

# **Racism towards Roma in the Czech Republic – the Task for Civil Society?**

**By**

**Petra Prášilová**

**THESIS**

Submitted to

KDI School of Public Policy and Management

in partial fulfillment of requirements

for the degree of

**MASTER OF PUBLIC POLICY**

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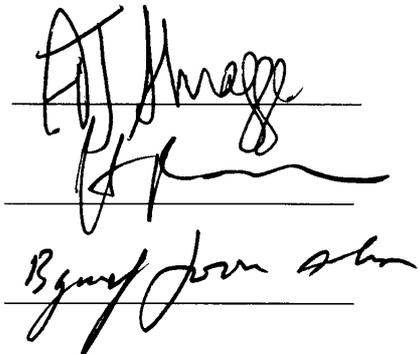
**MASTER OF PUBLIC POLICY**

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The image shows three handwritten signatures in black ink, each written over a horizontal line. The first signature is 'A. Shragge', the second is 'H. Park', and the third is 'Byung Joon Ahn'.

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Racism towards Roma in the Czech Republic – the Task for Civil Society?**

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The Czech Republic and its citizens have been perceived as a tolerant and liberty loving nation since the Velvet Revolution in 1989. Despite strong values, a problem has appeared and risen into the scale that divides the country into two camps – the Romani minority and the dominant society. Racism, xenophobia and hatred became words used in media more often than would be suitable for a broadminded and liberal country with strong values. The government has not managed to solve or even improve this striking issue, and therefore the civil society has taken its turn to bring the two worlds back together, and improve the position of Roma as a self-confident, self-aware ethnicity with its own language, culture, customs and opportunity to maintain them, develop and transmit to next generations as well as share them with the dominant society. The thesis intends to show whether the civil society grew strong enough to manage its role and what it needs to focus on. Furthermore, it indicates the responsibility and position of the Czech government in this problem and the relationship between the government and the civil society.

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## Introduction

Tolerance and liberality are fundamental characteristics of Czech society. The description has been connected with the country especially after the Velvet Revolution in 1989. A lot was expected from Václav Havel's country at the time of the transition from Communism to liberal democracy. The economic change of regimes, the social transition and also the split of the country into two independent parts – the Czech and the Slovak Republic – became a model for other countries to follow and a successful example of peaceful and mature transformation. Nevertheless, a social problem of an enormous extent arose and has been growing since 1989. Racism and xenophobia has cast a shade on the velvet transition of the Czech Republic, and have turned out to be not only a social problem, but with respect to its consequences also an economic problem, that has currently reached much more complexity than it appeared in the early era of the Czech Republic.

The dominant society in the Czech Republic particularly turns its hatred towards the traditional ethnic minority, Roma.<sup>1</sup> Roma have always been present in the country and peacefully coexisted with the macro-society, although they have not been treated equally by the ruling governments. Especially during Communism, Roma became subject to extensive policies, which goal was to assimilate the Romani minority and suppress its ethnicity. The Communist policies developed roots for the current striking situation. It is important to mention that neither the Communist government, nor its predecessors managed to solve the so-called "Romani question."

If the governments failed to reach their goal regarding Romani ethnicity and its difference from the dominant society, we can ask, who should take responsibility to solve the

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<sup>1</sup> The widely used word "Gypsies" bears a pejorative connotation, therefore I have decided to use the word Rom (noun, singular) and its variations; Roma (noun, plural), Romani (adjective) to talk about the minority in the Czech Republic.

problem. In the 1830s, French observer Alexis de Tocqueville noted and praised the close connection between civil society and democracy in the United States. In spite of Tocqueville's positive valuation of civil society, scholars and politicians have struggled to weigh the importance and understand the power of civil society. In the early 1990s in the Czech Republic, the two iconic leaders of the post communist era, President Vaclav Havel and the Prime Minister Vaclav Klaus attempted to reach an agreement during their controversial debate that they brought into the particularly urgent late 20th century political realm of the transition from communism to democracy. Despite their rival visions regarding the support and promotion of civil society by government, neither of them claimed to disagree with the positive impact of healthy civil society on democracy and liberality.

Just as Romani racism has been developing since the overthrow, Czech civil society has risen and grown, regardless of the elites' debate and opinions. Assuming the positive impact of the civil society on social problems reduction or solution, questions arise:

- How can the current Czech civil society contribute to the improvement of the Roma's situation?
- What should be the role of the government, and to what extent it should cooperate with or coordinate civil society?

The questions asked are not only valid for the Czech Republic, but also for other European countries, both post-communist and western, which have been dealing with the same problem. As observable from media, the Romani issues have recently received full international attention, and become a center of focus of political debates all over Europe and overseas due to the emigration of European Roma.

In order to answer fully the above questions, the paper will be divided into four sections. In the literature review, the term "civil society" will be defined to provide the reader with an

exact idea and different points of view as expressed by several authors. The definition will be followed by insight into the problem of civil society in post-communist countries. The next part of the literature review will reflect the academic works on xenophobia and racism with respect to the post communist atmosphere in the Czech Republic.

The second part of the paper provides the reader with background information reflecting the communist policies towards Roma followed by the analysis of the development of the problem after the Velvet Revolution in 1989. This section will include not only empirical information but also subjective perceptions of both the macro-society and the ethnic minority. The biased perceptions are important for the paper to show how deeply the problem is ingrained in the society, and how complex it is as a consequence of the prejudices. It will also point out the rise of the dark side of the Czech civil society in the form of extremist groups, which are part of the complexity of racism towards Roma.

The third section of the thesis aims to present the development of positive civil society in the Czech Republic after the overthrow, and examine its strengths and weaknesses. Such analysis is crucial for the thesis to provide answers to the main questions. What is more, the second half of the section will comment the state of civil society concerned particularly with Roma and Romani issues. It is important to understand the function of civil society and to find out whether it holds sufficient power to improve the circumstances surrounding the problem.

In conclusion, I intend to demonstrate that Czech civil society, although not perfect, is strong enough to fight the racism issue right in the terrain. It means that the civil society needs to work at the grassroots of the problem – to fight the bias of both the minority and majority. I expect to prove that the civil society is powerful enough to work and reach changes in the heart of the problem, within the regional or township communities. Its main goal is to bring the two groups together and teach them to tolerate their mutual differences, and benefit from

them. At this stage, it is not necessary to accept each other, but to tolerate and live peacefully next to each other. Obviously, not only the majority needs to tolerate the Romani minority, but the minority must work towards improving its image as a step along the way to greater acceptance, the latter being the ultimate goal.

With regard to the second question, the evidence leads me to conclude that the Czech government will need to cooperate with the civil society associations, because they are better informed about the problem. The government's central task will be to secure a reform of the current social system that partly contributes to the state of the problem. It will also improve law that needs to be free from discrimination, even the positive one, and ensure that rights and obligations are enforceable and their breaking properly sanctioned. A clear and just system of law is crucial for both social groups; neither should be favored over the other. Furthermore, the government should use the expertise found within civil society in preparation for launching governmental actions. Government might also delegate some or all execution of its Roma-related programs to qualified civil society organizations. In short, civil society and the government must be allies, not enemies. Finally, what must not be forgotten is that civil society, in order to be successful, must include not only associations of the dominant society but also associations of Roma or mixed associations.

I do not expect to provide a manual on solving the Romani problem in the Czech Republic, but I want to suggest a working plan for the country to reach a general change over the long term through particular changes and steps taken within a period of approximately two generations of citizens.

## 1. Defining “Civil Society”

This part of the Literature Review will consider the opinions of different authors on the definition of civil society and its components. Understanding the term is essential for comprehension of this study that reflects the issues of racism against Romani minority in the post-communist Czech Republic. It is concerned with the organizations of civil society that have been engaged in solving this social problem. Although the term is widely used in academia and by journalists, the authors and readers do not always apply and understand its meaning correctly or in the same ways. Therefore, the section will provide different definitions, criticism and comments as well as insight into the author’s own perception of the term.

Socrates, Plato and Aristotle were the first philosophers to introduce the idea of civil society. Michael Edwards (2005) explains that in the pre-modern to early modern era, from Aristotle to Thomas Hobbes, certain ideals representing society existed that would be described in contemporary language as civil society. John Locke’s definition approaches the modern explanation of civil society more closely. Although Seligman (1995) claims distinction between civil society and the state had not yet emerged, Locke (cited in Seligman 1995, 22) interprets civil society as

the realm of political association instituted among men when they take leave of the “state of nature” and enter into a commonwealth... [It is] the arena where the “inconveniences” and insufficiencies of the state of nature are rectified through the mutuality of contract and consent... It is but a more perfect form through which the freedom, equality, and independence of nature can be realized.

Clearly, Locke focuses on the necessity of consent among people, which is central part of the modern concept of civil society. Nevertheless, current civil society cannot be described

as realm of political associations, but as a realm of any voluntary associations created by free citizens of a state.

The term civil society became stable part of the vocabulary during the Scottish Enlightenment, represented besides others by Adam Ferguson's *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*. Alexis de Tocqueville devised a further formulation in the 1830s in the United States when he observed "associations of civil life which have no political object (Tocqueville 1835/2000, 513)." He was surprised by the scale and variety of associations formed for different purposes by people of different professions and ages. He expressed the idea that in democratic society individuals are weak and not able to accomplish anything without help of other citizens. For the sake of achieving their individual interest, they need to cooperate with and help fellow citizens (Tocqueville 1835/2000). We might debate the extent to which individuals are "helpless," but it seems logical that with help of others an individual is capable of reaching higher goals. On the other hand we need to take into account that the benefits of a community action are divided among many people and therefore, in some cases the individual gain appears to be smaller. The assumption is exempted from the theory of collective action explained in an article by Mitchell and Munger (1991).

Tocqueville also speaks about the role of government. He explains that "the more government takes the place of associations, the more will individuals lose the idea of forming association and need the government to come to their help (Tocqueville 1835/2000, 515)." I agree with this opinion up to a point. In a democratic state, where citizens are allowed to express dissatisfaction with a government's action through elections, civil society would exist no matter how much public space the government occupies. Such associations would challenge the state to provide better services.

Don E. Eberly (1998) defines civil society as “a real flesh and blood “thing,” consisting of people and institutions with moral substance and function... [C]ivil society denotes that realm of society in which non-political institutions operate” (20). He also claims that civil society embraces all associations and activities which are voluntary and free. I agree with Eberly’s point that the voluntary associations “arise spontaneously from the aspirations and desires of free people” (21), but I would not entirely support his opinion on civil society as a space where people cooperate together to gain greater common good. Despite the fact that working voluntary associations might benefit the whole society, they also include within their membership individuals seeking their personal self-interest. The intentions of individuals are well explained by Adam Smith in his *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, where he notes the benefits that occur to society as a result of individual’s pursuit of self-interest.

### **1.1. Civil society in Transitional Economies**

This section will examine the topic of the emergence and existence of civil society in the final stage of communism and in the wake of transition to a democratic regime particularly as it occurred in the Czech Republic. The case of the Czech Republic is unique by virtue of its political and social conditions during the last years of communism. It is worthy of academic interest due to role of the intelligentsia that became a new political elite instead of creating a stable base of the post-communist civil society. This part of the review will give us an idea of the state of civil society shortly after the Revolution and will help us to understand the further processes within the civil society as well as the state.

Richard Rose concluded in his study that post-communist countries seemed to lack social capital. Because social capital is a crucial element for the existence and functioning of civil society, let us first define this concept in order to understand Rose’s point. Coleman explains

that social capital allows an individual to use resources which would not be otherwise accessible even though there is sufficient human or financial capital (as cited in Edwards, Foley and Diani 2001). Putnam (1995) understands social capital as “features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (2). Inglehart adds that “networks result from people trusting each other rather than trust emerging as a byproduct of associations” (as cited in Rose 2001, 59).

Although Rose mainly concentrates on the case of post-Soviet Russia, he claims that his theory is generally applicable in many totalitarian and post-totalitarian states. He believes that social capital can exist separately from civil society in form of so called “informal networks,” observable in some post-communist countries. Such informal networks are perceived as beneficial, if they exist within formal networks, or they are complemented by formal networks of social capital (Rose 2001). When these formal networks are non-existent, informal social networks are only used to “get things done” or as a “protection against the state and to circumvent or subvert its commands,” and do not create a civil society working towards common good (Rose 2001). In case of post-Soviet Russia, Rose (2001) contradicts Putnam (1995, 65) who says that in post-communist countries there is a “widespread tendency toward passive reliance on a state.” Nevertheless, the individuals included in the informal networks of social capital are not passively relying on the state; they are seeking other ways to realize their interests. These interests are individual and the activities are likely to undermine the state and decrease already weak social trust. We need to uncover whether the freshly democratized Czech Republic supports Putnam’s theory, or is more comparable to Russia’s informal networks, or it mirrors the most favorable case of functioning civil society based on both formal and informal networks supported by developed social capital.

Pamela Paxton (2002) wrote that “[i]n the last stage of resistance to an oppressive regime, high levels of social capital provide resources for the organization of opposition movements and large-scale collective action” (257). This contradicts Putnam’s claim in the sense that in the former Czechoslovakia, a large opposition movement managed to overthrow the communist rule. Therefore, we can logically derive that there must have been high level of social capital; otherwise such a movement would not have been organized nor could it have been so effective. This is also supported by the opinion of Giuseppe di Palma, who says that although communism by its nature does not give space for the existence of civil society, it played very significant role in transition not only in Czechoslovakia but also other countries ruled by communist regimes (Palma, 1991).

With respect to the public discourse on the importance and role of civil society for democracy in early 1990s, I cannot fully agree with the above stated logical implication. Despite the mass movement that changed the political system, Czech civil society in the aftermath of the Velvet Revolution did not play as an important role as one would expect. Aleksander Smolar (1996) provides an interesting explanation, that “[t]he existence of a civil society of resistance was dependent on the existence of a hostile state that offered no hope for compromise. As soon as this state disappeared, the civil society that opposed it also disintegrated” (29). The sudden decline of civil society was caused partly by absorbing the main leaders of a so called “moral civil society” in the political and business sectors, which disabled the creation of stable fundamentals of strong civil society (Smolar 1996, Kaldor and Vejvoda 1997); and partly by the present legacy of communism: chaos and mistrust in everything “communal” (Smolar 1996).

At this point in the democracy-building process, it became necessary to strive for economic transition to create a liberal market economy but also to secure the social and political stability of the country. The two leading figures, Vaclav Havel and Vaclav Klaus,

met for the purpose of discussing the role of civil society in the democracy-building process. Although they have never reached an agreement, there is a general consensus among scholars that civil society's impact on democratization is mostly positive.

Alexis de Tocqueville spoke in his work about the necessity for people to associate under democratic rule in order to become more powerful and realize their interests. He claims that certain areas of social life cannot be usurped by the government, since the citizens of such a state would lose their freedom. Also, he is convinced of the inability of government to provide more than just rules; therefore civil society must take care of the matters which cannot be covered by the state, in order to secure freedom from excessive rule of government and stable social and political life (Tocqueville 1835/2000).

Putnam found that the quality of local governments in Italy is dependent on the level of civic engagement in a given area. The regions with a higher number of voluntary organizations of different kinds appeared to enjoy more efficient government. Furthermore, he suggests the need for a vibrant civil society as a "pre-condition for democracy and democratization" (Putnam, 1995). Putnam's conclusions imply that higher civic engagement in the form of associations of civil society leads to greater efficiency in distribution of public goods and smaller state, since certain services are provided by civil society organizations instead of the state. Civil society also serves as a "watchdog" over the political arena.

In a study by Kaldor and Vejvoda, the authors evaluate newly established democracies of Central and Eastern Europe based on several criteria. Among others, they note a criterion of freedom of expression and alternative sources of information and furthermore, associational autonomy which gives rights to the citizens to "form relatively independent associations or organizations, including independent political parties and interest groups (1997)." Apparently there is a close connection between democracy and civil society, since countries with stronger

civil society have been evaluated as more democratic than those with fewer voluntary associations.

A study by Pamela Paxton (2002), who strove to measure the influence of civil society on democracy and also its reciprocal impact, claimed that there has been increased funding of non-governmental organizations all over the world, who work for greater democratization. She found, that there truly is a positive relationship between civil society and democracy. What is more, she managed to measure that despite the mostly positive impact on democratization, certain organizations of civil society may shape democracy negatively . The Czech extremist organizations who have been involved in many cases of racial violence are a good example of such associations.

## **1.2. Racism and Xenophobia**

This part of the Literature Review refers to the case study, which is essential for the thesis to provide answers to the stated questions. The reader will learn about race, racism and xenophobia to recognize the meaning of the terms, which are crucial for further understanding. Furthermore, the idea of citizenship, citizenly behavior and social justice will contribute to the complexity and give a deeper insight into the major problem discussed in the main part of the paper.

According to C. Loring Brace (2005), the idea of race had not been known until people were able to travel long distances. With overseas discoveries and later colonialism, the concept of race emerged, as travelers were able to observe physical differences between them and local people. The distinctions were interpreted in their home countries and “the seeds of the race concept were duly planted in the minds of readers” (2).

Cynthia Brown (2002) also confirms that the concept of race is not supported by biological evidence. She bases her conclusion on studies of Stephen Jay Gould, R.C. Lewontin, Steven Rose, Leon J. Kamin, Audrey Smedley, Eugenia Shanklin and John Relethford. Brown concludes that “sociologists and anthropologists today regard the concept of race as a social construct, that it, a label that politically and culturally dominant groups apply to themselves and to other groups. Racial designations and definitions are understood to change over time, reflecting changes in political power and attitudes (as cited in Brown, 2).”

Brace noticed that for instance Adolf Hitler adjusted the term race and used it for those who did not even look different from other German citizens (2005). His Aryan “*übermensch*,” a special dominant race, was tall, strong, blonde and blue-eyed. Such person was treated as superior, despite no significant biological differences from other Europeans. Ironically, neither Hitler nor most of the Nazi leaders matched the Aryan prototype. This case only supports the above-explained origin of the concept of race.

Race is mostly perceived as a visual difference based often on skin color. Gloor (cited in Danielova 2003) defines race as a population which differs due to appearance of certain genes, frequency of inherited signs which are visually recognizable. A term “visual minority” is used instead of the term race in some countries (Danielova 2002). We can simply confirm this perception by the definition from online Oxford Dictionaries, where race is defined as “each of the major divisions of humankind, having distinct physical characteristics.”

Even if we admit that the biological concept of race does not exist, the presence of racism cannot be denied. Racism can be simply defined as the belief that some races are superior to other races based on their characteristics, appearance and abilities. The superiority and inferiority of different races gives certain sign that the idea of race was developed artificially for the purpose of rule of one race over another.

Blaut and Mills define racism as “white supremacy,” which underscores the way in which white people have created entire social, political, economic, and cultural systems that assign people of color to the bottom rungs of the ladder of privilege (as cited in Brown 2002, 3).“ The establishment of the theory for purpose of rule over inferior races admits also the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance.<sup>2</sup> Its definition describes racism as human-created ideology which claims that some races are predetermined to rule over other races based on basic physical and cultural features as well as economic wealth (as cited in Danielova 2003).

To understand the situation of Romani ethnicity further in the paper, it is necessary mention the term “marginality.” It is well defined by Zoltan D. Barany (1994), who refers to marginality in connection with Roma.

“Marginality” denotes a condition of separation or isolation from other groups, and collective exclusion from political, social, economic and cultural goods and services. A marginal condition might result from a variety of sources: distinctive appearance, race, ethnic origin, immigration, culture, etc... Although state policies might unambiguously prohibit discrimination (or marginalization) of any sort, such discrimination may persist through dominantly accepted views, mores and customs, and due to ineffective protective mechanisms for the marginal group (323).

The definition accurately describes the position of Roma in the Czech Republic and elsewhere in post-communist Europe, who suffer from marginalization and racial discrimination. Although Rick Fawn (2001) talks about Czech tolerance, openness and liberalism, so famous in the world, he also comments on the post-communist legacy causing xenophobia and discrimination against Roma.

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<sup>2</sup> The conference took place in Durban, South Africa in 2001, 31 August – 7 October.

Štechová explains that xenophobia means “fear of or hater to the unknown” (as cited in Danielova 2002, 15). Based on work of Danielova (2002), from a historical point of view xenophobia has a certain protective character, but this does not decrease responsibility for an individual’s anti-social behavior. Such phobia decreases tolerance among people and creates stereotypes in a society which are hard to eliminate.

Michael Banton (1996) makes a clear distinction between xenophobia and racism. “Racism can [...] be the name for that dimension by which persons assigned to another group are kept at a distance because they are considered racially inferior. Xenophobia can designate the way that others are kept at a distance because they are considered different (8).” Banton’s definition clearly distinguishes between inferiority of a minority in the case of racism and feared or mistrusted difference in the case of xenophobia. Both racism and xenophobia are present in the Czech Republic. Violent deeds against Roma prove racism, but the general perception of the minority by the Czech majority is more of a xenophobic one, given the Roma’s social, cultural and economic differences.

In order to easily comprehend the Romani situation in the Czech Republic described later in the paper, two more terms should be defined briefly, which ostensibly do not relate to racism. Nevertheless in the case study, they will go hand in hand. The term civil society explained above bears the idea of citizenship and citizenly behavior.

A citizen is “an inhabitant of a city or a town, esp. one possessing civic rights and privileges. In the United States it is a person native or naturalized, who has the privilege of voting for public offices and is entitled to full protection in the exercise of private rights (Oxford English Dictionary).” The definition implies that there are certain rights and also obligations of citizens, which performance can be called citizenly behavior. Citizenship; the state of being a citizen, requires individual to give up certain freedoms, but provides

protection and rights. Sanctions follow any violation of the rights. Citizenly behavior requires a citizen not only to perform in accordance to law, but also to use the citizen's rights reasonably and for the good of the community. In relation to civil society, citizenly behavior means participation in community events and voluntary associations to create greater common good.

Danielle S. Allen (2004) perceptively remarked on trust among citizens, which summarizes our debate on civil society, democracy, citizenship and xenophobia.

Trust in one's fellow citizens consists in the belief, simply, that one is safe with them. This trust can be registered cognitively, as when one believes that a particular fellow citizen is unlikely to take advantage of one's vulnerability...As for distrust of one's fellow citizens, however, when this pervades democratic relations, it paralyzes democracy; it means that citizens no longer think it sensible, or feel secure enough, to place their fates in the hands of democratic strangers. Citizens' distrust not of government but of each other leads the way to democratic disintegration (xvi).

I have already explained the close positive relationship between trust and civil society. Lack of trust among citizens jeopardizes performance and the very existence of civil society. Regarding the xenophobia of the Czech majority against their Romani fellows, the civil society splits into two; those who accept Roma and the opposing or mostly indifferent rest. Such a civil society can never reach consensus on the issue and proceed to harmonious and stable democracy.

The last concept to be explained is "social justice." Griffin (2007) provides a clear definition:

Social justice is both a process and a goal. The goal of social justice is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social

justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure. We envision a society in which individuals are both self-determining (able to develop their full capacities) and interdependent (capable of interacting democratically with other]. Social justice involves social actors who have a sense of their own agency as well as a sense of social responsibility....(1)

There are three institutions that need to cooperate together to achieve a socially just society: a state, a market and a civil society. A free liberal market with minimum control by the state will secure equal opportunities and efficient distribution of resources. Due to the existence of public goods, and to secure safety and performance of right and obligations, there is a state. But the state may not be always efficient in distribution, because it does not know people's needs and cannot reach to every part of its citizens' life. Therefore we need also civil society. Dominance of one institution over the others is not preferred, as it will cause instability and disharmony. Balance between the three elements of a democratic state and their cooperation is necessary in order to reach the goals of social justice.

## **2. The Romani Question**

The Romani minority has been present in Central and Eastern Europe for seven centuries (Barany 2002) and has always been subject to manipulation, persecution and discrimination by the dominant society. During the Second World War most of the European Romani populations became victims of the Nazi Holocaust. Later on, the communist regime attempted to eliminate Roma's traditional lifestyle and culture by forcing complete assimilation. The attempt not only failed but also brought further problems such as the collapse of the socio-cultural system of Romani communities, their values, cultural patterns and both inner and outer connections. Pavelčíková (2004) claims that the current state of Roma communities is up to a point a reflection of the crises caused by the totalitarian regimes. Therefore, we need to understand what happened during communism in Czechoslovakia and its legacy after the Velvet Revolution in 1989. These two topics will be the focus of this chapter.

### **2.1. Roma during Communism**

At the beginning of the 1950s the communist regime cared more about socialization and industrialization of the country than strict assimilation of Roma. Ethnic Roma were treated as victims of the previous totalitarian regime that the authorities blamed for Roma's incapacity to integrate into the major society. The attempts to educate, employ and integrate Roma with respect to their culture did not prove to be successful and brought to light previously hidden problems. At the end of the 1950's, the regime was about to finish creation of the stable socialist base and structure and could concentrate more on other issues, among them also the Romani question.

### **2.1.1. Failure of the Romani Policy in the First Half of the 1960s**

Living at the edge of society the nomadic Romani population did not match the pattern of the population, where everybody was equal and of conscious acceptance of the communist ideology (Pavelčíková 2004). The opinion that assimilation had been repressive surfaced and the ensuing debates resulted in a resolution to “work among gypsy population in CSR”<sup>3</sup> from 8<sup>th</sup> April 1958, which confirmed that “Roma cannot be considered as a distinctive national group, but as a socially and culturally backward population typical for its characteristic lifestyle features” (as cited in Pavelčíková 2004, 59). Therefore, all attempts to respect the cultural and social differences were claimed to slow down the process of the transformation of Roma into conscious socialist citizens. Next, the government implemented an Act, No. 74/1958 Coll. of 10/17 1958, on the permanent settlement of persons traveling that forbade “wandering and nomadic life” and vaguely defined who the traveling persons are. Clearly, the law aimed to force Roma to settle down. An extensive census of Romani population took place in 1959 to find those to whom the law was directed. The wandering Roma were forced to hand over their horses and the authorities also cut off the wheels of the Romani carts and caravans (Nečas and Miklušáková 2000). Roma were formally forced to settle down with no respect to their nature, habits and culture.

In the 1960s the interest of the state in working with Roma and their integration decreased due to political changes within the regime. Forced assimilation and denial of their culture became the more convenient ways to deal with the problem more than gradual progress towards their integration with respect to their ethnicity and “difference” as promoted during the 1950s. Two major events became the centre of attention of bureaucracy: spreading of Romani population and education of Romani children.

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<sup>3</sup> Czechoslovak Republic.

Due to the liquidation of Romani settlements in eastern Slovakia, it was hard to secure new housing for the newly homeless Roma. Although the government decided to disperse them among the industrial centers in the Czech area, which required building of new apartments, it did not manage to follow the uncontrolled movement of Roma families, and provide them with sufficient housing. Therefore, they were placed in inappropriate apartments designated for demolition and temporary wooden dormitories (Jurová 1993). In the first half of the 1960s, police were not capable anymore of solving all problems connected with Roma that worsened after the spread of Slovakian Roma whose settlements were demolished. A large group of Olach Roma still traveled and earned their living by outlaw activities, especially pick-pocketing and also more violent stealing and robbing. They adjusted to the contemporary societal needs and traded old western cars, which was not in line with the communist approach to the market and property (Pavelčíková 1999). In south Bohemia the housing issue became striking and Roma gained new apartments in good condition. Nevertheless, due to their habitual differences, they destroyed the property by selling metal and wooden material such as floors, doors, windows and pipes. Pavelčíková (2004) claims that Romani families preferred to live in the apartments subjected to demolition rather than in newly built housing facilities.

### **2.1.2. Organized Spread of Roma at the end of the 1960s and Romani Re-education**

Two problems emerged late in the 1960s: the creation of Romani ghettos and criminality of large clans. The government sought to solve these by the so called organized spread of the Roma population and their definitive assimilation. This process included not only separation of large Romani communities and ghettos to areas less populated by Roma, but also bringing up Romani children and re-education of adult Roma to deny their ethnicity and adopt

behavior, habits and culture of the majority. Nečas and Miklušáková point out that “all signs of their [Romani] ethnic identity must have been destroyed (2002).” Pavelčíková confirms that although many seemed to embrace the lifestyle of the majority, they returned to the Romani values and habits as soon as the assimilation policy loosened (2004).

**Table 1:** *Plan for spread of Romani population from the regions of eastern Slovakia to the regions in the Czech area in 1966-1970*

<b>Slovakia regions</b>	<b>Czech regions</b>	<b>1966–1968 families / persons</b>	<b>1969–1970 families / persons</b>	<b>Total families / persons</b>
Bardějov	Přerov, Svitavy, Jičín	112 / 896	84 / 672	196 / 1568
Humenné	Opava, Bruntál	55 / 440	30 / 240	85 / 680
Košice – city	Ostrava, Frýdek-Místek	45 / 360	35 / 320	80 / 640
Košice – countryside	Karviná	70 / 560	50 / 320	120 / 960
Michalovce	Nový Jičín, Šumperk	125 / 1000	85 / 680	210 / 1680
Poprad	Náchod, Rychnov n. Kněž., Ústí n. Orł.	85 / 680	70 / 560	155 / 1240
Prešov	Havl. Brod, Chrudim	46 / 368	38 / 304	84 / 672
Rožňava	Olomouc	90 / 720	60 / 480	150 / 1200
Spišská N. Ves	Vsetín	50 / 320	30 / 240	70 / 560
Trebišov	Hradec Králové, Pardubice	6 / 46	9 / 74	15 / 120
	Czech regions total	674 / 5392	491 / 3928	1165 / 9320

*(Excepted from Pavelčíková 2004)*

The table describes the proposed plan to spread the Slovak Roma to the Czech area. We can see that the number of families occupies the first position in the column, which indicates

the importance of a family unit for Romani ethnicity. Also we can count easily that on average there has been about seven to nine family members in each family, not to mention that the basic family units coming from the same area were mutually connected and reaching a number of tens of family members. Pavelčíková says that the plan was feasible only because some regions accepted more families than assigned (2004). Those regions are today the most problematic and with the highest unemployment – the area the north and northeast of Moravia and the north and northwest Bohemia. We can observe the trend in the following table.

**Table 2:** *Registered Romani population in the Czech area, December 31<sup>st</sup> 1968*

<b>Region</b>	<b>Number of towns</b>	<b>Towns with Roma</b>	<b>Roma in Total</b>
Prague and surrounding	4	4	8865
Středočeský	1330	258	5690
Jihočeský	918	119	2613
Západočeský	794	235	8014
Severočeský	705	311	18907
Východočeský	1284	257	5295
Jihomoravský	1582	172	2885
Severomoravský	883	193	8816
<b>Czech lands in total</b>	<b>7437</b>	<b>1549</b>	<b>61085</b>

*(Excepted from Pavelčíková 2004)*

In table 2 we can clearly see that the most Roma-populated regions are Prague, Západočeský, Severočeský a Severomoravský, which confirms what I have stated above, because apart from Prague, those regions suffer from the highest levels of general unemployment these days. The capital city of Prague has much higher standard of living and GDP per capita than any other region in the Czech Republic; therefore, the unemployment is lower and job opportunities even for less educated people are higher. Nevertheless, Prague has a large Romani community today that gathers in certain areas of the city that have turned into Romani ghettos.

The education of Romani children arose as the second issue. The specialized “gypsy schools” became a subject of cancellation and Roma should have attended regular elementary schools. However, the government suggested that they maintain specialized schools for children who had not yet started their school attendance and were older than eight years of age. The Ministry of Education and Culture also recommended adjusting curriculum to the needs and capacities of Romani children as well as a more personal approach by teachers. Special attention was required in many cases where children had never appeared or were frequently absent. The Ministry also supported Roma students’ attendance at vocational schools, despite their unfinished elementary education. However, parents usually could not afford to fund their children’s studies. By working the child could earn enough money to support himself even without proper education. What is more, vocational schools often functioned as boarding-schools, which was incompatible with Romani ties to family.

Moreover Romani children were often placed in specialized schools for the mentally disabled (Brabec 2008). During that era, parents in general did not have the right to decide which school their child would attend. A special commission established to assign children to schools decided about the placement of a child in a specialized school. The commission usually acted in favor of directors of regular schools, who did not wish to accept problematic

Roma. On the other hand, children placed in regular schools did not manage to adapt to the educational methods and absorption of an extensive amount of memorizing and failed to progress to higher grades. Furthermore, Romani parents complained that teachers treated their children badly, and they did not agree with the measures taken by the organs of public administrations such as fines and cuts of their child benefits and other social benefits in case of the child's absence (Pavelčíková 1999).

Fast artificial urbanization during the early years of the communist regime had not led to integration of Romani communities with the macro-society. On the contrary, the natural rules of the daily life of Romani societies got disrupted and caused decay of family ties and habits connected to lives in traditional settlements. The anonymity of the urban environment led to weakening of the social and educational level that had been reached earlier. New forms of criminality appeared like prostitution, drug abuse and alcoholism. In addition to that, the value of education in general declined due to the system's preference for manual work and promotion of working class people who received sufficient wages. Therefore, there was lack of motivation for Roma to educate their children, because the rise in salary was not significant. As a result, in 1970 only 0.5% of Roma finished high-school general education and, those completing high-school vocational education in full range reached less than 1%. There were only thirty-nine Roma with university education (Jurová 1993).

### **2.1.3. Roma Emancipation during 1969 – 1973 and the Union of Gypsies - Roma**

In 1968 at the beginning of the democratization process, Romani representatives for the first time expressed their demand to establish an independent Romani organization. The Ministry of Interior registered the Union of Gypsies – Roma in 1969, when it also started to publish its regular informative report. As Horváthová states “the Union based its activities

on principles of equal and non-conflict coexistence of major society and Romani minority, which did not want to assimilate but declared positive ethnic specifics and further develops them (2002, 53).” Thanks to the Union, for the first time ever Roma participated in solving the Romani question and integration process.

The Union successfully started to develop its program and activities. Up to the spring of 1973, about 8, 500 members registered (Pavelčíková 2004). A new company under the Union started to operate in 1970 and concentrated not only on employment of Roma in its construction section but also established departments for renewal of traditional Romani crafts. Although the company was successful and profitable at the beginning, it had to face typical problems of conflicts between different families, favoritism, and also financial problems due to employees leaving due to the need of labor in the state’s plants and especially lack of managerial skills.

The Union also developed relations with similar organizations in other European countries and participated in international activities. More importantly, it spread its activities all over the country in the area of culture, education and sport where it organized various activities and brought up the question of Romani education again by publishing resources for teachers who dealt with Romani children, organizing afterschool activities for Roma and used Romani volunteers to visit Romani families and talk with them about importance and benefits of regular school attendance. The cultural events became the focus of the Union and appeared to be very successful, contributing to better and more natural integration of Roma to the dominant society. Especially Roma dance and music groups enjoyed great success and even the attention of national media.

The Union of Gypsies – Roma felt resistance from the communist regime when they demanded their nationality become part of the Constitution. The Union also requested

government support of academic research on Romani language, culture, traditions and lifestyle as a national ethnicity. The request was based on *the Memorandum to the essential questions on Romani (Gypsy) problematic and definition of social status of Roma (Gypsies)*<sup>4</sup> initiated by Milena Hübschmann published on April 17<sup>th</sup> 1970 (Lhotka 2000). The Memorandum was definitively rejected by the communist representatives who expressed clearly that the acceptance of Roma nationality was inadmissible. Regarding the academic research, the Central Committee of the Communist party authorized the Department of Education and Science to control and revise its results to ensure that “partial scientific results are not transmitted to the political reality to support wrong tendencies (Lhotka 2000).” Apparently too much diversity would have stood against the principles of the communist ideology.

During the first half of the 1970s the democratization wave faded and was replaced by president Husak’s normalization process which did not act in favor of organization established as a response to the Prague Spring. Therefore, the Union of Roma – Gypsies “voluntarily ended its activity” in early 1973, pressured by the new communist nomenclature.

#### **2.1.4. Social and Cultural Integration of Roma in the 1970s**

The government started a new policy towards Romani population by the Agreement no. 279/1970. The agreement rejected renewal of the Act No. 74/1958 Coll. of 10/17 1958 on the permanent settlement of persons traveling as unconstitutional. The agreement described the “complex solution” of the Romani issues with an emphasis on individual and group social work, researches and analyses of the actual situation. However, it denied Romani emancipation as a self-competent national group promoted by the Union of Roma – Gypsies.

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<sup>4</sup> Translated from Memoranda k základním otázkám romské (cikánské) problematiky a vymezení společenského postavení Romů (Cikánů).

Up until the first half of the 1970s, the policy towards Roma took partly into consideration the Romani differences and worked with them with respect to the customs and culture. The previous harsh assimilation did not bring the expected results; therefore the new policy was milder although the long term goal remained the same. The government paid special attention to education and after-school activities of Romani children. The policy appeared successful. In addition to that, special social workers came to the areas with large Romani communities to help them integrate into the majority. Their results, though, did not reflect their efforts. Most of the workers belonged to the majority society themselves and did not receive proper training on how to deal with Roma, the nature of their attitudes, culture and customs, nor their language. The social workers' attitude as well as the general atmosphere of the normalization era contributed to an even more formal approach to the solution of Romani question (Pavelčíková 2004).

During the second half of the 1970s the idea of gradual elimination of maladjusted groups' birthrate through contraception was introduced. Such policy went against Romani nature; nevertheless Romani women often agreed to undergo the surgery after they received financial reward for sterilization. Some regions later announced that their solution of Romani question was successful due to sterilizations.

Horváthová explains that Romani equalization with the majority was supposed to be reached through material and social benefits and advantages. Roma gained higher social benefits and easy access to new housing. This approach did not solve the problem of the Romani community; it actually worsened the issue as it "paralyzed [Roma] – blunting their traditional self-sustainability and independence (2002, 53)." Such policy automatically led to lack of interest of Roma in education and work as the social benefits were higher than their wages. As we will see later, this policy caused one of the main issues currently prevailing in the major society towards Roma.

### **2.1.5. Charter 77, Document no. 23, 1978**

On December 13<sup>th</sup>, 1978, signatories of the Charter 77 addressed Document no. 23 *About the Situation of Gypsies – Roma in Czechoslovakia* to the United Nations. The document summarized that anti-Romani discrimination amounts to violation of human rights in Czechoslovakia. It emphasized that there was no formal Romani or governmental institution protecting Romani civic, political, social, economic and cultural rights or promoting their interests. The document also warned about the major society which was either indifferent or racially biased. In addition to that, it claimed that the questions of minorities were generally neglected and the governmental institutions suppressed information about their problems which caused danger in terms of even greater ignorance from the macro-society. The authors also touched the question of Romani nationality rejected by authorities, and logically claimed that although Roma did not legally exist, the authorities treated them as a special group (Charta 77 1990). Such approach contributed not to requested integration but to a greater segregation and marginalization.

Czech intelligentsia welcomed the document as a support in a dialog with the government officials. It also became one of the basic documents of Romani culture's promotion in the 1980s. At that time, the crisis of the regime deepened and formerly hidden problems, including the questions on minorities, received attention from society. The influence of the Charter 77 and the Document no. 23 became quite clear at the final stage of the communist crisis (Pavelčíková 2004).

### **2.1.6.A New Approach to the Romani Question and the Collapse of the Regime**

In the 1980s we could observe a two-track attitude to the Romani problem. The government kept publishing empty reports claiming the success of the communist policies, despite their apparent failure. At the same time a new generation of intelligentsia and representatives of Roma promoted development of the Romani culture, public activities and events that enjoyed positive feedback also from the non-Romani majority.

These activities and an absolute failure of the government policies forced the state to surrender in the middle of the 1980s. The Communist Party invited Romani representatives to evaluate a new report on results of communist policies attempting to solve the Romani question. The newly prepared Constitution should have incorporated ideas of the Romani representation to recognize Romani nationality. The approach towards the Roma was subject to change and included development and promotion of the language, culture and social life and other activities of the Romani community whose representatives participated in this process. However, the regime collapsed in less than a year and the plans inherited by newly established institutions had to be revised (Pavelčíková 2004).

### **3. Developments After 1989**

In the following chapter the reader will learn about the contemporary situation after the revolutionary year of 1989. Based on the previous chapter I will analyze the impact of the communist policies on Roma's social status after 1989, the most significant problems that the minority has to face, and perception of the problems by the dominant society. The second part of this chapter will be devoted to the description of the negative civil society, the extremist groups whose activities have been and still are center of attention of Czech media in question of the Romani minority, and who may influence the bias of the general society.

#### **3.1. Romani Issues after 1989 and the Negative Perception by the Macro-society**

The years after the collapse of the communist system brought liberalization of the market and growth of associations of civil society. For the first time, Roma were able to claim their own nationality and thus gained several rights; besides others the right to get educated in their language, to maintain their culture, and to participate in solutions of related matters. In the first free elections in 1990, the political party Romani Civic Initiative ran for the Parliament of the country and what is more, eleven (Roma in the Czech Republic, n.d.) Roma from different parties gained parliamentary positions.

The generally optimistic nation had to face several difficulties related to transition such as high unemployment caused by market liberalization and privatization. What became a short-term challenge to the dominant society happened to be a serious issue for the Romani minority. As explained in the previous chapter, most Roma had not achieved sufficient qualification and education and therefore, after the Velvet Revolution, could only hold low job positions. In addition to that, those jobs became highly competitive due to inflow of

“gastarbeiters”<sup>5</sup> from the Eastern Block. With growing poverty of Roma caused by unemployment, Roma have been increasingly marginalized. The majority of those who came to the Czech Republic from Slovakia had not changed their permanent address and thus could not apply for social benefits and job search at the Unemployment Office. Another problem came in 1994 after the split of Czechoslovakia with the new Citizenship Act. The Citizenship Act assigned Czech citizenship to those who were born in the area of the newly established Czech Republic. Other people had to fulfill conditions given by the law in order to gain citizenship – two years of permanent residence in the Czech Republic and five years of impunity. As a result, thousands of Slovak Roma living in the Czech area became practically homeless.

Despite the unsuccessful policies towards Roma during communism, the system managed to keep the whole society employed.<sup>6</sup> The sudden increase in Romani unemployment after the Revolution contributed to the negative perception by the dominant society. In addition to that, the generous system of social security and benefits<sup>7</sup> discouraged low income population from work. It became more profitable for a low-skilled worker not to work and stay on the dole instead of accepting a low-wage job. What is more, the child benefit system in particular produced sufficient income for families with multiple children, which was the case of Romani families. The above mentioned factors have resulted into large Romani families affected by so-called family unemployment which had a further impact on children. Seeing that their parents were not working, they did not have a chance to adopt working habits and daily

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<sup>5</sup> The term *gastarbeiter* or “guest worker” comes from Germany of the 1960s and 1970s. It describes a foreigner who came to the country in search of a job as a part of the “Guest Worker Program.” The term was often used in the era of initial transition for foreigners coming from Eastern Europe to search low-skilled or unskilled jobs.

<sup>6</sup> The efficiency of the employment is questionable, since jobs were created in order to secure jobs for every single person capable of working. Those who did not want to work were treated as traitors to the regime.

<sup>7</sup> The generous social system is another legacy of communism. Currently, the country is facing far-reaching problems caused by the generosity and slow reformation of the system. Reformation of the system is urgent but politically unpopular.

routine. Under-education, unemployment and social exclusion have become “inheritable” (Pospíšil, 2006). As a result, non-Romani society perceives Roma as slackers, free-riders and criminals.

Criminality relates to the unemployment issues. According to “*The Ways of Earning a Living of Roma in Terms of Criminality*,”<sup>8</sup> Roma tend to commit crimes of usury, restriction of personal freedom and abuse, prostitution, pimping, drug distribution, theft and pick-pocketing. Theft and pick-pocketing are especially complicated social problems because those acts are not perceived as a criminal activities among certain groups of Roma when they steal from “gadžos” – white members of the dominant society.<sup>9</sup> What is more, the Olach groups or Roma admit, that a good Olach bride must be a good thief (Kryštof, n.d.). Stealing is therefore perceived as a useful skill and has developed throughout centuries as a way to survive material poverty and to harm the “white ones.” The result is that the majority is highly biased against Roma and generally perceives them as thieves.

Hirt explains that Roma criminality concerns only those living in socially excluded areas. Such people are not only Roma, but also the socially weak members of macro-society. According to the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, there are more than three hundred such enclaves in the Czech Republic (2006). Living in ghettos means having a limited approach to livelihood usually due to lack of skills, high unemployment in the area, and discrimination. Children who are born in such environment are often destined to remain there. They are not motivated to study and thus they copy behavioral patterns of their parents, whose benefits from criminal activities are higher than from legal jobs.

Criminality and ghetto life bring another bias that affects the whole Romani minority. The members of dominant society widely believe that the state positively discriminates

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<sup>8</sup> Translated from Způsoby obživy romských populací související s trestnou činností.

<sup>9</sup> This is especially the case among Olach Roma.

against Roma in the matter of housing. Typically, houses inhabited by socially weak populations belong to the township, they are in bad condition, and thus affordable for the poor. The city as the owner is responsible for the conditions and has to care about the houses. Once the houses are no longer re-constructible, it is cheaper to build new housing, and move the families over. Socially excluded families therefore gain new housing that is still cheap, despite its perfect state and value. Some towns present this policy also as a tool to deal with socially excluded populations, and help them increase their standard of living and to escape from the circle of low opportunities. The problem is that the families from a ghetto are not allocated all over the township, but new houses are built in one area and thus a new ghetto emerges. Why is the solution perceived negatively by the dominant society? First of all, if a Romani family is assigned an apartment in a “regular house,” it hardly changes its habits gained in a ghetto. The “decent inhabitants” of the house have to face problems with this family such as noise, disorder, too many members living in the apartment, security issues. Secondly, in case the houses emerge in the same locality, again, the socially excluded families are not able to change their habits all of a sudden and often demolish the new housing in a short time. A third problem relates to incapability to pay rent, even if it is low. The affected town can apply measures to those who do not pay rent such as cutting the water and electricity, which does not prevent the excluded families from living in an apartment. If a seizure of property takes place, the executor usually does not have much to confiscate. Again, the above noted problems affect all the socially weak and excluded population, not only Roma. Nevertheless, according to research in different localities, about 70 – 80 % of Roma live among the population of the socially excluded localities. As a result, the biased macro-society generalizes about ethnicity as such, and socially integrated “decent” Roma suffer from unjust attitude of people and governmental institutions.

### **3.2. The Dark Side of Civil Society**

The thesis aims to explain the positive impact of civil society on integration of Roma into Czech macro-society; nevertheless, we must not forget that civil society may also contain sick elements. Although these elements correspond with civil society associations by definition, they are not perceived as positive and may cause disintegration of the society. With respect to the case of Roma in the Czech Republic, such unhealthy elements of civil society are the extremist groups. This sub-chapter will introduce who the groups are, what they do, and - as a paradox - how they contribute to better relationship between the Romani minority and the dominant society.

The extremism that exists in the Czech Republic is often described as right-wing extremism or ultra-right. Although we can divide extremism to left and right with respect to the political scale, it is important to understand such scale not as a line with finite ends, but as a circle where the extreme right and extreme left meet. Such assumption implies that there might be similarities within both types and certain aspects may intermingle. For the purpose of the thesis we will study the definition of the right-wing extremism.

As many definitions have appeared, the German Friedrich Ebert Foundation conducted a research in 2006 and introduced a new definition of the right-wing extremism:

Right-wing extremism introduces a thought pattern, whose significant character lies in the idea of people who are not equal. In [the] political field, it arises as an affinity to forms of dictatorship, chauvinistic attitude, justification and defense of National Socialism. In [the] social sphere, it is characterized by anti-Semitism, hostility to foreigners and social-Darwinist<sup>9</sup> opinions (Štern, 2006).

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<sup>9</sup> Social Darwinism is a misinterpretation of Darwin's theory sometimes shortly called "the survival of the fittest." As Hofstadter explains, Darwinian collectivism rose up during the First and especially the Second World war

Thus we can say that right-wing extremists believe in supremacy of one race, ethnicity or national group over others. The note on social Darwinism in the citation introduces the idea that belonging to a certain group is important for a person, as it determines his physical and mental structure, skills and abilities. Such perception can easily lead to violence among individuals, and in greater range to social unrest and civic war. A strong presence of right-wing extremism in a democratic state undermines and threatens democracy.

According to the Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic (2010), “any activity or clear-cut ideological approaches, which do not respect the constitutional or legal norms, include intolerance and attack democratic constitutional principles, are labeled as extremism.” The Ministry’s definition embraces extremism as such and does not distinguish between the right and the left wing. Nevertheless, we can derive the same conclusion as from the previous quotation; extremism in any form is not acceptable by modern democratic society and purposely causes instability of democracy.

In the Czech Republic there are several significant groups to be described as extremist or ultra-right. The project Varianty of People in Need that focuses on education of children in global topics and current social problems, issued a paper with the list of the major Czech neo-Nazi groups that the society considers to be the most problematic. As the report (?) by Syrový, Cakl, Kalibová, and Buryánek describes, a group of skinhead movements arose shortly after the Velvet Revolution, when people were more tolerant to racial violence due to deep social and economic changes and search for their own identity. Up until 1993 there was not an organized group of skinheads, although many musical concerts were organized to attract young people and extend the base for a future organization. In 1993 the Bohemian Hammer Skins (BHS) were established as a branch of the international Hammer Skins. The task of

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and provided alibi for fascist, Nazi regimes and racism. In case of this paper the theory can be explained as a “struggle of racial or ethnic groups,” where the extremists believe that the white race is biologically superior to other races.

BHS was to create a network for neo-Nazis in the Czech Republic, support growth and spread of racist music groups and distribute magazines and flyers with ideas supporting the ideology. In 1996 another international organization opened its branch in the Czech Republic, Blood and Honor Division Bohemia (BHDB), and its activity became a focus of attention of the police during 1997-1998 (2005). We can observe a turn of the government's approach to racism and activities of ultra-right groups in the years of 1997 and 1998. As ignorance could no longer be accepted and the situation called for quick solution, several police raids took place and the government had to intervene.

As a result of the government's attention, the ultra-right were forced, act more moderately and go public with a new formal program; but the leaders did not succeed in introducing their new program and attracting voters, and therefore failed to even participate in the parliamentary elections in 2002. Czech skinheads initiated a new tactic, a national social revolution. Since 2002 they have organized concerts, demonstrations, mobilized small groups of skinheads, created contacts and networks abroad, and spread their ideas and ideology online (Syrový et al. 2005). Increased power of the movement could be observed in 2009 when the Ministry of Interior failed to provide valid arguments against the Labor Party, the Czech extreme right wing party, and the Highest Court rejected its proposed abolition. The Court's decision meant a victory of the Party that is supported by neo-Nazis and for the first time in history it gained more than 1 % of votes in the European elections (ČT24 2009a). The activities of the ultra-right have faded recently due to sharp police raids and media focus (ČT24 2010a). Although the movement is not stable and unified today, its individual members are the major actors in racially motivated violence in streets of the country.

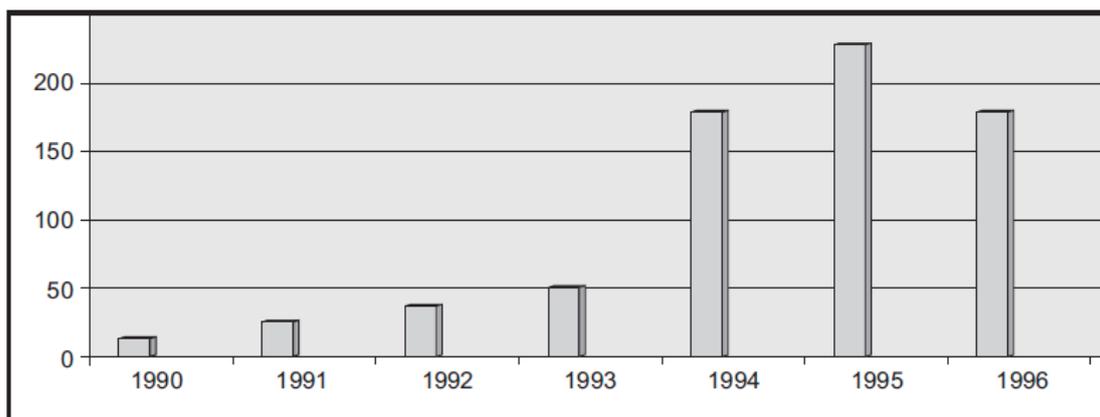
The main racially motivated violent deeds that ended in death of Roma perpetrated by ultra-rightist individuals after 1989 (ČT24 2009b) are:

- 2009 Arson attack on a Romani house in Vítkov, Opava area. A two years old Romani girl suffered an extensive skin burn.
- 2001 Roma Ota Absolon stabbed to death at the disco in Svitavy,
- 1998 Roma Helena Biháriová offended, beaten and pushed into a river where she drowned,
- 1998 Milan Lacko beaten to unconsciousness and driven over by a car in Orlová-Lutyně, Karviná area, which caused his death.
- 1995 Tibor Berki attacked in his apartment and died due to extensive injuries,
- 1993 Tibor Danihel drowned in a river after being beaten and pushed in.

A brief look at the nature of the crimes clearly shows the brutality and suffering of the victims who were randomly chosen people, whose only common feature was their ethnicity, perhaps indicated by their skin color. These six crimes that ended with the death of the victim are only a fraction of the total number of more or less violent attacks, not to mention verbal offenses and threatening. The number of such events is increasing. The reason for the trend can be explained by the increase in the deeds reported to the police. Also, the Czech police pay greater attention to recognition and combat crimes with racial motives (ČT24 2010b).

Statistics showing the actual numbers of crime against Roma do not exist. Nevertheless, the Czech Helsinki Committee (Múka et al. 2008) compiled data from the Police of the Czech Republic that resulted into following tables on racially motivated crime from 1990 to 2006 .

*Summary of crimes with racist implication committed between the years 1990 and 1996:*



*Summary applicable to a period of time between the year 1998 and 2006:*

Trestné činy celkem <i>Crimes in total</i>		Z toho s extremistickým motivem <i>Therefrom with extremist motive</i>	objasněné <i>Discovered and explained</i>	Z toho stíháno osob <i>Therefrom a number of prosecuted persons</i>
1998		0.03% / 133	75.2% / 100	184
1999	426 626	0.07% / 316	86.4% / 273	434
2005		0.07% / 253	75.5% / 191	269
2006	336 446	0.07% / 248	79% / 196	242

As we can see, the racially motivated criminality had its peak in 1995, where it reached over 200 crimes and then again in 1999 with 316 crimes, which is the highest number that we have. The overall tendency shows increase in crimes with racial motives since 1990. What statistics do not show, though, is the higher attempt of Roma to secure their human rights, and increase in reporting these crimes to the police by Roma (Múka 2008). Thus, the low numbers during the years 1990 to 1993 reflect only crimes that were reported, and not the actual number.

If we look up the locations of the crimes that ended in death, we will find a match with the following map showing the centers of right wing extremism.

**Picture 1:** *Centers of the right-wing extremism in the Czech Republic*



*Source: ČT24, 2009b*

The map also reflects the historical spread of Slovak Roma to the area of the Czech Republic. The areas inhabited by Roma at that time correspond with areas of the ultra-right extremists. In those areas there are also many ethnically exclusive localities – ghettos.

To make the extremist tendencies of the overall population clear, the Ministry of Interior had conducted research that found that 5.8 % of population sympathizes with the ideology of the ultra-right and is willing to support such organizations by membership, or active participation in demonstrations, marches and other events. In addition, 2.5 % of the population is willing to support extremist parties by their vote, but they would not participate in any events. The research also showed that those who belong among the 5.8 % are poorly educated people, unemployed, psychically frustrated, mentally unstable or in need of strong leadership. The latent group of potential extremist voters includes mostly people who have had negative experiences with problematic minority groups in the population (MVČR, 2010). Despite the roughly 8 % (MVČR, 2010) of people with inclination to right wing extremism, about 91 % of the population do not represent any threat. These people are either willing to

fight extremism, or they express strong disagreement with practices of the problematic groups. Obviously, there is a large ratio within this percentage of people who remain passive and do not care.

After the 2009 attack on a Romani family in Vítkovice the Czech nation finally expressed strong disagreement with activities of extremists and together with extensive media attention pushed the government and police to greater focus on the issue, thorough combat of racial crimes and preventative programs. Such approach is definitely a necessary step to improved situation in future; nevertheless, it is crucial to avoid one-way solution both by the institutions and the society. So far, the fight against racism focuses on the majority suppressing the minority. There is a wide range of crimes committed by the members of the minority, which are not dealt with fairly.

A recent attack on a 12 year old boy , a “white” member of the dominant society, from Krupka, Ústí nad Labem area conducted by two minor Roma has been often compared with the arson attack in Vítkov, and sometimes even called “Vítkov vice versa (IDNES, 2010).” This crime has not been covered by media as much as the Vítkov arson and the penalty for the Romani actors was much lower. The older Roma was sentenced to 10 years in prison, whereas the main incendiary from Vítkovice was sentenced to 22 years in jail. It is obviously up to professionals to judge the severity of each crime; nevertheless the society expressed disagreement with the punishment. As a positive aspect we can see that the major Romani organizations such as Romea have voiced their regret to the victim and fairly estimated the crime.

## **4. Civil Society in the Czech Republic After 1989**

In the literature review we analyzed the theoretical framework of civil society in transitional economies and came to the conclusion that the civil society in the Czech Republic during the twilight of the communist regime was mostly revolutionary, and its purpose was to change the political system. In the Czech Republic, the major figures of the revolution did not form a stable base for the post-revolutionary civil society, but became political leaders or businessmen (Smolar, 1996, Kaldor and Vejvoda 1997). Nevertheless, the most significant figures managed to shape the debate on the state and importance of the civil society in the Czech Republic after 1989.

This section of the thesis will briefly show the state of civil society after the revolution and introduce the main opinions of two political leaders of that time – President Václav Havel and Prime Minister Václav Klaus.<sup>10</sup> Based on the reality of the civil society organizations concerned with Roma, I will analyze Havel's and Klaus' opinions and merge their ideas into a one that would reflect the real situation.

### **4.1. General Situation**

Different resources present different opinions on the condition of Czech civil society after the Velvet Revolution. What we can understand from the literature is that despite the strong wave of civil movements in the 1980s, and pressure from foreign institutions to form and establish a strong civil society for stable democracy and successful transition, the newly invigorated civil society faded in the early years of the post-communist era. As Klvaňa (2004) notes “The 1990s in the Czech Republic were characterized by emphasis on economic reform, which overshadowed the development of the civil society” (51). Also, Klvaňa explains in

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<sup>10</sup> In 2003 Václav Klaus became the second president of the Czech Republic and was re-elected in 2008.

great detail that mistrust in politicians and transformation of communist leaders into big capitalist entrepreneurs caused today's political passivity among Czechs as well as cynicism and strong individualism. Such tendency has been strengthened by homogeneity in the country that from a historical point of view is "a story of a continuous shrinkage of its cultural and ethnic diversity. The new homogeneity has been accompanied by cultural isolationism, which is a reaction to the travails of history in the region (Klvaňa 2004, 51-52)." This claim explains why the Czech Republic has had extensive problems with protection of human rights in connection with ethnic minorities, especially Roma. Kaldor and Vejvoda support the idea of the highly individualistic and atomistic Czech society (1997).

The state of civil society, its possible future path and the role of NGO's became focus of attention of the two major political personas of the country during 1995, five years after the Velvet Revolution. President Václav Havel and the Prime Minister Václav Klaus exchanged series of opinions that were compiled and commented on by former Prime Minister Petr Pithart in the article called *Rival Visions* (1996). Despite that the visions of the two leaders are described as opposing and extreme in many journals and articles including Pithart's "Rival Visions," I believe that although they used different approaches and views, they came to same conclusion. Different terminology used to describe the same or similar conclusion based on the macroeconomic background of Klaus and artistic, humanitarian background of Havel confused both intellectuals and politicians to perceive their ideas as conflicting.

Václav Klaus emphasized the importance of the economic transformation - that rapid liberalization, privatization and an open "political market" led to a free market and free society with open opportunities. He claimed that "[n]othing else needed to be done. Some people, however, still want to take advantage of the collapse of communism to create something more than "just" a free society (Pithart and Klaus 1996, 14)." The message hidden in this claim tells us that first of all we need to think about people as about individuals. If we

give them space and opportunities to express their wishes and wants, if the state provides them with opportunities, or better, the state does not limit their utility maximizing tendencies, the civil society will naturally rise and develop. Instead of the term “civil society,” Klaus preferred to use the term “society of free citizens” and believed that a civil society is not different from a democratic society (Pithart and Klaus 1996).

Klaus agreed that citizens needed to be involved in public affairs, but he asked whether directly or indirectly. He distinguished between the positive and the normative, explaining that direct participation was what we desired whereas indirect participation was achievable in terms of efficiency to reach wanted outcome. Klaus believed that although the direct participation is better than indirect, it is not feasible. Further in the debate he touched the role of nonprofit organizations. Based on his economic background he stated that for-profit organizations are as good as nonprofit organizations and therefore the latter ones should not be protected or favored. The task of the state is to prepare space for a so-called intermediate layer that lies between the government and society itself,<sup>11</sup> not to artificially construct it (Pithart and Klaus 1996).

To develop the discussion between Klaus and Havel, we need to understand what the function and the utility of not-for-profit organization (NPO) is. NPO's are usually service providing organizations (Phelps 2003) which do not operate for profit and are established to serve the society towards greater common good. They are often charities relying on gifts in form of money and time to conduct their projects. Phelps (2003) claims that

Not for profit firms arise and are supported by potential customers through gifts of time and effort in order to bypass natural monopolies arising from scale economies (relative to the size of local market) that the community would otherwise confront. They create opportunities either to bypass monopoly profits or to increase quality above the profit-maximizing level, or both.

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<sup>11</sup> Intermediate layer is the layer between a government and its citizens.

NPOs are voluntary associations as described by Tocqueville in his definition of civil society explained in the literature review. Phelps therefore understands NPOs as organizations that complement the market in the area that lies beyond maximum profit. Individual profit maximization secures maximum benefit for individuals and firms, but does not necessarily reach the social maximum benefit. Here come NPOs to fulfill this empty spot and serve for the common good. Great examples of such NPO are Medecins Sans Frontieres or International Red Cross.

With respect to the classic economic approach it is easy to advocate Klaus's point of view. Profit-seeking organizations make decisions based on the information that is provided by prices. The price system though, does not apply for non-profit organizations, because their aim is not to maximize the profit and minimize the costs. Thus, we cannot say that nonprofit organizations are better than profit organizations; as they may lead to imperfect allocation of resources. I believe that protecting and favoring nonprofit organizations to profit firms can lead to growth of their quantity but decline of their quality and abuse of the favors. Whereas in case of creating space without overstating government support, only those whose intention is clearly to help the society, to participate in the civic life, will become members of the civil society, as membership in or establishment of a nonprofit organization will maximize their personal utility. Klaus's idea therefore leads to lower quantity but higher quality of NPOs within civil society.

Václav Havel's approach reflects his humanistic background. He points out that the "moral and spiritual condition (Pithart and Klaus 1996, 15)" of the country has been declining together with growing indifference of people and absence of ethics. Havel wishes to create and develop strong civil society and perceives it as the primary task of the era. It seems that Havel's society is based on love, altruism, ethics and community life. Despite the idealism, such society can neither be found in the world, nor created by the state. Here we can possibly

emphasize Klaus's ability to distinguish between normative and positive, between the ideal and the real and achievable. I agree with Havel when he says that "it is healthy when a society boasts a rich spectrum of interests, for this links people at different levels (Pithart, Klaus 1996, 19)." But I do not agree that "[b]ringing people from all walks of life together is something a state should try to do (Pithart and Klaus 1996, 19)." Any possible incentive created with the clearest intention to boost civil society and establish a better one would encourage people to maximize their individual profit, no matter how ethical or loving they are. It would not be bad but it would not even be good in each and every case. And here we get to the solution offered above; if the state provides space for the civil society to grow, the society will take advantage and create what Havel has idealized may be slower in pace but more efficient, in terms both economic and social.

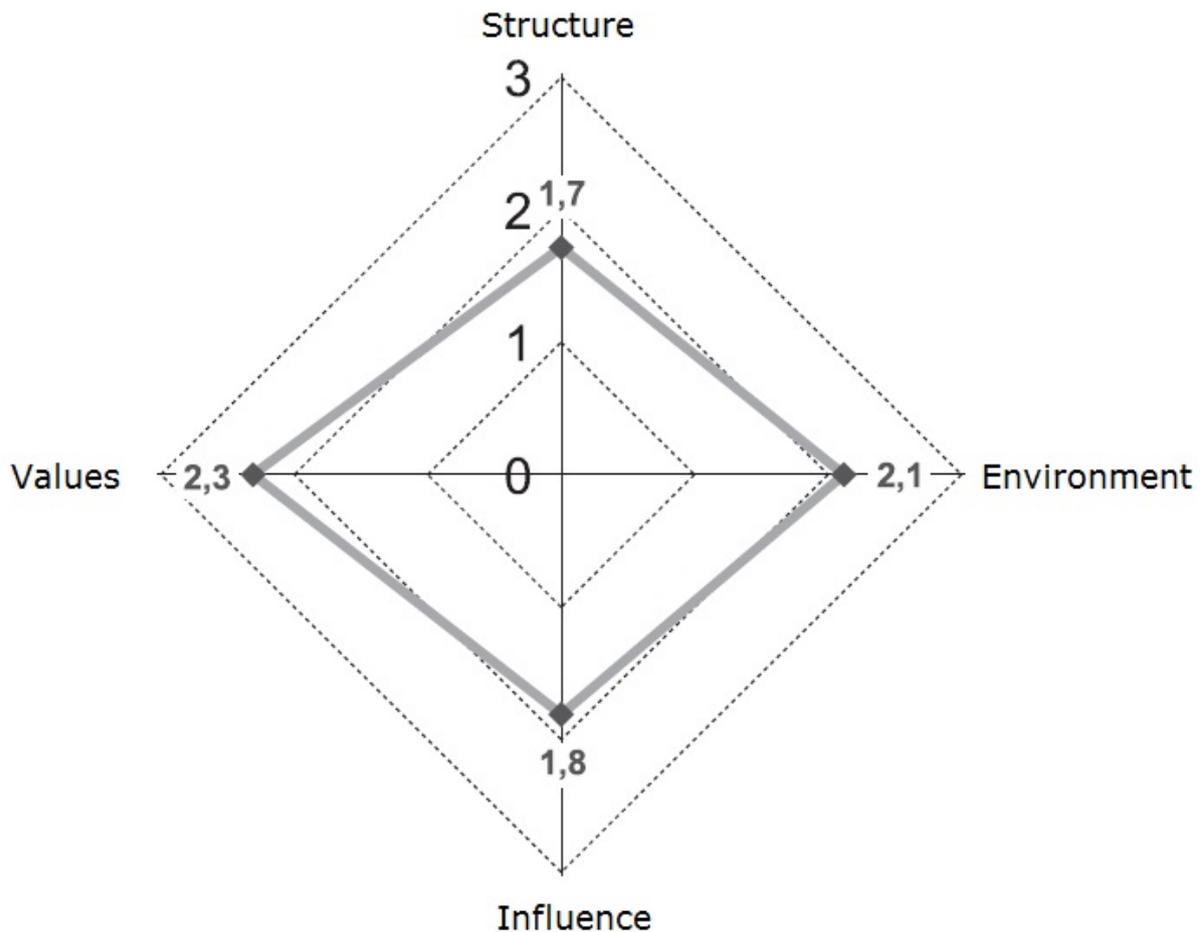
To sum up, what a country attempts to reach is a state where voluntary associations that create civil society can freely arise, grow and develop to fulfill the space beyond market, serve as a mediator between society and government and work towards greater common good creating complex, harmonious, aware and interconnected society.

The development after the Velvet Revolution brings up a question if in such conditions and state a strong civil society can actually arise and exist. Despite the decline of civil society in general in the early 1990s caused mostly by the character of transition, Frič, P., Deverová, L., Pajas, P., Šilhánová, H. (1998) claim that many NGOs have been established after 1993 and Hladká describes the development after 1989 as "explosive (2009, pp 4)." According to the 2009 NGO Sustainability Index there is 105,758 nonprofit organizations operating in the Czech Republic today (US-AID, 2009).

What should be questioned is not quantity but quality of the nonprofit organization in the Czech Republic. The Czech civic organization CIVICUS conducted a research in 2005

focused on the civil society in the Czech Republic and its state 15 years after the fall of the communist regime. The major outcome of the research is the diamond pictured below that represents the civil society condition in the Czech Republic.

**Picture 2:** *Diamond of the Civil Society in the Czech Republic in 2004*



*Source: Vajvodová, 2005*

The diamond explains that the civil society in the Czech Republic is stable, balanced and does not suffer from a significant disproportions and weaknesses. As we can see, the values have settled around the point 2 of the diagram, which signifies well developed civil society. Nevertheless, there is a long way to reach the point 3 that would mark the highest levels of civil society's development. Despite the value of "Environment" and "Values" reaching over 2, the level of "Influence" and "Structure" are slightly lower than 2, and need to be focused on.

To improve the structure, it is important to increase number of memberships, volunteers, the scale of donation, and to advance the ability of communication within the organizations and among them, and develop greater self-regulation within the civil society. In order to increase the value of the influence, the target is to strengthen controlling activities, become a stronger partner to the government and firms, and to build up stronger public confidence.

Vajvodová names several weaknesses of civil society that we can sum up in one problem - lack ability to self-manage. It includes lack of transparency, inability to promote, low quality of management and decision-making, dysfunction of umbrella organizations, miscommunication among the organizations and lack of financial resources (2005). Such issues lead to low professionalism of otherwise enthusiastic members and lack of trust in the organizations from the society which causes the failure of the organizations to mobilize masses.

Czech civil society benefits from wide range of people, professionals as well as volunteers, who are willing to participate, but they need to be better organized. Also, the current organizations cover a wide range of activities and issues and focus especially on two major areas, the environmental protection and care for socially weak groups of population especially with respect to health. Particularly the “environmentalists” are quite active and well organized and play a significant role in influencing the government towards legislative changes. Such activity needs to be strengthened also by other groups. Czech civil society has the ability to generate topics of public discussion and is ready to help especially in case of sudden emergencies such as natural catastrophes (Vajvodová 2005).

To conclude, Czech civil society has come a long way since the revolutionary year of 1989, but it has not reached its peak yet. Despite the significant strengths such as balance, amount of professionals and volunteers, areas covered and readiness to help, there is still a

large space for improvement especially in the inner structure of particular organizations, their interaction and professionalism. Nevertheless, the future of the Czech civil society appears positive, as some groups such as environmentalists have already taken the right path on the way to greater influence and organization.

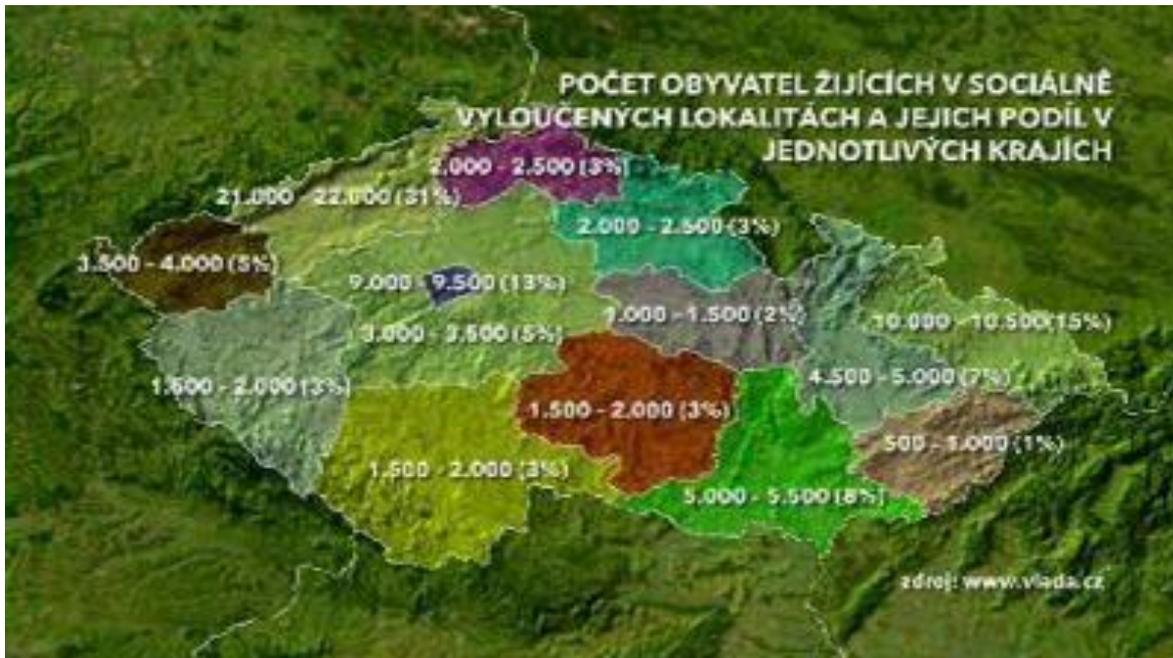
## **4.2. Civil Society Concerned with Roma**

The above chapter presented the reader the condition of Czech civil society. It is important to investigate the state of civil society organizations that deal with Roma and Romani organizations as well as mixed organizations. The importance of these lies in their role as mediator. Not general civil society organizations but particularly this subclass of associations serves as a connection between the dominant society and the Romani minority, and Romani organizations with different focus and fields of impact play the same important role.

This subchapter will outline the state of Romani civil society and civil society concerned with Roma. Although the general research on Czech civil society conducted and presented above applies also for civil society concerned with Roma and Romani problems, differences maybe expected with respect to the opposition of major society to the ethnicity.

As research indicates, there is a significant number of various voluntary organizations dealing with Romani ethnicity. The largest number of the associations exists in the areas with extensive numbers of Romani families, or in socially excluded localities--ghettoes-- where Roma constitute the majority of inhabitants.

**Picture 3:** Number of inhabitants living in socially excluded localities and their share in particular regions in the Czech Republic.



Source: Česká televize, 2009

A close look at the picture uncovers that the highest percentage lives in the areas of the cities Ostrava and Opava (15 %, northeast), Brno (8 %, southeast), Most and Teplice (31 %, northwest) and Prague (13 %, central). In comparison with Picture 1 *Centers of the right-wing extremism in the Czech Republic*, presented earlier, it becomes obvious that the centers of racial extremism correspond with centers of Roma concentration. In addition to that, as mentioned above, these areas contain extensive numbers of socially excluded localities. It is understandable that the civil society is quite active in these regions in both the positive and the negative way.

Recent demonstrations against a march of extremist radicals in the city of Nový Bydžov, Krupka (Teplice area) and Brno serve as good examples. In the article *Občanská společnost se probudila*,<sup>12</sup> Drahomír Radek Horváth, an important Roma leader and a representative of Roma civil society, describes occurrences during the demonstration, actions of civil society

<sup>12</sup> Civil Society Awaken.

and the failure of the Czech police. Horváth says that in the course of the demonstrations the civil society organizations were rather disappointed and powerless after the first demonstration in Nový Bydžov, where the municipality supported the radicals, and allowed them to march through quarters inhabited mostly by Roma, and spread fear and hatred. Also, the police failed and used inadequate measures to suppress the protesting group. In addition to that, the media influenced the public opinion in a biased way. According to Horváth, only the Czech TV provided neutral reports on the events. He also mentions a great contribution of Romea o.s., one of the most active non-profit organizations for Roma issues and integration, and the presence of large numbers of Roma who constituted the majority of the protesters.

In Krupka the majority of protesters were also Roma, but more representatives of the majority society participated. Horváth claims that “It is no longer fight of Roma against neo-Nazis but of the [Czech] society as such against neo-Nazis (Horváth, 2011).” Such situation should be considered a step forward as the Roma and the majority society attempted to join forces against a common problem, and did not stand against each other. Nevertheless, despite the promises of the local government officials, their action and the action of police were considered a failure again, as police applied inadequate power to take control of the situation. Horváth also notes that a priest was attacked by the police unreasonably. He adds that the representatives of local religious organizations were present to defend the rights of civilians and protect the protesters. Their presence can be seen as a presence of an overarching civil society organization that does not distinguish between Roma and the major society. Although the population of the Czech Republic is not remarkably religious compared to other post-communist countries the presence of the church serves as an anchor to all of those engaged in the protests.

The protests took a different course in Brno, the last of the demonstrations against the marches of radical groups. Horváth expresses satisfaction with the actions of civil society and

the initiative “We do not want neo-Nazis.” He claims that the civil society in Brno is significantly stronger, organized and able. Several important public figures showed their support to the protesters and participated in the event. The overall mood among the protesters after the last event in Brno was enthusiastic and full of motivation for further action (Horváth 2011).

To sum up the above events and derive a conclusion for this study we need to look at the actions of civil society regarding this protest and also the action of the representatives of the state; the municipalities and the police. Regarding the civil society, it has proven that although the relations between Roma and the macro-society are not balanced, the two parties are capable of common action against violence, fear and hatred. Nevertheless, the municipalities in Krupka and Nový Bydžov failed to support the civil society. It is questionable what the position of the municipalities is, whether they should have supported the civil society or stayed impartial, and dealt with both the radical groups and the protesters in the same way. Contrary to the offered options, the municipalities took the third way and acted against the civil society limiting the power of the police. Therefore, we can assume that the attitude of municipalities in general have impact on the current state of the problem in the country and if their attitude changes, an improvement of the situation would be faster.

In case of the protests in three Czech cities the civil society organization Romea o.s., one of the most active in the question of Roma and their integration problem, has been mentioned, but it is not the only important organization in the country. The Centre for Study of Minority Groups Integration, Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk’s University in Brno has published a list of most important organizations that deal with Roma and integration of minor groups in the Czech Republic.

The organizations can be divided into several groups. There are associations that deal with violations of human rights with focus on minorities in general; cultural organizations that support the Roma culture and identity, and provide greatly needed connections with the majority society through cultural events; organizations and groups which arrange free time activities for Roma children and bring them together with the children of the dominant society. Among these belong also educational organizations, which organize afterschool activities for children, educate children about ethnicity and multiculturalism, bring children of different background together and communicate with their parents. No less important are educational organizations that help adults to gain proper education or a new qualification in order to improve their position in the job market and assist with job search and dealing with bureaucracy.

Although there are a few organizations that generate impact on large territory, most of the associations operate only within their region or city with focus on a small local community. Therefore, they play a very important role in each city or community with Roma population; as they are well aware of the local conditions and problems, they understand the moods within the major society as well as the minority. In addition to that, such small organizations allow for development of more personal relations and a more individual approach. What is more, participants in various NGOs in smaller localities, who are members of the dominant society, are able to consciously and also unconsciously spread information about the problem among citizens and influence awareness and trigger greater action towards acceptance and integration of Roma. Among the small NGOs there are for example:

**Český západ, o.s.**

The organization intends to create a society free from xenophobia, hatred and exclusion, and focuses on Romani community in the village of Dobrá voda and surrounding areas of

Toužim and Tepel. The organization covers a large range of problems and activities, and claims credit for lowering the unemployment of the Dobrá voda community from 100 % in 2000 to 35 % in 2009, prevention of socio-pathological phenomena leading to decrease in drug and alcohol use, truancy and criminality. Furthermore, the organization reconstructed a block of apartments in disrepair inhabited by members of the Romani community, and opened several facilities and shops producing and selling Roma-made products (Český západ n.d.), and many other activities that improve the situation of Roma families and build consent and tolerance among the minority and the dominant society living side by side.

The Český západ, o.s. organization serves as a prime example of a small but efficient civil society association with great impact upon a township where there was a problem. Civil society managed to deal with it, and bring two opposing groups to work towards common good. In addition to that, the organization is motivated to work further not only by the success it enjoys within the community, but also thanks to several awards it presents such as Ethnic Friendly Employer or Gypsy Spirit.

Other organizations of similar character are for example **Vzájemné soužití, o.s., Společně – Jekhetane, Sdružení Dženo, Ratolest Brno, o.s., Oblastní charita Přerov, Nadace Verda, DROM o.p.s.**

Regarding nationwide or region wide civil society organizations dealing with problems of Romani integration, there are for example Romea, o.s., People in Need o.p.s., Český Helsinský výbor, and Demokratická alliance Romů ČR. Their task is more general and focuses mostly on providing information about the ethnicity and their culture to the dominant society, focus on children's education within both social groups, providing information to Roma about their rights, and employment services and overview of governmental activities in the matter and implementation of government programs.

An example of an organization that functions on a bigger scale is **Romodrom o.s.** Romodrom provides services in three areas: programs for children and youth, prison programs and programs in socially excluded areas. The organization runs summer camps and educational weekends or trips for Romani children from socially excluded areas or areas with large number of Roma population all over the country. It provides consulting services to families with members in prison and helps former prisoners to integrate into post-prison family and social life. In addition to that several social workers of the organization operate in socially excluded areas to help its inhabitants to integrate within the dominant society and decrease socio-pathological phenomena.

To sum up, the civil society organizations concerned with the Romani minority are quite strong in the Czech Republic and work efficiently and bring results especially on a small scale. In contrast, the larger organizations tend to gain more financial resources and support from municipalities, government and the EU, whereas the strength of the small organizations lies in their personal attitude and direct cooperation of the local majority and minority. Nevertheless, there is an outstanding importance of the whole-nation organizations in providing information to the local civil society and the society as a whole. We can say that the Romani civil society and the civil society dealing with Romani issues constitute a positive impact on improvement of the overall problem that exists in the Czech Republic.

## **5. Suggestions for Improvement and Conclusion**

The paper has provided the reader with a study of the contemporary Romani problem in the Czech Republic and its roots, followed by a study of the civil society from different points of view; the general civil society in the Czech Republic and problems it faces, the negative civil society in form of extremist groups, and the particular branch of civil society that seeks to improve the gloomy relationship between the dominant society and the Romani minority as

well as socio-pathological phenomena within the ethnic minority itself. This final chapter will present conclusions drawn from the previous analysis, and will offer answers to questions raised in the introductory chapter.

- How can the current the Czech civil society contribute to the improvement of Roma situation?
- What should be the role of the government, and to what extent it should cooperate with or coordinate civil society?

The research shows that there is an extensive issue in need of solution that would contribute to improvements of the overall Romani problem: education. As suggested earlier, not only Romani adults suffer from lack of education and even illiteracy, but also children who are obliged by law to attend elementary school but often do not fulfill this duty. They are either often absent or not enrolled. In addition to that, in the Czech Republic still exist so called special schools for children with mental diseases in which healthy Roma children are often placed by authorized officers, although placement of healthy Roma children in such schools is forbidden by law. As a consequence, children who finish the special schools are not eligible for further education and their opportunities become significantly limited. On the other hand, in many cases Romani parents prefer special schools because they do not want to place their children in regular schools, where they are subject to bullying by their schoolmates – members of the dominant society – and do not earn grades necessary for progress to higher class, as their style of studying differs from the style used in Czech schools.

Czech civil society organizations care about this problem and should be supported to do so on a greater scale. As I have shown in the previous chapter, there are many associations organizing free time and educational activities for children. I suggest that voluntary tutoring of Romani children in an entertaining way would help to improve their status in a regular

school, and provide them with greater opportunities in their further life. Also, the volunteers and the children need to cooperate to educate their parents in terms of life values. Family is the most important value in Romani life, which is praiseworthy. Nevertheless, their attitude to work and routine needs to develop in order to advance their financial situation, opportunities, and also to be accepted by the dominant society, who perceive them as recipients of undue social benefits and lazy citizens. In addition to that, I believe that a mixture of children with different ethnicity in a classroom would teach the “white” children tolerance, friendship and anti-racism. This approach is based on Gordon Allport's (1954) contact theory of intergroup relations that is a framework for contact learning practiced in the United States. Children of different races are grouped together to work on assignments in independent teams that compete among each other. In several surveys the contact learning was proven successful in increasing class performance of both racial groups and declining prejudice towards the minor group (Slavin 1983, Colca, Lowen, Colca, & Lord 1982).

Therefore, the government, particularly the Ministry of Education, should support creation of a new position in state schools that would be a specialist in the education of Romani children. Such specialists would not only provide information and training for teachers but also communicate with Romani students and their parents. Although the position must be announced by the government, the person should be chosen by the school or with help of a local NGO, so that he or she is not merely a bureaucrat but a professional with education in special pedagogy and field experience in tutoring Romani children, aware of the local conditions and problems to tailor his cooperation with children and parents accordingly.

Another task for the government is to undergo necessary but unpopular strict reforms of the social system. The system needs to be reformed in such a way that will provide Roma with positive motivation to work; otherwise they may be encouraged not to work.. As demographic conditions change, and the population of the Czech Republic ages, the current

social system will become unsustainable; thus it needs to be changed. Reforms have been introduced, but they appear insufficient. A new social system launched by the government needs to motivate people to work, and to provide help to those who cannot be helped by family and acquaintances. Thanks to the previous communist regime, the people of the Czech Republic learned to rely on the state, and the solidarity among them has weakened. With a motivating social system and civil society to support community help, family relations and solidarity, the Romani problem among others would improve.

I agree with Václav Klaus, as cited in the thesis, who claims that there needs to be space for civil society, but it is not necessary to artificially support its existence and growth (Pithart, Klaus 1996). Therefore the government should ensure that there is a working legal system that actively fights discrimination and efficiently protects the citizens. In addition to that, the government might provide information for the civil society organizations about possible funding from the European Union and other sources. Other than that, there is no need for the government to take any special care of the problem, as long as all its basic functions and activities are efficient, honest and for the good of the citizens. Such government appears supportive to civil society by its nature.

Civil society organizations need to improve upon weaknesses as pointed out in the chapter *Civil Society in the Czech Republic after 1989*. Especially the inner organization of the associations and their cooperation between one another is important for more efficient work. If the civil society should be expanded, it is not necessary that the government intervene. Better advertising for greater public awareness and attraction to potential members will serve as a solution for larger participation of citizens in civil society activities, both personal and impersonal in form of funding, support and material help. Again, this needs to be conducted especially on local level by the grassroots organization in order to attract people

from particular townships as it will be more appealing to care about problems that directly touch them, than in case of larger and more general NGOs.

An earlier chapter of the thesis claims that cultural events show positive aspects of the Romani community in the Czech Republic such as their culture, arts, music and dance as well as handcraft products, and have engendered a positive response from the public; as well, they are appreciated by the dominant society and strengthen pride and identity of the minority. Thus, NGOs should be motivated to organize more events with such cultural character as a connecting bridge between the two groups. The Romani minority is culturally very rich and possesses talents that would enrich the whole society. This is a useful fact that says that not only the Romani minority takes, as seen through eyes of the majority society, but it holds a lot to give if allowed. Here lies the task for the state and the municipalities respectively. They should support organization of events in terms of providing adequate representative space and equipment that every township usually has at its disposal. Events under the auspices of a town claim a better reputation and such support is priceless to both the NGOs and the minority. In addition to that such events demonstrate that the town cares about bringing the two groups together; it cooperates with civil society on problem solving and at the same time does not artificially intervene into the society's activities. Low or zero interventions of government into the activities of civil society has been evaluated to be the most supportive for creation of healthy, strong and well functioning civil society.

To summarize, the civil society is strong enough to contribute to the solution of problems with Romani ethnicity in the Czech Republic. It needs to focus on two main areas to achieve the greatest improvement; education and cultural exchange between the dominant group and the minority. Education is considered the most striking problem for several generations of Roma, and thus change of study methods, individual tutoring and educational free time activities for children would be a solution that would bring significant results. It is necessary

not only to educate children but also their parents in order to change their attitude to education of their children and basic daily routine to deal with the habits of the dominant society more easily. Education for parents in terms of special requalification and general adult education programs are also options, but the case of children and connection with parents through children seem to be the most efficient way of coping with the problem.

In addition to that, it is important to bring the “two societies” together through mutual exchange of experiences, culture and talents to make both parties understand that they can serve usefully to each other. Cultural events blend people from both groups together and help the Romani members find their lost pride for and identity with their ethnicity, and discover common aspects of their and Czech culture and habits or aspects that could be adapted and adjusted to their culture.

In conclusion, the government needs to ensure that the social system of the Czech Republic is efficient and motivates all citizens to contribute to community solidarity. Apart from that, the government should make sure that the legal system is not discriminatory in any way, and serves the citizens efficiently in terms of pecuniary affordance, speed and justice. Once the government functions accordingly, there is no need of other interventions to support or even create civil society. As cited in the *Literature Review*, civil society can be compared with a living organism that develops naturally and any governmental interference would be considered as an artificial derogation that would possibly affect its functioning in a negative way, especially in terms of efficiency.

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