

## THE STATUS OF GYPSIES IN MONTENEGRO

UDC 323.15:314.1(=914.99)(497.16)

**Srdan Vukadinović**

Faculty of Philosophy, Nikšić

**Abstract.** *The examination of the status of the Romanies in Montenegro is interesting for at least two reasons. Firstly, the Gypsies represent an ethnic national minority that is among the numerous ones in Montenegro and whose participation in the entire population, according to the official demographic statistics for the period from 1981 to 1991, more than doubled (from 0,25% to 0,53%). On the other hand, the analysis as well as the consideration of the status of an ethnic minority having no mother country on its own are specific especially regarding the protection of the basic minority rights and the freedom of this group in the Montenegro society. The question of violating the basic rights and freedom of the Romanies' ethnic population in Montenegro was examined with reference to several indicators (everyday public communication, contacting public and government services, etc.). The results show that there are several differences but they are in the qualitative and the quantitative sense insignificant for establishing the existence of any form of discrimination.*

**Key Words:** *Mother Country, Romanies' Demographic Characteristics, Minority Rights*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Any attempt to explore and consider the position of the minority national and ethnic groups in a given social reality is a very specific problem. The best indicator of democracy and tolerance achieved by the social system in a country is the attitude towards the minorities. It is reflected in the ability on the part of the majority population or populations to exist under the conditions of tolerating and respecting the minorities and their rights. In that sense, the question of the actual (not only constitutional) position of the minorities is a problem of the majority community just as it is a specific mirror of its achieved level of tolerance, emancipation and culture of living. It is specially interesting to explore those national and ethnic minorities that have no so-called "mother country", that is, that have "no one to stand up for them." The Romanies' population is one of these. It should be kept in mind that its position, regardless of what state is in question, is

difficult and that it is facing various problems.

The paper presents an analysis of the Romanies' position in Montenegro on the basis of the subjective indicators of the examined members of the Romanies' population. The research was done by means of a questionnaire and interviews, that is, by "scanning" some Romanies' families in Podgorica, Nikšić, Cetinje and Bar in the late 1999 and early 2000 (December - January). The observed families were chosen by a random sample method. The sample comprised 60 families including 240 individuals examined. The sample comprised 183 or 76,3% men and 57 or 23,7% women. As for age groups, the most present population comprised individuals of 30-39 years of age, that is, 40-49 years of age (comprised 63 examined per each or 26,2% which amounts to the total of 126 examined or 52,4%). It means that less than a half of the overall sample (47,6%) included the other three, that is, four age categories (of 19 years, of 20-29, of 50-59 and of over 60 years of age). Though the interviews and the questionnaire were done with individuals examined, the aim of the research was to make a record of the Romany families in order to determine their real position. A special discussion about the Romanies' position as well as the problems of their adoption to the dominant way of life was held with the members of the Montenegro Romanies' Association.

## 2. ROMANIES IN MONTENEGRO

The presence of the Romanies in Montenegro can be traced back to the early sixteenth century when the historical sources mentioned them as a work force used for "repairs and building up of the fortresses". Thus the Romanies are mentioned when engaged as workers in 1508 at the times when "Herceg-Novi was transformed into a trade emporium". (1) More historical data about the Romanies' stay in Montenegro date from the second half of the sixteenth century, that is, from the times when the seacoast towns of Bar and Ulcinj became important trade and transit places. These towns fell to the Turks in 1571 and since then they developed more intensively. They became important harbors through which people from the various continents communicated, most of all from Europe and Africa. Since that in those days the city of Ulcinj was a "pirates' nest", the pirates of Ulcinj also dealt with the slave trade that was quite developed at the time. The Romanies lived like slaves in the Mediterranean countries. The pirates of Ulcinj bought them in Europe and Africa in order to sell them in Ulcinj. In the seaside region they were used as "exploited manpower on the pirate ships and for work on their estates." (2) It is evident that the Romany population emerged in the region today called the Montenegro seacoast almost five centuries ago; since that time its members have been living throughout Montenegro thus making up a constituent segment of the ethnic and the demographic structure of the Montenegro society.

It is certain that the living conditions for the Romanies at the seacoast were much better than in the continental part of Montenegro in the years after they were first mentioned in the chronicles. The communication of the seacoast towns with traders and other business people of the times contributed to the creation of much more favorable living conditions as well as to the provision of the existential prerequisites for the Romanies' survival on the Montenegro territory. On the contrary, in the ambiance that used to form what was in those days called the under-Lovćen Montenegro there were

frequent wars as well as intertribal fights that caused an ever present hunger. The Romanies that used to live in that region were forced to leave it very quickly and search for some more favorable places for living.

However, those who remained to live in Montenegro "adopted themselves to the given circumstances which caused certain changes in all their ways." (3) The very-well known lawyer and creator of the first Montenegro Constitution dating 1905 Baltazar Bogišić made, in the early eighties of the twentieth century, a difference between the Romanies Nomads (*Čergari*) and the Romanies Blacksmiths. The Romanies Nomads came to Montenegro only temporarily and mostly as seasonal workers ready to leave it soon. The Romanies Blacksmiths were permanently settled on the Montenegro territory in those days; they built in those elements of the Montenegro society in their habits and behavior patterns that they achieved in their long stay in the region. In the period before the adoption of the Constitution in 1905 the Romanies were protected in the Montenegro society by the tribal and unwritten laws and they fitted into the former social division of labor doing the jobs that were relevant for the social community. Bogišić mentions that "the similarity of the Romanies Blacksmiths with the Montenegrins is to be found in their permanent residence that makes them essentially different from those of their compatriots who live in the other Yugoslav and other countries like nomads." The Romanies Blacksmiths adopted themselves completely in the nineteenth century to the specific social and economic circumstances in Montenegro and they never left their homeland unless, as stressed by Bogišić, "they were forced, like all other artistic craftsmen, by the circumstances to move away due to unemployment or hyperproduction." The presence of the Romanies in the twentieth century, especially in the second half, can be more reliably followed on the basis of the demographic indicators given in different statistic publications. It should be mentioned that the demographic indicators of the Romanies' existence in Montenegro, just like in other countries, cannot be taken at first sight as completely accurate since they appear quite odd. Namely, the Population Census gives a much smaller number of the Romanies than it really is; neither is the number given by the research true. The reason for this is that the Romanies, when required to declare themselves at the Census, mostly declared themselves as members of other national groups, most often as Muslims and Montenegrins. Thus, for instance, according to the Population Census dating March, 1971, out of 234 Romanies in the former Ivangrad (today's Berane) only six of them declared themselves as belonging to their ethnic group. (4)

In the second half of the twentieth century the Romanies settled in Montenegro from the republics of the former Yugoslav society. In the last fifty years even as many as 36,3% of the overall number of Romanies permanently settled in Montenegro came to live there. A very small number (0,51%) members of this minority ethnic group settled in Montenegro before 1945. The greatest number of Romanies (48,9%) settled after 1981. A considerably smaller number of them kept settling down in the period from 1971 to 1980 (21,3%) and from 1961 to 1970 (13,6%). Most of the Romanies today permanently settled in Montenegro came over from Kosovo (63%) while a considerably smaller number of them came from the Central Serbia (23%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (6,3%) and Macedonia (5,8%). A negligible number of them came over from Slovenia, Croatia, Vojvodina and from abroad.

We can notice that most Romanies (63,7%) permanently settled in Montenegro have been living there for several generations. They are descendents of those Romanies who were in the Montenegro past used as a work force for the most primitive jobs and who

gradually adopted themselves to the social, the economic and the cultural conditions of living in the Montenegro society. Of the Romanies who mostly came to Montenegro in the last two decades the greatest number of them is from Kosovo.

### 3. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ROMANIES IN MONTENEGRO

The Romanies make up one of the more numerous minority ethnic groups in Montenegro. Regarding their number, there are big differences between the official statistic evidence and the data possessed by the Romanies' Association of Montenegro. Thus, according to the Population Census from 1991, in Montenegro there were 3282 Romanies or 0,54% of the overall population. These indicators are considerably below those shown by the centers for social aid in the municipalities of Montenegro, the Red Cross Organization or the above-mentioned Romanies' Association. Comparing the data from the above-mentioned sources as well as the numbers given by the Romanies themselves the research presented in this paper has stated that today in Montenegro there are 21,000 permanently settled inhabitants belonging to the Romanies' nationality which is 6,5 times more than given by the Annuals of the Institute for Statistics. These figures place the Romanies among more numerous minorities in Montenegro, namely, just behind the Muslims (89,614 or 14,57%) and the Albanians (40,415 or 6,57%). The reasons why the official statistics show a smaller number of Romanies comparing to the real situation are quite different. On one hand, the Romanies' themselves are not interested in the Census. On the other hand, quite frequent changes of the Romany families' place of residence within the Montenegro territory make it difficult to get to know their real number. Moreover, there is one very important fact, namely, the Romany population has an extremely evident ability of quick adjustment to the conditions and the ways of living of the environment they live in so that the majority of them in Montenegro declare themselves as Muslims or Montenegrins. There is also a number of the Romanies who have, on the basis of their ties of family or kinship, assimilated into the members of the other national groups. Otherwise, in Montenegro there are 12% of the Romanies who are of Orthodox and 82% of those who are of Islam religious confession.

The Kosovo catastrophe made the Romanies' position even worse in the social and the economic sense. In the middle of 1999 there were about 43,000 Romanies who came to Montenegro either as refugees or dislodged persons. Meanwhile most of them left for other European countries in the search for a more permanent source of existence. The research has shown that in March-April, 2000, there were another 10,000 Romanies living in Montenegro, namely the dislodged persons from Kosovo. Of them all, only a small number (7%) ever think about coming back to Kosovo while 42% of them want to settle down permanently in Montenegro. However, the greatest number (51%) of them want to move - legally or not - to other European countries. They may even experience a catastrophe like the one that occurred in August, 1999, when dozens of Romanies died in the Montenegro part of the Adriatic Sea while trying to get to Italy illegally and in a overcrowded boat.

The previous wars on the former Yugoslavia territory caused a much less exodus of the Romanies. For instance, only 15 Romany families came from Croatia, while 1,000 Romanies from Bosnia found refuge in Montenegro.

Our research has confirmed the presence of the Romanies permanently settled in some Montenegro municipalities. In this way we could not establish any reliable presence of the Romanies Nomads since all the examined claimed that their permanent place of residence was some of the given municipalities. The number of the Romanies living in the given municipalities is the following: Bar - 280 (1,34%), Berane - 400 (1,9%), Bijelo Polje - 480 (2,28%), Budva - 180 (0,86%), Danilovgrad - 370 (1,76%), Žabljak - 80 (0,38%), Kolašin - 60 (0,28%), Kotor - 520 (2,47%), Mojkovac - 50 (0,23%), Nikšić - 4,200 (20%), Plav - 170 (0,80%), Podgorica - 10,800 (51,4%), Rožaje - 380 (1,8%), Tivat - 350 (1,67%), Ulcinj - 950 (4,52%), Herceg Novi - 630 (3%) and Cetinje 1,100 (5,23%). The overall number of Romanies in Montenegro, therefore, is 21,000.

It can be noticed that in four municipalities, namely, Andrijevica, Plužine, Pljevlja and Šavnik (5) there is not a single member of the Romany nation at all - or there is no one who declared himself as one. The reasons for this is that in the northern communities of Montenegro there are far smaller opportunities for the Romanies to practice particular crafts or trades. Besides, those regions are exposed to very low temperatures and severe winters which does not suit at all to the Romanies' 'housing' conditions. Exceptionally mobile, the Romanies move, forced by cold, to much warmer areas where there are more of them in order to adopt more easily to the living and the working conditions. In the north of Montenegro, even in those municipalities in which the Romanies are living nowadays, there were not any of their members for quite a long time. If any Romany family even tried to live there, it could not endure for long; therefore, it moved towards the central and southern part of Montenegro. This was probably the case with those Romanies who, at the end of the autumn and before the winter, lived in Pljevlja and Andrijevica.

The data about the Romanies in the Montenegro municipalities show that 88,6% of them live in urban or suburban environments while only 11,4% of them live in rural areas. More urbanized environments offer better possibilities for the Romanies' economic activities. The largest Romanies' settlement is in Konik and Vrela Ribnička in Podgorica with about 6,000 permanent settlers. In addition, larger Romanies' settlements are also Pod Trebjesom in Nikšić and Zabrđe in Cetinje.

Regarding violation of the Romanies' basic rights - more precisely, right to life - a very illustrative example is the case of the Romanies living in the town of Danilovgrad. In this small town with 16,000 inhabitants, situated in the central part of Montenegro at some fifteen kilometers away from Podgorica, the Romanies used to live in their own settlement in the place of Glavica. The town itself was built in the second half of the nineteenth century by Prince Danilo. The Romanies' population has lived there since the town's foundation; they had their own place in the division of labor. In the spring of 1995 a crime occurred in Danilovgrad, namely, the crime whose "actor was a member of the Romanies' community. The reaction was horrifying. The raging mob of the people who up to that time were quite and tolerant in only one night burnt all the Romanies' houses at Glavica; there were fire-arms threats, shootings, explosions! The message was all too clear and the Romanies - on that tragic night - decided to leave Danilovgrad! The threat was too violent and serious. Thus, lit up by fires and clouded in smoke, Danilovgrad was left without some eighty of its citizens of Romany origin; those rare ones who remained were, in the following months, exposed to further threats, attacks and 'friendly warnings'". (6) It should also be mentioned that this was the period of the nationalist zeal, very often

expressed by singing some patriotic songs, that would leave its trace upon the stability even in more compact nationalist and ethnic communities. The nationalist ragings of various kinds had as a consequence the jeopardizing of the basic human rights of innocent people. Though it was one of the rare instances of violating the fundamental rights on the part of an otherwise tolerant community (as the Montenegro society really is), the events in Danilovgrad showed the prejudice against the minority national and ethnic groups regarded as the guilty party for all that goes wrong. (7)

The examination of the demographic facts of the Romany population in Montenegro as one of the elements of quality of life shows two characteristic phenomena. First, there is a decline of the nativity rate, that is, the increase of the Romany ethnic group population has been declining. The majority of the examined families (29,8%) have only one child, then two (17,6%). The third level of this "hierarchy" is taken by the families with five children (16,5%). Three children are to be found in 13,4%, while four are found in 10,3% of the Romany families. More than nine children are to be found only in 2,1% of the families. The nativity drop in the Romany families is a consequence of increasingly worse socio-economic living conditions. The destruction of the social, most of all, of the economic structure in the last decade of the twentieth century reduced the possibilities of the Romanies in Montenegro to provide for the fulfillment of their living needs; in this way they are forced to take into consideration "family planning." Up to the eighties the nativity among the Romanies was an accidental thing.

The gender structure of the Romanies in Montenegro was properly distributed, namely, there were 49,7% of men and 50,3% of women. While carrying out our research in the observed families there was not any single member older than 65 years of age which is a characteristic proof of the Romanies' short life. Mostly there are Romanies of 19 years of age (58,9%) followed by those younger than 29 (16,7%). Among the Romanies there are 9,1% of those older than 30-39 years of age. Moving towards the older ones, the number of the Romanies' population declines, namely, 50-59 = 3,9%, over 60 years of age = 1,6%.

The demographic analysis of the Romany population in Montenegro proves that the Romanies live shortly and that they rarely live up to 60 years of age. The unfavorable housing conditions, poor and bad quality food, hard working conditions are only some of the factors having a direct impact upon the health quality and the duration of the Romanies' life.

#### 4. RESPECT OF THE ROMANIES' BASIC RIGHTS IN THE MONTENEGRO SOCIETY

The basic rights of the national and the ethnic groups are regulated by the Montenegro Constitution dating 1992. Article 67 of the Constitution states that the members of the national and the ethnic groups are guaranteed the protection of their national, ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity. The basic rights' protection is realized in accordance with the international protection of the human and civil rights. For the sake of carrying out the measures, activities and actions that serve to protect the constitutionally-guaranteed rights, the Republic Council for the Protection of the National and Ethnic Groups' Rights was established in Montenegro in 1993. The Council is headed by the President of the Republic while the body's structure is formed in such a way as to include

representatives of all the three confessions but not of all the national and the ethnic groups in Montenegro. Up to 2000 there were no Romanies' representatives in the Council's structure. The reason for this lies in the fact, as stated in the Romanies' Association of Montenegro, "that they could not reach an agreement about who is going to represent them". The Romanies think that their rights are not jeopardized by this; after all, the fact that they do not have their delegate is their own fault.

The constitutional right to schooling in the Romany language in the Montenegro society is not realized in practice. In 1998 there was some talking about establishing an elementary school in Romany language in Podgorica, but not much has been done to make this plan come true. In this context it is interesting to note that more than a half of the examined (58,6%) think that the school in their mother tongue is not so much needed as an educational institution since, later on, they could neither continue their schooling in Romany language nor could they find a job. The examined ones care much about the fact that the Romanies' elementary school is needed as an institution that cherishes their ethnic and cultural identity rather than a form of education that would prepare them for some career. The examination of the real state of the educational level of the Romany population in Montenegro shows that 77% of the Romanies have no school education whatsoever or have at least three classes of elementary school completed. Of this number 80,6% are illiterate. Only 16,5% of the Romanies have elementary school completed, while 6,8% of them have some grammar school completed. Four Romanies have completed high school while six of them have university degrees (two doctors of medicine and two lawyers, one army officer and an economist).

The parents of the children attending elementary school, namely, those examined in our research, stress that in 71,6% of the cases they have neither noticed nor have their children complained of any discriminatory attitude on the part of the non-Romanies' teachers or children. However, the examined ones who have completed elementary school, namely, 53,8% of them, and who have strated the next education level, feel jeopardized and neglected because of their ethnicity and very often they lose the desire to proceed with their schooling - most often they give it up. For example, let's mention the case of one examined person who, after completing the elementary and grammar schools as excellent student, was forced to give up his studies at the Faculty of Law after a few passed exams since he lost any wish to continue it because of the attitudes the professors and his fellow colleagues took to him. In his opinion, their attitude was not correct and, as he adds, it was due to his Romany origin.

As for information policy in Romany language, it can be said that in Montenegro there is almost nothing done about it. There are no programs in Romany language either on the radio or television; neither are there newspapers. As stressed by the Romanies themselves, the reason for this is not in the authorities' attitude, but rather in the lack of material or financial resources as well as the lack of adequate journalists especially of those familiar with Romany language. At present, there is only one page dedicated to the Romanies' life in a newspapers for the dislodged persons entitled "Vrela" distributed to all the non-government organizations, Centers for Social Aid and the Red Cross organizations. Truly, it speaks more about the living conditions of the Romanies having the status of dislodged persons or refugees than about the Romany population permanently settled in Montenegro in general.

Though it is stated in the Montenegro Constitution (Article 70) that the members of

the national and the ethnic groups have the right to establish their pedagogical, cultural and religious associations with the material support from the state, the Romanies' Association of Montenegro did not get (up to early March, 2000) any material aid from the state budget though it exists for ten years.

Regarding communication with different state authorities, the majority of the Romanies (69,3%) stress that they have no feeling of being discriminated because of what they are. They think that even concerning their ignorance of Serbian language they are not in any subordinate position since they are given an opportunity to communicate in Romany language - with the aid of an interpreter - even in the offices of the Minister of Internal Affairs or before the court. Likewise, 73,2% of them think that regarding the behavior of the employed persons at various departments of the local self-government they are absolutely equal with other citizens.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The research of the Romanies' position in Montenegro has shown that there are deviations in the realization of the constitutionally-determined particular and defined rights of the Romany population in view of the real situation. In that sense, the insight into their state in Montenegro shows the same picture as in the majority of other countries. The Romanies are one of the minority national and ethnic groups without their own mother country that they could rely on. Though they have been living in Montenegro for almost five centuries, in the late twentieth century they are in a more unfavorable position than in the under-Lovćen Montenegro society when they were protected by unwritten laws and tribal customs. Then they were firmly incorporated in the social tissue primarily on the basis of their position within the division of labor.

Still, the majority of the Romanies examined in the research consider Montenegro as their homeland. Despite their expressing such a feeling, they are still on the margins of the social events while their perspective is somber. Only 10% of them are full-time employed which means that a small percentage of the Romany population has a steady income as well as the social and health insurance. Even among the employed ones - more than 85% - the majority of them do the most difficult jobs, avoided by others, most often dealing with town cleaning. That is why they have found themselves in the state of living and working resignation without any possibility to change it by relying on their own qualified staff. The quality of their life and the satisfaction of their elementary needs have come to nothing more than a mere fight for survival; that is why they are forced to move to other regions even within Montenegro itself in which they can exist even at such a level at which they are now. Along with their recognized ability to adopt, this mobility is the cause of great disproportions between the official statistical data about their number, the demographic characteristics and the factual state.

No radical violation of the basic rights of the examined individuals has been noticed on the ground that they belong to the Romany population. Still, we cannot avoid the impression that the Romanies in Montenegro are that minority national and ethnic group that exists in the qualitative-living conditions below any minimum; moreover, they are often exposed to unfounded prejudice on the part of the majority ethnic and national groups. In a word, concerning the Romanies, there is a gap between the constitutionally

provided level of rights and their essential realization, but this is also the case in other countries in Europe and in the world at large. The mastery would be to eliminate the gap altogether.

#### NOTES

1. Momčilo Lutovac, *Romi u Crnoj Gori*, Društvo prijatelja knjige, Ivangrad, 1987, p. 21
2. Ibidem
3. Ibidem
4. Ibidem
5. The research team of the non-government organization the Association for Culture of Peace and Non-violence "Anima" from kotor registered, in the fall of 1999, 110 Romanies in Andrijevića and about 140 Romanies in Pljevlja. However, our research has not confirmed it; moreover, neither the Romanies' Association of Montenegro gives any data about the Romanies' settlement in the above-mentioned municipalities.
6. Živorad Tasić, "Narod na ivici normalnog svijeta", *Republika*, Belgrade, No. 227, 16-31, December, 1999, p. 25
7. As stated by Ž. Tasić in his research up to the summer of 1999 it was not even possible to imagine the return of some of those Romany families to Danilovgrad. Only one family returned and this might point to some possible normalization of the relationship between the majority population and the Romanies.

## POLOŽAJ ROMA U CRNOJ GORI

**Srdan Vukadinović**

*Proučavanje položaja Roma u Crnoj Gori zanimljivo je iz, najmanje, dva razloga. Prvo, Romi predstavljaju etničku nacionalnu manjinu koja je među najbrojnijim u Crnoj Gori i čije se učesće u ukupnom stanovništvu, prema zvaničnim demografskim podacima, od 1981. do 1991. godine uvećalo više nego dvostruko (od 0,25% na 0,53%). Sa druge strane, analiza i razmatranje položaja etničke manjinske grupe, koja pri tome nema zemlju maticu ili takozvanu matičnu domovinu, karakteristično je u smislu razmatranja zaštite osnovnih manjinskih prava i sloboda ove grupe u crnogorskom društvu. Pitanje ugrožavanja temeljnih prava i sloboda romske etničke populacije u Crnoj Gori, ispitivano preko nekoliko indikatora (svakodnevna javna komunikacija, kontaktiranje raznih javnih i državnih službi i sl.), pokazuje određene razlike koje u kvantitativnom i kvalitativnom smislu nijesu značajne da bi mogli utvrditi postojanje bilo kakvog oblika diskriminacije.*

Ključne reči: *matična domovina, demografske karakteristike Roma, manjinska prava*