account of the mayor, who tried to demonstrate by the gesture of offering protection to the threatened Roma family that he feels personally responsible towards the security of all inhabitants of the settlement, including the Roma as well.

## CONCLUSIONS

Before considering the relevance of the research question, or the pertinence of the thesis statement, basic concepts – 'Roma', 'non-Roma', 'interethnic' –, and a basic implication – namely the self-evident connection between tension, conflict and violence – of this statement (included also in the title of thesis), are to be challenged, as these concepts turned out to be fluid and this basic implication proved to be questionable in practice.

First of all, when raising a question about any Roma issue, the basic – and definitive – difficulty occurs at the very conceptualization of the term 'Roma', or practically, at the classification of persons into categories labeled 'Roma' and 'non-Roma'. As mentioned above, when discussing the legal framework concerning ethnic issues in Hungary, any kind of ethnic data handling is considered problematic, therefore not just ethnic registers are non-existent, but aggregated ethnic data is usually unavailable as well. The estimations – if the parties are willing or able to provide an estimation at all – are based on perception (which is still nonetheless a crucial aspect regarding interethnic relations). The nature of data collection on perceived ethnicity is well illustrated by the case of the vice-principal of an elementary school in Verőce (where, ultimately, less than 10% of the pupils were considered to be Roma), who, when he was asked about the estimated number of Roma pupils, asked for patience and left his office. After a couple of minutes, he returned with the aggregated data, revealing that it was calculated with the help of the cleaning lady, who knows all the pupils in the school and is therefore in a position of having a reliable perception of ethnicity. As the vice-principal added, the classification is not rigid, as in the case of some pupils, one of the parents is not perceived as a Roma, therefore the pupil is 'not really' considered to be a Roma. The mayor of Nagybörzsöny also referred to 'uncertainties' concerning the number of inhabitants of Roma origin. According to his conceptualisation, not just the status – in terms of ethnicity - of offsprings of mixed marriages is uncertain, but also the status of spouses in mixed couples, especially in the case of

non-Roma spouses of Roma individuals. According to his classification, *'those non-Roma who are married to (or live together with) Roma, and who are not to be disassociated from the Roma regarding their lifestyle, are perceived as Roma, too'*.

The second challengeable term is the adjective 'interethnic' when used to characterize a relationship or a conflict. As Paul R. Brass phrases the problem, "interethnic relations have become such a pervasive concern that the interpretation of virtually any act of violence between persons identified as belonging to different ethnic groups itself becomes a political act."<sup>108</sup> However, the interviewees seemed to be aware, in a natural way, of this conceptual problem, as became clear by their accounts on community relationships, conflicts, incidents etc. For instance, an indicator of people's politically untouched consciousness that not every conflict which involves individuals of different ethnicity is necessarily ethnic conflict was an example given by a non-Roma inhabitant of Nagybörzsöny about his noisy Gypsy neighbors, *'who are not problematic because they are Gypsies, but because they are noisy'*. In contrast, the perceived artificial nature of 'real' – politicized – ethnic conflicts was tangible in the narratives about the incident of Verőce, which burst out in a pub when non-Roma people started to play skinhead music and sing aloud anti-Gypsy lyrics, with the apparent aim to provoke the Roma guests in the establishment.

The third question concerns an implication, hidden in the thesis statement, about a seemingly self-evident connection – or even, correlation – between tension, conflict and violence. In actuality, the violent cases in the two villages are rather illustrations of a very impressive thought, professed in article of Rogers Brubaker and David Laitin, according to which "violence has generally been conceptualized – if only tacitly – as a degree of conflict rather than as a form of conflict, or indeed as a form of social or political action in its own

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<sup>108</sup> Paul R. Brass, *Theft of an Idol. Text and Context in the Representation of Collective Violence*, Princeton Studies in Culture, Power, History (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997): 4.

right<sup>109</sup>. According to the available information, the Verőce incident is apparently rather a political act than anything else – even if there might be personal clashes in the rural community –, while in Nagybörzsöny, the actual, almost-everyday violent incidents happened among the members of the Gypsy community, and never (yet) along the line of fierce tension, between Roma and non-Roma.

As for the relevance of the research question, or the pertinence of the thesis statement, it should be emphasized that according to the limited scope of the field research, the outcomes of the two case studies might not constitute a base for comprehensive conclusions. Instead, only concluding remarks are to be derived or observation to be noted. That said, one of the main findings, according to the experiences gained through the series of semi-structured interviews and informal talks, is that the main research question (about the local impact of the involvement of the Hungarian Guard) in its original form proves to be partially irrelevant, not just because the impact of the media coverage about the activities of the Hungarian Guard cannot be underestimated, but also because of the quick spread of Hungarian Guard appearances throughout the country (not always in the form of power demonstrating marches, but also by organizing recruiting events or other gatherings, connected for example to public assemblies of the Jobbik); the Hungarian Guard managed to reach practically the whole country, in more or less intimidating forms, or at least in virtual terms. (The forthcoming EP-elections significantly catalysed this process, as the Jobbik Party's campaign was apparently built on the popularity – or at least, attractiveness – of the Hungarian Guard among the members of its prospective voters, therefore a lot of Jobbik campaign events involved some kind of Hungarian Guard presence.)

However, while the questions regarding the direct consequences of the involvement of external forces proved to be difficult to answer, a lot of information and aspects arose

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<sup>109</sup> Rogers Brubaker and David Laitin, "Ethnic and Nationalist Violence," *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 413.

concerning the antecedents of certain (successful or rejected) Hungarian Guard invitations, namely about the considerations and the argumentations within local communities. As it seems, still one of the most ambitious attempts, in terms of the issue of interethnic tensions, is to identify some factors or arguments that might play a role – at least, temporarily – in keeping the Hungarian Guard and other extremist forces away from a community.

A community's local investment into peaceful internal conflict management might be perceived as a kind of preventive factor when it comes the involvement of external political forces, like the Hungarian Guard, as the case of Nagybörzsöny indicates. Eventually, it still does not seem to be an absolute guarantee, as far from all of the inhabitants participated in the mediation training program, and the invitation of the Hungarian Guard was still an option which was considered by the community, after the municipality's participation in the crime prevention program.

However, as can be expected, from the perspective of a rural community, overwhelming media attention might be a repulsive concomitant of the the Hungarian Guard. Power demonstrating appearances of the Guard are designed to be spectacular media attractions, and that is not necessarily what the inhabitants of a village desire, i.e. letting the external world know about their inconvenient situation. Especially in cases where a good reputation is a high priority for particular reasons – like in Nagybörzsöny, where the income from tourism is considered to be a key element of the economic survival of the village – media coverage of local tensions and problems was agreed to be potentially harmful to the image of the settlement, and therefore undesirable.

The fear of the non-Roma inhabitants of the furor of the humiliated Roma, and from – potentially violent – Roma responses, at least on the level of a local action or threat, might be another argument against the involvement of the Hungarian Guard, as could be discerned in the Nagybörzsöny case. In fact, an organized, yet peaceful counter-action has already taken

place in Szikszó in July 2008, when approximately 1,000 Roma gathered together for a peaceful demonstration against the Hungarian Guard. However, there are voices of a more militant approach as well from the side of the Roma. An articulated Roma backlash, i.e. the option of establishing a 'Roma Guard' as a response to the Hungarian Guard, is a recurrent element on the (rhetorical) agenda of the MCF Roma Unity Party<sup>110</sup>. In a press release in August 2008, which caused widespread outcry, MCF leader Orbán Kolompár claimed, in the context of news about violent attacks against the Roma throughout Hungary, that the Roma should join forces: *'I call on Roma society to forget about party politics and other affiliations, and join together for the interests of the Roma in Hungary, and contribute to the establishment of a self-defence movement. Let's demonstrate that we are powerful, and that we are able to defend ourselves if the situation is such!'*<sup>111</sup>

However, the forthcoming EP-elections – given that both the extreme-rightist Jobbik Party (which constitutes the political background of the Hungarian Guard) and the MCF Party (one of the two leading Gypsy parties) qualified to put forth candidate lists – might modify the political power map of Hungary, given an increased voting activity; furthermore, during the remaining one year until the next general elections in 2010, the country might witness a sharpening of political tensions. It is feared that a constant emergence of extremism would not only affect the general political climate, but would pose a setback for grassroots attempts aimed at peaceful co-habitation of Roma and non-Roma at local levels, and seriously risk the return of individual investments into these attempts.

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<sup>110</sup> MCF Roma Összefogás Párt.

<sup>111</sup> „Arra szólítom fel a roma társadalmat, hogy tegye félre a pártpolitikai és egyéb kötődését, és fogjon össze a hazai cigánység érdekeiért, és egy önvédelmi mozgalom megszervezésében vegyen részt. Mutassuk meg, hogy erősek vagyunk, és ha úgy adódik, akkor meg tudjuk védeni magunkat!”

## APPENDICES

**Table 1.**  
*Ethnic and National Minorities in Hungary,*  
*according to the enumeration of the Minority Act, 1993.*

	<b>Estimated number* (1999)</b>	<b>Population census, based on self-declaration** (2001)</b>	<b>Votes for minority self-government candidates*** (2006)</b>
<b>Gypsy/Roma</b> ( <i>ethnic</i> )	<b>400,000–600,000</b>	190,046	246,728
<b>German</b> ( <i>national</i> )	<b>200,000–220,000</b>	62,233	130,301
<b>Slovakian</b> ( <i>national</i> )	<b>100,000–110,000</b>	17,693	124,329
<b>Croatian</b> ( <i>national</i> )	<b>80,000–90,000</b>	15,620	29,731
<b>Romanian</b> ( <i>national</i> )	<b>25,000</b>	7,995	9,427
<b>Polish</b> ( <i>national</i> )	<b>10,000</b>	2,962	9,690
<b>Serb</b> ( <i>national</i> )	<b>5,000–10,000</b>	3,816	4,840
<b>Armenian</b> ( <i>national</i> )	<b>3,500–10,000</b>	620	6,477
<b>Ruthenian</b> ( <i>national</i> )	<b>6,000</b>	1,098	6,364
<b>Slovenian</b> ( <i>national</i> )	<b>5,000</b>	3,040	2,624
<b>Greek</b> ( <i>national</i> )	<b>4,000–4,500</b>	2,509	5,422
<b>Bulgarian</b> ( <i>national</i> )	<b>3,000–3,500</b>	1,358	3,342
<b>Ukrainian</b> ( <i>national</i> )	<b>2,000</b>	5,070	1,722

\* Source: Open Society Institute, *Monitoring the EU Accession Process: Minority Protection. Report 2001* (Budapest: Open Society Institute, 2001).

\*\* Source: Központi Statisztikai Hivatal (Hungarian Central Statistical Office), *Population Census 2001. Ethnic Affiliation. Data on National and Ethnic Minorities* (Budapest: KSH, 2002).

\*\*\* Source: webpage of the Hungarian National Election Office (Országos Választási Hivatal), <http://www.valasztas.hu> (accessed November 23, 2008).

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