Mechanisms of empowerment for the Roma in a New Social Europe

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The context

Recent years have been turbulent for the European Union (EU), as evidenced by the UK’s departure (Brexit) and increasing levels of Euroscepticism that charge the body with excessive bureaucracy and centralization. However, critics from the progressive spectrum of politics feel that the EU has neglected the social dimension and has lacked the energy and impetus of the Delors-led European Commission (EC) of 1985–95 in the realm of social policy. Indeed, it was under Delors that the EC established a Social Charter of the European Community and sought to steer the EU away from just being a free-trade area towards an expansive social contract-based market economy. Although there was a security and economic focus in the early manifestations of the EU (the Schuman Plan and the Common Market), alongside this has been a social dimension, in particular, after the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997 strengthened EU competences in employment and social policy. Reflecting the dominance of the centre-right in
European politics, in particular, the European Peoples’ Party, the EU institutions can be characterized as cautious in the social sphere, and the concept of Social Europe appears to have gone neglected for much of the past two decades (Graziano and Hartlaap, 2019). In part, this results from the EU’s response to the financial and Eurozone crisis, and strategies within the EU centred on austerity, a point that is elaborated upon later in the chapter; however, there is also a long-standing tradition in many northern EU member states of exalting balanced budgets that deter stimulus and deficit spending.

In this context, we must assess what the EU has achieved for the Roma but also consider what new directions the EC might take under Ursula von der Leyen. This chapter seeks to dovetail a new Romani policy within a dynamic New Social Europe framework. In this respect, some ‘blue sky thinking’ – an envisioning of the future – will come into play. In an age of political and economic crisis, change and new directions often occur quickly and suddenly, presenting new opportunities. To date, it appears the Right have been the political beneficiaries of the crisis, and here we consider what Europe and the situation of the Roma might look like if progressive ideals prevail and a New Social Europe emerges.

Although the situation of the Roma has been on the agenda of EU institutions since the 1970s, the main concern of EU policymakers rested with the presumed itinerant way of life of some Romani and Traveller communities in Western Europe, and the Roma only received more substantive attention with the EU enlargement negotiations with Eastern Europe (Simhandl, 2006). The improvement of Romani rights became part of the criteria for accession. Romani civil society has also been instrumental in promoting this issue on the European stage through transnational activism; in part, it has found the EU more amenable to its advocacy than its more intransigent national governments, which, it has been hoped, the EU might guide, steer and, at times, prod into greater action. The most important European policy initiative for the Roma has been
the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS) (hereafter referred to as the EU Roma Framework). The EU Roma Framework was adopted in 2011, requesting member states to develop NRIS or put in place an integrated set of policies (for countries with small Romani populations) to address Romani integration in core areas such as employment, education, health and housing. It relies on a soft form of governance known as the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), where it is believed that peer pressure and persuasion can help to steer member states to reach common goals. The adoption of the EU Roma Framework can be viewed as an adjunct to the EU 2020 Strategy, the response to the European economic crisis that also relies on OMC and involves an agenda for job creation and growth. The new EC is reviewing the Roma Framework and considering what steps should be taken in the future, and will unveil a new policy stance at the end of 2020. This chapter seeks to consider potential new actions.

The EU Roma Framework and mechanisms of empowerment

In re-conceptualizing Romani policy in Europe, we reflect on the successes and failures of the EU Roma Framework using Hennink et al’s (2012) ‘mechanisms of empowerment’, a benchmark to measure inclusion and improve capacities. The ‘mechanisms’ referred to include: Knowledge, in other words access to education, training and information from formal or other means such as experience and conscientisation. Agency, the capacity to act independently and make choices is another central mechanism enabling ‘Self-Identity’, the self-confidence to achieve goals; ‘Decision-Making’, the ability to make informed decisions; and ‘Effecting Change’, the belief in one’s own ability to take action. Another mechanism is Opportunity Structure, an enabling environment of social, economic, political, institutional and community support to foster community development. Capacity Building is another important dimension in this process referring to community
capacity to provide or advocate for services or self-governance. According to Hennink et al, **Resources**, access to physical and financial resources, are integral to develop communities and empower. Finally, **Sustainability**, the ability of communities to develop initiatives towards long-term sustainability, is an integral part of empowerment.

It is important to differentiate between ‘liberal empowerment’ and ‘liberating empowerment’. Liberal empowerment is often a feature of mainstream development agencies and organizations, and focuses on individual growth, though in an atomistic perspective, through the notion of the rational action of social actors based on individual interests. In contrast, liberating empowerment is a process where those denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability in terms of resources, agency and achievements/outcomes through a process of conscientization/critical awareness and relying on collective action and structural change. Critics argue that the term ‘empowerment’ can be paternalistic as it implies an external body will grant empowerment; however, it is a term widely used by social justice campaigners, many of whom adopt a more radical interpretation. Hennink et al’s (2012) ‘mechanism of empowerment’ clearly belongs to the more radical visioning of empowerment, and it is that conception that guides discussion in this chapter.

Hennink et al (2012) identify ‘agency’, as articulated through self-identity, decision-making and effecting change, as a central component in mechanisms of empowerment. This is one of the most serious criticisms of the EU Roma Framework, and actors within Romani civil society have consistently pointed out the lack of agency in developing national strategies and involvement in evaluating and monitoring progress (Ryder and Taba, 2018). Tokenism and paternalism within the EU Roma Framework have limited what Hennink et al (2012) describe as the ability to effect change, a sense of self-belief and, in turn, optimism. Romani civil society, especially that operating at the community and
grass-roots level, has found the bureaucratic regulations of the EU difficult to navigate and has had limited success in accessing resources for capacity building; in contrast, those fortunate enough to attain funding have found themselves overwhelmed by the bureaucratic demands of the EU and/or to be merely ‘token partners’ in large consortia dominated by state institutions (ERGO, 2019). This is part of the continuation of ‘internal colonialism’ that Roma have experienced for centuries.

Disempowerment, as Hennink et al (2012) note, limits the opportunities to challenge power structures and venture into forms of meaningful co-production, as well as to enjoy forms of sustainability and autonomy that avoid reliance on short-term project funding that ties civil society to the rigid agenda of funders (Ryder et al, 2014). This is related to the idea of Gramscian ‘hegemony’, where the subject population actually accepts and normalizes its own disempowerment. A long-standing criticism of the EU is its propensity for top-down and distant policymaking that fails to effectively engage with or involve affected EU citizens. The EU has sought to embrace the concept of empowerment by adopting the ‘10 Basic Principles of Roma Inclusion’, a tool for both policymakers and practitioners. The principles are centred on: (1) constructive, pragmatic and non-discriminatory policies; (2) explicit but not exclusive targeting; (3) an intercultural approach; (4) aiming for the mainstream; (5) awareness of the gender dimension; (6) transfer of evidence-based policies; (7) use of EU instruments; (8) involvement of regional and local authorities; (9) involvement of civil society; and (10) active participation of the Roma.

Despite an emphasis on participation, there is clearly a rhetoric–reality gap. For some commentators, the logic and rationale of Romani policymaking has been a narrow form of integration that fails to give the Roma a voice and seeks to problematize the Roma and promote assimilation (Szilvasi, 2015).
More fundamentally, there has been an absence of what Hennink et al (2012) describe as an ‘opportunity structure’: an enabling government willing to give financial support to inclusive community development steered by Romani communities. One indicator of a lack of progress is that in some EU countries, there are actually more unemployed Roma after nearly a decade of the EU Roma Framework being in operation – in 2019, 75 per cent of Roma were said to be unemployed, as opposed to 74 per cent in 2011 (Matarazzo and Naydenova, 2019). By contrast, in the same period, employment for the mainstream population has increased steadily in all countries surveyed. Likewise, there has been a deterioration in educational inclusion and housing, as well as expanding health inequalities for Roma. We can say that the Roma are the victims of ‘structural racism’: the normalization and legitimization of an array of dynamics – historical, cultural, institutional and interpersonal – that produces cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes. The evaluations by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency featured in Chapter One, with their disturbing social indicators, support this assertion. Why has progress been so limited overall?

For a start, in addition to grappling with the aftermath of a major financial crisis in 2008/09, Europe also had to contend with a Eurozone crisis that prompted a series of bailouts, as well as strict financial regulations and penalties to encourage balanced budgets. Austerity, as imposed by the ‘troika’ of the EC, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Central Bank, together with economic caution, has placed pressure on welfare budgets in many EU member states that has had adverse impacts on low-income groups like the Roma. Moreover, these policies defied conventional economic wisdom by slashing welfare and socio-economic development budgets at a time when economies were weak and vulnerable, consequently exacerbating unemployment and recession. Governments chose to bail out the banking system without demanding deep structural change, transferring the
cost of this financial rescue onto ordinary citizens through spending cuts and increased regressive tax.

These economic ills have brought the EU to the precipice, creating a legitimacy crisis where a growing number of European citizens feel alienated from the EU, and it has been a major factor in the rise of the radical right (see Chapter Three by Taba). In the absence of governmental action to stimulate economies, some choose to accept the narratives of the radical right and nationalists that blame the status quo on actors such as the EU or migrants, and also demonize minority groups like the Roma, claiming that they are a financial and social burden on the state as a result of their alleged cultural dysfunctionality, often termed ‘a culture of poverty’ (Feischmidt et al, 2013) – a notion that taps into long-standing European racist tropes against the Roma termed as ‘antigypsyism’. Structural racism, the rise of the radical right and forms of nativism and xenophobia in the public sphere have made the dominant conservative centre of Europe, such as the national parties within the European Peoples’ Party (EPP), even more hesitant to actively promote the interests of groups like the Roma; hence, national action on ‘integration’ by member states has often failed to match the urgency and commitment of declarations issued by the EU.

Romani civil society has certainly raised its criticisms of the EU Roma Framework. Given that there is no binding nature to the EU Roma Framework, the design and implementation of the NRIS is absolutely dependent on political will, political priorities and the views of respective member states. Thus, there has been a serious lack of funding allocation, monitoring and proper implementation from the side of member states (REF, 2020). Critics of the EU Roma Framework also note some NRIS have a homogenized and even stereotypical view of the Roma and neglect the particular needs of Romani women, migrants and children (Rostas, 2019). Concerns on the lack of progress have prompted the EU to review the EU Roma Framework and the procedures for allocating EU
funds for Romani inclusion and their outcomes (EC, 2020). The success of any new policy framework will depend on the degree to which policymakers and civil society accept and act upon the points of criticism raised thus far.

**Questioning the rationale of Romani inclusion policy**

EU Romani inclusion policies from 2011 to 2020 focused on how to bring Roma to the labour market and adequately validate their human resources through the exchange value system of the market. Within the introductory paragraph of the EU Roma Framework, Roma are repositioned from liberal citizens whose fundamental rights are systematically violated, to poorly educated future labour market entrants. The design of EU policies as recommended by the EU Roma Framework is based on inclusive labour market and activation schemes, which often run in parallel to the official labour market. Creating manual jobs with low-skill requirements and allocating them to unqualified and often uneducated Roma appears to be a key element in advancing Romani inclusion, according to the EU Roma Framework. Policymakers seem to believe that this will spontaneously further expand their inclusion in social, political and cultural spheres. Once the majority looks at Roma as citizens like themselves, as employees and taxpayers, this will have a correcting effect on accepting their cultural specificity and ensuring their civil and political equality.

However, a central question is whether all areas of the social life of Roma should be validated through the exchange value systems of the market and what the effects of the introduction of the logic of economic efficiency, profitability and competitiveness in the realm of civil liberties and political participation may be to the Romani situation. One of the identified contradictions lies in the definition of the labour market as the main field of inclusion. If the intent is to produce inclusion policies that would enable Roma to become fully fledged citizens, by considering the labour market as the main option, policymakers paradoxically
chose one of the most rigid and disciplinary systems. The institution of the labour market is perceived as a fundamental organizational principle of our contemporary societies to such an extent that the lives of those people who are unable to become employed are considered futile. In the shift towards productivist policies at the EU level, which began with the Lisbon Agenda in 2000 and has been reinforced by the Europe 2020 Strategy, inclusion in the labour market is seen as the basic foundation upon which other inclusion policies can be built. Cultural, civil and political empowerment has been increasingly subordinated to market logic. This has implications for Roma and policies targeting them.

**Roma road map**

In February 2020, the EC published a ‘road map’ to facilitate consultation on a new Romani ‘initiative’. In this document, the EC appeared to recognize some of the criticism levelled at the previous EU Roma Framework by pledging to combat both socio-economic exclusion and antigypsyism, and to promote Romani empowerment. In the initiative, the EC pledges to ask member states to better reflect diversity within the Romani population in their strategies, in particular, the needs of Romani women, children, youth, mobile EU citizens and migrants (DG Justice, 2020).

Will the finalized Romani initiative reflect calls for bolder initiatives backed up with hard law and aligned to a radical social policy agenda? The next section first outlines current civil society thinking and then outlines a series of concepts and ideas that have received relatively little discussion within Romani civil society.

**Towards a Romani strategy**

Leading voices in Romani civil society (Matarazzo and Naydenova, 2019) are calling for the development of
a strategy based on hard law rather than OMC, with more ambitious and clearly defined targets, objectives and indicators, and with penalties for non-compliance (in June 2020, Romeo Franz MEP presented a draft resolution to the European Parliament Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) calling for a Romani strategy with binding responsibilities for member states [Franz, 2020]). Calls have been made for a greater focus on antigypsyism and reference to gender, youth, Romani migrants and the promotion of minority targeting.

With reference to binding legislation, it should be noted that the Racial Equality Directive (RED) identifies Roma as a vulnerable ethnic group and the EU Roma Framework imposes an obligation on member states to desegregate public services like education. In this sense, more recognition is needed as to how the human rights of Roma in Europe are being undermined. The EC launched several infringement cases under the RED on the discrimination of Romani children in education in the Czech Republic (in 2014), Slovakia (in 2015) and Hungary (in 2016). Infringement can lead to the EU Court of Justice ruling that a member state must take action to comply with the Court of Justice judgment; it is a lengthy process as it takes time to gather data and scope is afforded to negotiate solutions. However, it is a cause of concern that the aforementioned cases have not been fully concluded. The midterm review of the EU Roma Framework by the EC (2018) notes there is a consensus that infringement proceedings as a tool should be further used to advance Romani integration. However, as noted, infringement proceedings have proven to be slow and cumbersome, with negative verdicts sometimes being ignored by member states. There is scope for such action outside of just segregated schooling and many would like to see legal action taken in, for example, the fields of housing, eviction and employment in Western as well as Eastern EU member states. The infringement process needs to be more transparent and faster, have improved monitoring,
ensure compliance with basic human rights, and apply greater punitive sanctions.

Minority targeting

The initial development of the EU Roma Framework prompted an intense debate between national and European decision-makers and Romani civil society. Decision-makers asserted that any policy targeting Roma should be in line with the EC’s approach, meaning that no future funding allocations should be based on ‘ethnicity’. From the other side, civil society representatives countered with the argument that if there will be a Romani policy and, as a result, a funding allocation to reduce social and economic gaps without considering the target population as the main beneficiaries, then the risks of failing to reach out to the most excluded are high. Moreover, Romani civil society asserted that government should be ‘explicit’ in what they were going to do and how. The compromise between the two sides was to consider within the Common Basic Principles (a joint declaration between decision-makers and civil society, as discussed earlier) that one of the agreed principles be ‘explicit but not exclusive’. The present experience has shown to many that governments have used this ambiguity to channel financial resources to places and localities where the Roma are demographically less evident. A re-evaluation of this approach is needed.

As part of the drive to achieve greater Romani inclusion, some lead civil society voices are calling for greater targeted projects and funding streams. However, some policymakers believe that developing specific inclusion policies for Romani populations runs counter to a ‘mainstreaming approach’. To a certain degree, the viability of and/or support for targeting depends on the structure and political apparatus of the state, the composition of society, political history, the prevailing political attitude of governments, and so on. Care is needed with a targeted approach, in particular, to avoid the creation
of inferior or ghettoized services. Furthermore, since Roma are often scapegoated, once targeted policies are designed, specific attention is needed to avoid further intentional exclusion of Roma. It has been argued that Romani inequality exists, in part, because of actual Romani-specific policies that fail to address and often reinforce a view of the Roma as an ‘exceptional category’. Van Baar and Vermeersch (2017) suggest that measures that are aimed at ‘saving’ the Roma are implemented as part of a range of practices that mark Roma as vulnerable, leading to further essentialization and paternalism by the state.

A close relationship should exist between mainstream and targeted support so that knowledge arising from, for example, a local pilot project is then fed back into the daily operations of mainstream service providers and becomes part of their activities (Ryder et al, 2014). This can lead to progressive change within mainstream methods and approaches as the pilot facilitates new directions or becomes part of established services as a path to empowerment. In the next section, we discuss how inclusive forms of ‘community development’ can form part of a broad strategy to avert the dangers that can materialize when targeted actions become paternalistic and assimilatory.

The Youth Guarantee Scheme (YGS) is a commitment by EU member states to ensure that all young people under the age of 25 years receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education. Accordingly, member states are required to submit action plans as to how these goals can be achieved. Roma and other marginalized groups have been unable to access the benefits of this scheme to the same degree as more privileged peers; hence, greater targeting of Romani youth and improved outreach services should be a priority of active targeting. In 2021, the EC will present a Child Guarantee to make sure children have access to the services they need until adulthood (EC, 2020); again, targeted action for Romani
children could be highly beneficial. Greater targeting and flexibility could also lead to improved outreach between service providers and Romani communities.

**Blue sky thinking: on a New Social Europe**

The EC is now reflecting a rationale for Romani inclusion initiatives based on economic as well as anti-discrimination and social justice principles. According to the EC road map, such efforts will help Roma achieve ‘their potential to contribute to the economy, social protection systems and society at large … the marginalization of Roma represents a loss of human capital, results in welfare dependence and limits labour supply and tax revenues’ (DG Justice, 2020: 1–2). This is a robust argument against those who oppose Roma-targeted measures but we should not forget the logic of social justice in the application of a New Social Europe to Romani inclusion (on the concept, see Chapter One). Critics may be right that, for too long, the EU in general and its Romani inclusion policies in particular have been too growth-oriented and the social dimension has been subservient to competition and profitability.

A New Social Europe would recalibrate the relationship between economic interests and communities, placing greater emphasis on solidarity and social protection in a new social contract, linking the Roma more with social/economic rights discourses and processes, and mainstreaming them in EU institutions. It would also provide greater scope for Roma to shape policy.

**Socio-economic rights**

Most welfare systems have been closely tied with labour market participation (Bauman, 2005). The difference can be analytically cast between those policies that promote the right to labour as an aspect of welfare state services and those that promote the duty to labour as a foundation for all other
socio-economic (and other) entitlements. The latter approach relies on processes of decommodification (Esping-Andersen, 1990), which enable decent living independent of the labour market. The former approach, on the contrary, relies on processes of re-commodification (Pierson, 2001), which aim to gradually tighten eligibility, roll back existing welfare provisions and promote the virtue of active re-engagement with the labour market.

The general manner of framing the debate on the just distribution of wealth is critical for the design of Romani inclusion policies. In left-wing circles, the universality of socio-economic rights and their primacy over other forms of rights is de rigueur. Socio-economic inclusion approaches do not accept the distribution of wealth as an entirely competitive or lottery-like matter, in which only the winning card gives an entitlement to provisions, while the gambling groups, which organized the game, get ever richer. They call for the entitlements for all citizens in some sort of egalitarian socio-economic (re)distribution. Building on liberal societies, in which civil and political rights are, at least formally, granted to all citizens regardless of their individual performance or merit, the left-wing discourse claims the same universal and unconditional application of socio-economic and cultural rights. According to Bauman (2005: 46), the welfare state ‘rendered the right to dignified life a matter of political citizenship, rather than economic performance’.

The discourse on socio-economic inclusion understands the situation of injustice in terms of a socio-economic misdistribution. Different groups, sometimes delineated by racialized rhetoric, such as in the case of Roma, experience conditions of the relegated and unemployable underclass or exploited working class – the ‘precariat’, that is, those suffering from precarity (Standing, 2011). Therefore, policy solutions strictly favouring labour market integration might not have a tangible effect on the inclusion of these groups. It can be argued that welfare state inclusion policies are better placed to deal
with the fully fledged inclusion of Roma, who are represented in large numbers among groups considered worthless to labour markets. However, socio-economic inclusion policies have been gradually shrinking alongside the contestation of the welfare state in the age of ever-growing austerity and declared scarcity. Pierson (2001) emphasizes that since the 1970s, welfare states have faced a context of essentially permanent austerity due to changes in global economies, the sharp slowdown in economic growth, the maturation of governments’ commitments and population ageing, all factors that have generated enormous fiscal stress. This fiscal stress is based on the upward movement of surplus capital to the 1 per cent. In order to respond to this demographic and fiscal pressure, European welfare states began to initiate processes of recalibration, narrowing and tightening eligibility. Hence, from the beginning of the 1980s, according to Therborn (2008: 113), ‘suddenly, the high water withdrew and was followed by a neoliberal tsunami … and the privatization became the global order’. However, in the mid-1990s, a resurrected leftist discourse emerged in the shape of the alter-globalization movement and World Social Forums opposed to neoliberalism. This new global wave of leftist politics has sought to return social justice and socio-economic inclusion discourses to the main stage of policymaking.

A conceptual analysis of poverty and socio-economic inequalities within a human rights framework may have value for Romani policy frameworks given that political, civil, economic, social and cultural rights are connected and equally important for their mutual realization. Linking poverty, inequality and human rights creates an opening where the former concept can be understood and addressed in terms of the deprivation of capabilities or lack of empowerment, and as a denial and even a violation of human rights, a conception influenced by the ‘capability approach’ of Amartya Sen. Hence, a human rights framework can involve poverty strategies, a concrete parameter for providing legal remedies and measuring state compliance with international human rights obligations.
Such an approach might more effectively tackle the multiple and complex forms of exclusion experienced by the Roma but also perceive action to address such exclusion as a moral duty on the part of society rather than pathologizing and blaming the excluded.

A European New Deal would be a major component of a New Social Europe that targets the problems of involuntary migration, unemployment and low investment, all consequences of austerity, and tackles the regional economic disparities within the EU (Varoufakis and Galbraith, 2016). The New Deal would encompass a living wage centred, in part, on a jobs guarantee, as well as anti-poverty, social housing and environmental justice programmes ensuring a right to basic human needs and access to high-quality public services in health and education. These initiatives would be funded and supported by common European funds and would entail much more ‘active’ government economic initiatives encompassing forms of state intervention that some argue have been discouraged by the stipulations of the single market within the EU.

Active employment measures should avoid statist solutions of large public works programmes, as practised in Hungary, which confined Roma to low-skilled and low-paid work (ERRC, 2015). Involving Roma in large infrastructure projects can be effective if coupled with genuine skills development and space for upward mobility. On account of the high levels of discrimination in the waged labour market, many Roma prefer or are compelled to engage in small-scale entrepreneurial activities. Despite the EU Roma Framework promoting microcredit, the success of such initiatives has been limited; some have been discouraged by the terms and conditions of loans, or have lacked the financial and technical expertise to start up a business. There is also the danger that when implemented under a neoliberal framework, microcredit can actually increase indebtedness and marginalization (Bateman, 2014). There are isolated cases of civil society providing
financial and business start-up mentoring and guidance, a notable case being the Autonomia Foundation in Hungary; such work needs to be scaled up. There is also a need to promote greater awareness and understanding of development finance, where local communities support, encourage and catalyse community development and expansion through public and private investment, which should be premised on egalitarianism, self-empowerment and growth, rather than on neoliberal principles centred on repayment generating profit.

A New Social Europe would entail greater reinforcement and implementation of the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights that seeks to bring ‘fairness’ into the lives of European citizens (EC, 2020). The European Pillar of Social Rights is likely to have an important impact on EU Roma policy. Proclaimed by all EU institutions in 2017, the 20 principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights aim at improving equal opportunities and jobs for all, fair working conditions, social protection, access to services, and gender equality (EC, 2020). Part of a New Social Europe would also entail the European Social Union (ESU), a ‘coming-together’ process involving welfare states that would facilitate mutual adaptation based on jointly defined criteria and would include risk-pooling. Given the EU has its own budget and resources, the foundations are there for forms of social federalism; however, this may ultimately entail the need for new forms of EU tax consolidation powers. Hemerijck (2013) has defined the ESU as a holding environment: in other words a zone of resilience centred on shared values and a common purpose, backed up by competent institutions, ready to act in times of crisis and adaptation. Thus, a holding environment should mitigate stress and tensions and consequently uphold the integrity of national welfare states. The global economic system has become highly complex and difficult to regulate, in part, because of financialization; the power and dominance of financial investment, free market thinking centred on deregulation and privatization have empowered global finance
and helped it prosper and take over aspects of the state, such as welfare and social care (Citizens for Financial Justice, 2019). Clearly, if there is to be a meaningful ESU and a holding environment, these trends need to be challenged at the European level.

An obvious and key question is: where will the money come from and how will it be channelled to need? The EC relaxed the budgetary constraints stemming from the Maastricht criteria, setting a precedent for further relaxation. Soros (2013) has argued that if EU member states could convert their entire stock of government debt into Eurobonds, then indebted and poor member states’ budgets could move into surplus and fiscal stimulus would replace austerity. More recently, Soros (2020) has proposed that the EU should raise the money needed for a European Recovery Fund to deal with the economic consequences of COVID-19 by selling ‘perpetual bonds’ on which the principal does not have to be repaid (though they can be repurchased or redeemed at the issuer’s discretion). As perpetual bonds never have to be repaid, they would impose a surprisingly light fiscal burden on the EU, despite the considerable financial firepower they would mobilize.

With reference to EU funding, there have been calls for respect for and compliance with the principles of equality and social protection to constitute an element of conditionality in EU funding streams (André, 2009). An element of conditionality has started to be introduced to EU funding but compliance with the European Pillar of Social Rights, with an impact on funding, could be a mechanism to drive up social convergence. Increased employment participation and the consequent increase in purchasing power will also raise the overall tax take and correspondingly reduce welfare payment demands. To start with, the EU should embrace progressive taxation and close the loopholes that enable tax avoidance. The measures this section has outlined are ‘pre-distributive’ forms of social investment that rest on the logic that it is more cost effective to ensure marginalization does not occur in the first
place than to use resources to tackle and mitigate the impact of poverty and exclusion. The acceptance of such a notion would have profound consequences for Romani communities. The active economic and social interventions envisaged in this section certainly align with Hennink et al’s (2012) vision of opportunity structure and enabling government.

**Agency and community organizing**

For some, notions of a New Social Europe, as outlined earlier, might conjure up fears of statism, a form of top-down governance that is distant and bureaucratic. For Roma, in the past, such regimes under communism constituted forms of assimilation and control. In contrast, a New Social Europe would need to be driven by empowered and active communities, including those like the Roma at the margins. In a New Social Europe, Romani policies need to be inherently flexible and, where appropriate, involve forms of minority targeting that can shape mainstream policy and be designed and implemented through negotiation and co-production with civil society and or staff employed in public and targeted initiatives. However, concerns have been expressed as to the degree of autonomy such initiatives afford and the tensions that can arise when Roma are employed by state institutions and services that arouse hostility and mistrust on the basis of past discrimination. Here, civil society could play an invaluable role in performing such tasks, ensuring Romani expertise helps shape and deliver inclusive public services in meaningful forms of co-production. However, as noted, Romani communities and civil society are perilously weak at the moment and need huge levels of financial support and competence to enable localized and organic community development but in a way that also allows local community groups scope to build capacity within Romani communities, acting in the sense of the writings of Paulo Freire (1972) as catalysts for critical awareness and community organization. Hennink et al (2012)
refer to such awareness as conscientization. Conscientization can be linked to a ‘Development Education and Awareness Raising’ (DEAR) approach common with non-governmental organization (NGO) projects in the Global South, which provides communities with tools to critically engage in development issues, and mobilizes greater public support for action against poverty and exclusion.

Trehan (2001) raised concerns about the funding and donor-driven agendas in Europe that run the danger of creating forms of managerialism (NGO-ization) that disempower Romani activists. Alinsky (1971) cautioned as to the dangers of activism being hijacked by a service-driven agenda. Indeed, forms of co-production and public–private partnerships between Romani civil society/institutions and governmental agencies need to take care to avoid becoming an adjunct of the state in forwarding agendas that are assimilatory. Reflecting such fears, a policy briefing by the University of Manchester (2014) stated that interventions by third sector agencies entrusted with managing interaction between Roma and local institutions held the long-term risk of perpetuating the Roma’s dependency on outside mediators and support provisions. Instead, it was argued, intervention should take the form of capacity building within the Romani community, enabling them to develop expertise and competences beyond the community outreach work. This critique mirrors the thoughts of theorists such as Foucault (1991), who argued that development theory constitutes a form of control, through the concept of governmentality, which normalizes neoliberal and assimilative policy agendas, and ‘responsibilizes’, individualizes and pathologizes the victims.

Some of the concerns outlined earlier are theorized by Powell (2010), who contrasts two interpretations of intervention/development. One perspective perceives social policy intervention as assimilationist, based on the imposition of civilizing values that discard Romani norms and values; in contrast, others see such intervention as a means to forward
equity and competence through emancipatory processes. The emancipatory perspective argues that formal education, for example, broadens horizons and opportunities, allowing Romani children to escape and reformulate the stifling straightjacket of tradition, and have agency. Critics argue that this can constitute a narrow form of integration that ultimately assimilates. A danger, though, is that an unquestioning exaltation of ethnicity can promote static and narrow versions of identity that ignore the fluidity of identity and Romani propensity for ‘bricolage’ or cultural borrowing and innovation. The key point is that inclusion has to be shaped and negotiated, with active involvement of and leadership from the Roma themselves (Bogdan et al, 2015).

Social accountability

Some Romani NGOs are able to enter into forms of co-production and retain autonomy; by autonomy, we mean not only the ability to have a significant say in the design and delivery of policy, but also a chance to challenge and offer critique. However, such groups often enjoy extensive experience, thematic expertise and engaged communities, holding authorities accountable about the terms and direction of any service. Social accountability is an evolving umbrella category that includes citizen monitoring and oversight of public and/or private sector performance, user-centred public information access and dissemination systems, public complaint and grievance redress mechanisms, and citizen participation in actual resource allocation decision-making, such as participatory budgeting (Joshi and Houtzager, 2012). The approach refers to strategies developed over the last two decades that employ information and participation to demand fairer and more effective public services (Maru, 2010). It seeks to improve institutional performance by bolstering collective citizen engagement in and monitoring of public policy systems and the public responsiveness and effectiveness of the state (Fox,
It should be noted that a critique of this approach is that participation is based more on the ideas of ‘governance’ and ‘accountability’ of citizens in terms of oversight; it does not link back to the citizen having a claim to certain social/economic rights. However, ‘social accountability’ is a term that governments and donors agree to use, and it can be used as a bridge to include wider civil society and rights-based demands into the framework.

To achieve such reorientation in a New Social Europe, a complete cultural and organizational paradigm shift would need to occur that would validate community as a source of determination and knowledge. Here, rather than the government using civil society as a tool to impose narrow inclusion/assimilation policies, we see a situation where civil society is in the driving seat instead, directing governmental and institutional power as to what needs to be done. This point reiterates a central argument in this chapter that an effective ‘Social Europe’ approach for Romani communities requires greater support for the development and expansion of Romani civil society in a manner that extends not only its capacity and skills, but also its autonomy. Hence, support and encouragement would be given to community organizing, social accountability and ‘inclusive community development’, where allocated resources allow for independent manoeuvrability and bottom-up development, in which a premium is placed on empowerment and agency, as well as asset-based development, where community traditions are adapted and used as a foundation for development (Ryder et al, 2014). Such inclusivity would certainly facilitate the agency and self-belief that Hennink et al (2012) believe is key to inclusion.

Another means of ensuring community and civil society voices are heard and acted on is to create a second chamber of the EU featuring representatives of cities, regions and NGOs, such as trade unions and community organizations (Zielonka, 2019). This body should have equal status to the European Parliament and include Romani civil society as the
MECHANISMS OF EMPOWERMENT FOR THE ROMA

Romani cause has been hampered by the low level of Romani representation in the European Parliament and the limitations of the Roma Platform – the annual meetings between Romani civil society and the EC.

Inclusive community development is, in part, dependent on knowledge production, research and data that allow an understanding of the issues communities face, assess the impact of existing policy frameworks and interventions, and help to formulate new policy tools. Social accountability and community monitoring should be an important part of the next EU Roma Framework and allocation of resources. Limited resources have impeded the scope of such work in measuring the impact and relevance of policy, and in some cases, member states refuse to collect ethnically disaggregated data. With EU funding, the Central European University Roma Civil Monitor was able to build civil society networks in EU member states to assess the impact of the NRIS and EU Roma Framework. It has conducted valuable monitoring and helps empower Romani activists by training them in monitoring processes. However, resources have been relatively slight and not permitted more collaborative and participatory forms of monitoring and research or pioneering leadership of Romani community members in research design, data collection and analysis. The EU needs to greatly extend the level of resources accorded to such work in the new policy cycle on Roma.

**Intersectionality and solidarity**

The Romani movement has been able to galvanize and mobilize sections of Romani civil society through forms of ‘identity politics’; critics would argue it has, at times, essentialized and sought to homogenize Romani identity, as evidenced through ‘nation-building’ efforts (Surdu and Kovats, 2015). For example, in 2000, the fifth World Romani Congress in Prague appealed through its president, Emil Ščuka, for the
Roma to be recognized as a nation without territory; such nation-building constructs have enjoyed limited support or even awareness from Romani communities, and have tended to be driven by small Romani political elites (McGarry, 2010). However, ethnicity and identity have been effective tools in binding forms of Romani transnational activism and solidarity, which has been instrumental in the relative success of Romani advocacy at the European level. The question has been raised as to whether an overt focus on identity politics has diverted Romani activists from the need for fundamental structural change. Has Romani civil society aligned itself too closely to tokenist policy change that offers merely cosmetic change? This debate has relevance for Nancy Fraser’s (1995) discussions on how in ‘post-socialist’ societal conflicts, group identity has tended to supplant class interest as the locus of political debate and contestation. The message of this chapter is that Fraser is right to contend that struggles for recognition have validity and can help achieve incremental change but the quest for redistribution is central for meaningful change to come about. To date, Romani civil society has conducted limited discussion on the centrality of redistribution and what a New Social Europe might mean, as well as on how issues related to ethnic identity would be addressed within such a policy framework.

However, evidence of a paradigm shift within Romani civil society is seen in growing support for intersectionality, where Roma show solidarity and form alliances with women’s, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer (LGBTQ), migrants, and other marginalized groups. Romani empowerment could thus be interpreted as Roma and non-Roma finding common points of interest and forming alliances. Such intersectionality has challenged narrow notions of Romani identity that exalt conservative tradition and insular forms of bonding social capital. Such intersectionality is more apparent among the cadre of national/international Romani leaders and is less apparent at the local level; more, though, is needed to be done to align
the Romani struggle with broader social justice and anti-poverty campaigns directed at multidimensional poverty (such as poor health, lack of education, inadequate living standards, disempowerment, poor quality of work and so on), as well as support an understanding of green/environmental issues, where Roma can identify common interests in the mainstream and give new focus to Romani issues.

Given climate change and the environmental challenges that society now faces, an important part of a New Social Europe and, indeed, Romani inclusion strategies will rest upon sustainability and a new ‘Green Deal’ ensuring economic activity seeks to not only stem, but also reverse, the harm already inflicted upon the planet. Romani activism should more robustly engage with environmental and climate justice movements, not only to challenge the context of environmental injustice and racism endured by Roma, but also to build solidarities and knowledge to tackle global challenges. Previous periods of major social investment and active economic interventions by the welfare state, such as that which occurred from 1945 to the early 1970s, witnessed rapid growth. Such a model may not be sustainable environmentally because of the level of resources that were and would be devoured to fuel such growth. In addition, post-war growth was also based on cheap materials and exploitation of low-wage labour from regions of the periphery. Within a New Social Europe and hopefully a corresponding new globalized economic order, such actions could not be replicated. Furthermore, technological advancements and the increasing automation of production and services might mean full employment is also an impossible goal in the sense that it materialized in the post-war period. Hence, a New Social Europe will necessitate sustainable forms of production that could, in fact, generate new green industries and lead to the redistribution of working hours as well as resources.

The proposed recalibration of the role of the EU and the values it should promote centred on social justice will also entail new conceptions of European citizenship built upon a
notion of ‘inclusive European citizenship’. Inclusive citizenship encompasses solidarity, or a belief in the capacity to act in unity with others in their claims for justice and recognition; thus, it complements well the policy agenda of a New Social Europe (Donaldson and Kymlicka, 2017). Inclusive citizenship should articulate the terms of when it is fair for people to be treated the same and when it is fair that they should be treated differently. In this sense, it should not have the rigidity of, say, French conceptions of citizenship that preclude minority ethnic targeting and affirmative action. In addition, recognition – framed in terms of the intrinsic worth of all human beings, as well as recognition of and respect for their differences – should be a core value in inclusive citizenship and power should act decisively where such principles are challenged. Self-determination should also be part of the formula of inclusive citizenship, allowing people the ability to exercise some degree of control over their lives; hence, this chapter has advocated radical forms of Romani empowerment.

Conclusion

Although EC President Ursula von der Leyen has affirmed a strong determination to present an action plan to deliver on the European Pillar of Social Rights, it remains to be seen whether radical measures are initiated as a part of a process of building a New Social Europe. The EC is aware that it faces a legitimacy crisis, as reflected by the rise of the radical right, and that additional mistakes could further the growth of political extremism and xenophobia. Furthermore, the EU and the current European social model is under threat from militant forms of neoliberalism fused with populism as the US with Trump and Britain through ‘Brexit’ seek to reorient their economic models in order to maintain an advantage over old and emerging competitors, and to retain hegemony in the core group of economic powers. To avoid a ‘race to the bottom’ – a downward spiral of social protections, wages and
workers’ rights – the EU will need to hold firm in defence of the European social model and initiate a bold and dynamic reorientation of the European project through a New Social Europe. The COVID-19 pandemic and the economic crisis it has induced necessitate major acts of economic intervention and stimulus. The mood and support for transformative change are therefore far greater than some European leaders in recent times have assumed. Through Hennink et al’s (2012) ‘mechanism of empowerment’, we have sought to promote a vision of a New Social Europe that offers economic fairness with the potential for skills development, coupled with increased scope for agency, knowledge, opportunity and capacity building.

In October 2020, the EC unveiled the ‘EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation’, which refers to infringement action to tackle antigypsyism, a drive to cut poverty and empower Roma. However, some critics felt it lacked binding legal obligations, and it remains to be seen if the bold vision of transformative change as set out in this chapter materializes.

References


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