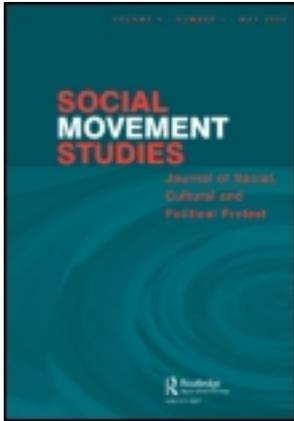


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The Roma Voice in the European Union: Between National Belonging and Transnational Identity

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ABSTRACT *This article examines the response of Roma activists to the Italian Roma crisis in 2007 and 2008. The Roma community has become targets of discriminatory policies in Italy, such as forced evictions and ethnic profiling by the authorities, which construct Roma as distinct from the Italian nation. Roma activists increasingly circumvent national political structures and instead regard the European Union (EU) as an ally in redressing discriminatory policies in member states. In the absence of a kin state to lobby and advocate on their behalf, Roma activists, working in the transnational political context, articulate their voice and demands to the institutions of the EU. In doing so, they construct a transnational identity which on the one hand reifies Roma to a homogeneous group, whilst on the other hand contributes to the idea that Roma are not a constitutive component of the dominant nation. This article uses the Italian Roma crisis as a particular episode in which transnational Roma activists responded to a nationally based crisis and explores the impact of this on issues of national belonging.*

KEY WORDS: Roma, European Union, Italy, transnational, identity

The Romani community numbers 10–12 million across the European Union (EU) and is the most discriminated and marginalized community in Europe, suffering from extreme poverty and an inability to access socio-economic provisions such as basic health, education and employment (European Commission, 2004a). Efforts to redress this exclusion began in the 1970s with the creation of transnational Roma organizations which claimed to speak on their behalf. International organizations, particularly the EU, have been instrumental in drawing attention to their exclusion and have pushed governments in Central and Eastern Europe to improve the living conditions of Roma within their borders. Whilst most Roma are citizens of the states in which they reside, they also possess a transnational identity, though this is highly fragmented and contested. Activists and advocates working on behalf of the heterogeneous Roma community have increasingly mobilized in the transnational political context out of strategic necessity as member state governments and societies have been unwilling to pursue sustained policy interventions in order to integrate Roma. Instances of persecution of Roma are not a historical artefact but have been proliferating with alarming frequency in recent years: the practice of placing

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Romani children in ‘special schools’ in Czech Republic was condemned by the European Court of Human Rights in 2007 [European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), 2007]; the rise of the extreme right-wing *Magyar Garda* in Hungary has resulted in violence with nine Roma being murdered between 2008 and 2010 (ERRC, 2010); Roma families were intimidated out of their homes in Northern Ireland in 2009 (Clark, 2009) and France began expelling Romanian Roma in the summer of 2010 (Davies, 2010). Thus, discrimination against Roma is not geographically concentrated but stretches across the EU and has precipitated demands by Roma activists and international organizations for governments to take immediate and effective action.

Ultimately, Roma are citizens of the state in which they reside, yet calls to improve their situation occur primarily at the transnational level. Roma nationalism began in earnest in the 1970s and 1980s with the establishment of the International Romani Union and the Roma National Congress. The principal concern of the former was to construct Roma as a nation without a territory (Acton & Klímová, 2001, p. 216), but the absence of a kin state to advocate on their behalf has long been identified as a problem for Roma, though no territorial claims have been articulated by Roma activists. Roma thus find themselves in a paradoxical situation where they are persistently, if variably, persecuted in national political contexts and lack a clear voice to articulate their demands, whereas there is an increasing professionalization of Roma activism in the transnational political context. There, they have created organizations to lobby on their behalf, but which possess tenuous claims to legitimate representation in the absence of a democratic mandate.

Significantly, transnational Roma activists pursue a ‘politics of presence’ (Phillips, 1998), which means that Roma are less likely to be ignored and their interests are less likely to be assumed by international organizations and national governments. Yet by possessing a voice in the transnational political context, Roma activists must negotiate a number of issues. First, defining who belongs to the Roma community is complex because Roma are a heterogeneous group with different religions, languages, ethnic and familial ties, geographical distribution, and divergent levels of wealth and education. Second, by mobilizing transnationally, activists are essentially demanding rights and privileges which transcend those of citizens of nation states. One implication of this is that an identity or loyalty constructed beyond the state might (a) invite discrimination from the governments of those states because Roma are not regarded as constitutive of a given nation state and (b) absolve national governments of the responsibility of care and protection to their Roma communities.

Nation-building efforts have demanded recognition as ‘Roma’ (as opposed to the exonym ‘Gypsy’), and have highlighted the common hardships—poverty, exclusion and discrimination—which most Roma endure. The existence of representation structures based on a shared ethnic identity ‘enhances ethnic collective action on a large scale insofar as they provide organizational infrastructures, leaders, and networks links’ (Olzak, 2004, p. 671), although problems of legitimacy and accountability of Roma representation structures persist. The International Romani Union and the Roma National Congress have been joined more recently by several transnational organizations which work on behalf of Roma, including the European Roma Information Office (ERIO), the ERRC, the European Roma and Traveller Forum (ERTF) and the European Roma Policy Coalition (ERPC). Each organization pursues its own path in attempting to improve the situation of Roma across Europe, whether acting as interlocutor between Roma and EU institutions in order to gather and disseminate relevant information to the broader Roma activist network

(ERIO); using the tool of anti-discrimination legislation to address human rights violations (ERRC); articulating the interests of Roma and Travellers in the Council of Europe (ERTF) or lobbying on behalf of Roma across the EU (ERPC).

Each organization responded to the unfolding crisis in Italy in different ways, deploying arguments which emphasized the transnational character of Roma identity and/or reaffirmed Roma's belonging to the Italian nation. This article affirms the importance of considering both the national and transnational political contexts in tandem in order to understand the situation of Roma in Europe, and asks how Roma activists can articulate claims, given the ambiguity of Roma identity as both national and transnational? It does not evaluate the success of the strategies of the transnational Roma movement in order to change the Italian authorities' treatment of Roma nor does it examine the response of the EU to unfolding events in Italy. It begins by outlining the dynamics of transnational Roma identity and nationalism, then considers how the EU has attempted to address the needs and interests of Roma communities across Europe, before outlining the hostile policies enacted by the Italian authorities. Transnational Roma activists responded to events in Italy differently, and the role and impact of four organizations will be evaluated before a conclusion explores the tension between national belonging and transnational identity.

National and Transnational Roma Identity

The construction of a Roma identity in the *transnational* political context has been driven by Romani elites, demanding recognition and attaining rights; however, when transplanted to the national political context, this identity loses its substance (McGarry, 2009a). Indeed, how are Hungarian, Spanish or Bulgarian Roma communities to understand the substance of a transnational identity if they anchor their citizenship in the national political context and are not particularly concerned with, or knowledgeable of, transnational mobilization efforts? Moreover, as highlighted above, attempts by Roma to foster a transnational identity are challenged by (inter alia) their cultural and material heterogeneities and their geographical dispersion. In its earliest incarnation in the nineteenth century, Roma nationalism drew on the example of Zionism (Acton, 1974, pp. 233–234) and recognized the importance of gaining the support of national governments as well as the international community to achieve their goals (Jenne, 2000, p. 197). Gheorghe (1997, p. 155) points out that because nation states are the building blocks of the intergovernmental political system, this 'adversely affects minorities such as the Roma who have no such resource, no "fatherland" to back them up'. Since the 1970s, efforts to build Roma identity in the transnational political context occurred with a concerted move away from the exonym 'Gypsy' towards the use of the endonym 'Roma', an umbrella term which harbours a highly diverse community. Mirga & Gheorghe (1997, p. 22) cautiously warn of the danger of constructing Roma identity beyond the state as a stateless nation because it reinforces the idea that Roma are not constitutive of the dominant nation and are not full citizens of the states in which they reside. The implications of such an approach are that states are relieved of their obligations of protection towards Roma and can instead rely on the international political community, such as the EU, Council of Europe and Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), to improve their situation. Suffice to say, this approach has not worked in the past as events in the Czech Republic, Hungary, UK, France and Italy attest.

However, it would be erroneous to suggest that Roma activists focus solely on the transnational political context. Civil society organizations have emerged across Europe which advocate on behalf of Roma and target specific issues such as health, education, poverty, unemployment and marginalization. These interests are then amplified to the international political community; indeed many Roma non-governmental organizations (NGOs) rely on the international political community to fund local and national projects, and attempt to build networks across EU member states. Despite mobilization efforts in the national political context, research has attempted to account for their lack of political participation, particularly in Central and Eastern European states (Vermeersch, 2001; Weber, 2001; Sobotka, 2002; Vermeersch, 2003, 2006; Bačlija & Haček, 2007; McGarry, 2008a) and how governments have initiated policies to address their needs and interests (Cashman, 2008; McGarry, 2009b).

Attempts to construct a common Roma identity are described as a 'double jeopardy' (Vermeersch, 2006, p. 182). In order to mobilize, Roma activists must emphasize their ethnic identity; but by doing so, they risk self-exclusion through the assertion of difference vis-à-vis the dominant ethnic group of the state. Barany (1998, pp. 309–310) maintains that the goals of Romani mobilization are 'enhanced interest representation; the cessation of political, social, economic and other forms of discrimination; and the improvement of the given collective's conditions and relative standing in society'. Roma identity is not dependent on the territory they happen to live in (Acton, 1997, p. 166), which suggests that it transcends state boundaries and can be both national and transnational. Thus, mobilization efforts to build a transnational identity have grown with many Roma activists claiming a transnational space beyond the confines of the state. Crucially, activists maintain that their ability to articulate interests, combat discrimination and improve their relative standing in society is enhanced in the transnational political context.¹ However, uniting under a single ethnic banner is challenging in national political contexts; in Spain, the forging of a Roma identity has been noted as a tactical endeavour, whereby Spanish Gitanos and recently arrived Eastern European Roma migrants could unite under common interests, although such a union has proven 'more rhetoric than reality' as there is little contact between the two groups (Laparra & Macías, 2009, p. 238). As I have argued elsewhere, to fully understand the socio-economic and political situation of Roma in Europe, attention must be given to the national and transnational contexts concurrently (McGarry, 2010).

Roma have been constructed by activists as a nation, a community, as well as a distinct ethnic group and due to the advocacy and activism of political elites from within the Roma community, they can be accurately described as a social movement. However, the Roma movement only comprises a relatively small number of individuals; moreover, there are some who question the existence of a Roma movement (see ERRC, 2001, pp. 18–28 for a roundtable debate on the Romani movement), though this appears to centre on the number of actors involved, and whether such elites can legitimately claim to represent the highly diverse Romani community. Setting aside important questions of legitimacy, the article now outlines the instruments used by the EU in attempting to improve the socio-economic situation of Roma.

The Development of EU Roma Policy

Before the 1990s, the EU had not given much attention to Roma. The pan-European policy paradigm did not emerge until the early 1990s and now there is 'certainly a transnational

dimension to Roma issues' (Kovats, 2001, p. 106). When a group is consistently discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity, it can come to understand itself as a persecuted community, meaning the group itself, rather than individuals within the group are targeted. Simhandl (2006, p. 106) argues that the EU explicitly links the discrimination which Roma face to their 'way of life', that is, their ethnicity. Roma identity is therefore linked to specific interests such as eradicating extreme poverty, combating discrimination and exclusion, and improving the ability of Roma to access socio-economic provisions such as employment and education. The European Commission's DG Employment and Social Affairs produced a key text entitled *The Situation of Roma in an Enlarged European Union* (European Commission, 2004a) outlining the EU's policy framework on Roma which focused on anti-discrimination, human rights, structural funds, employment, and the impact of eastern enlargement.

EU enlargement offered an opportunity for the Commission to impose conditionality criteria (known as the Copenhagen Criteria) including 'respect for and protection of minorities', and it delivered annual progress monitoring reports on candidate countries from 1999. Whilst the Copenhagen Criteria were widely interpreted as applying to national minorities, the 1999 accession partnerships specified integration of Roma as a priority for Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia, and the Commission devoted considerable attention in its regular reports' 'minority rights' section to Roma, 'detailing infringements of their civil, political, economic and social rights' (Guglielmo & Waters, 2005, p. 771). A key instrument of EU policy on Roma was PHARE funding, allocated to candidate states as 'socio-economic interventions designed to deal with some aspects of the social exclusion experienced by many Roma minority populations' (European Commission, 2004b, p. 1; cited in Guglielmo & Waters, 2005). The motivation for this policy was that Western governments feared westward migration of Roma communities; policy was thus tailored to improve the conditions of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe, reducing 'push' factors for migration (Guglielmo & Waters, 2005). PHARE projects have been criticized for being top-down 'without sufficient planning, adequate resources or appropriate consultation' (EMS, 2004, III; cited in Guy, 2009, p. 31). Indeed, the socio-economic condition of Roma communities across Central and Eastern Europe has actually deteriorated since the early 1990s (Kovats, 2003).

Frustration at the actual living conditions of Roma across Europe has motivated Roma activists to demand alternatively a European Charter of Romani Rights, a European Directive or a European Roma Strategy. Such demands are rooted in the conviction that Roma require a targeted policy, reflecting their dissatisfaction over the EU's mainstreaming approach, which favours coordination and facilitation at the European institutional level²; the ERTF (2006; McGarry, 2008b), for example, has elaborated a list of demands which ought to be included in a Charter. The Commission debated the issue of a targeted policy at the first ever EU Roma Summit, held in Brussels on 16 September 2008, but did not commit to the hoped-for EU Roma Strategy, instead opting for an 'Integrated Roma Platform'. Roma delegates at the summit expressed their disappointment at what they consider a diluted and ambiguous commitment, with tangible outputs such as a Strategy, Charter, Fund, Directorate or specific Roma Unit in the Commission conspicuously absent. At the summit, the President of the Commission, José Manuel Barroso, maintained that the main responsibility for promoting the cultural and material inclusion of Roma lies in the hands of member states: 'Key policies for the inclusion of Roma are the competence of Member States, though they are, or can be, coordinated at the

Community level' (cited in Guy, 2009, p. 270). A second EU Roma Summit, held in Córdoba, Spain, on 8–9 April 2010, again did not initiate a targeted EU Roma Strategy, with the Commission instead re-iterating its commitment to the 10 Common Basic Principles for Roma Inclusion, adopted by the Council in June 2009.

The motivations behind the Commission's approach are: that the EU does not want to interfere in the respective minority policies of member states due to the resistance it would face; that such a policy would legitimize a group-based approach to minority protection as opposed to the current anti-discrimination and human rights approach; and that it could deflect blame if member states cannot find an appropriate solution for Roma communities within their territory. The obvious problem here is that this policy has not worked in the past, because member state governments have proven unwilling or unable to initiate effective integration policies for Roma within their territory.

Whilst the Commission appears content to facilitate the integration of Roma by member state governments, the European Parliament (2008a) has proved much more vocal in its support of Roma, arguing that the EU should elaborate a specific Roma Strategy and that 'the EU and the Member States have a shared responsibility to promote inclusion of the Roma and uphold their fundamental rights as European citizens [... The Parliament] calls on the Member States and the EU institutions to endorse the necessary measures in order to create the appropriate social and political environment for implementing the inclusion of the Roma'. Of the EU institutions, it is the Parliament which has been the most critical of the Italian authorities for their treatment of Roma (European Parliament, 2008b, 2009).

Of course, beyond their strategic differences, both the Parliament and the Commission are staunch supporters of the rights of Roma, and have done much to illuminate the discrimination and exclusion which Roma endure. Certainly, the presence of such powerful allies has enabled the mobilization of Roma activists in the transnational political context and ensured that their voice has been heard. In 2007–2008, the EU was dragged into the unfolding Italian Roma crisis as Roma activists looked towards the EU to take a firm stand against the Italian authorities.

The Italian Roma Crisis

It is estimated that there are 150,000 Roma in Italy. Of these, half are Italian citizens, though many lack the necessary documentation, and a quarter come from EU states, particularly Romania; the remaining quarter come from the former Yugoslavia (ERRC, 2008, p. 7). The great majority of Romani groups in Italy live in 'authorized' and 'unauthorized' camps, which is also true for those from Romania who entered Italy after the visa requirement was lifted for Romania and Bulgaria in 2002 (EUFRA, 2008, p. 7).³ During 2007 and 2008, the Italian authorities embarked on a systematic programme targeting Roma through policy and discursive interventions. In November 2007, the incumbent centre-left government issued a decree according to which EU citizens deemed to pose a danger to public order and security could be deported. Threats to non-citizen Roma have increased after the election in April 2008 of a right-wing government coalition, which includes xenophobic and racist elements, and following the success in local elections of the extreme right in a number of municipalities (ERIO, 2008a, p. 4). Costi (2010, pp. 110–111) argues that political authorities in Italy have constructed Roma as a dangerous immigrant community which are not constitutive of the Italian nation, 'where the Roma are treated as the *other*' (emphasis in original). Sigona (2005) maintains that

Roma in Italy are seen and treated as others, immigrants who do not belong to the majority society even when second or third generation; he also points out that ‘the inclusion of the references to *Italian Roma* and Sinti in the immigration sections of the election manifestos [...] provides a further evidence of the process of “othering” of this minority’ (Sigona, 2009, p. 278, emphasis in original). This is not to say that Roma are regarded as a transnational community; rather the default position of political authorities (and of Italian society in general) is that Roma are not part of the Italian nation.

Cast in the familiar role of scapegoat for domestic economic and political problems, the Roma community in Italy has been targeted by political authorities riding on a wave of anti-immigrant feeling and seeking to deflect blame for domestic policy problems. The Eurobarometer (2008, p. 8) poll reveals that, across EU member states, respondents from Italy and the Czech Republic are the most hostile to having Romani neighbours, with 47% reporting that they would feel ‘very uncomfortable’ with having a Romani neighbour. Forced evictions of Roma communities, anti-Roma statements by political authorities and the media, fingerprinting of Roma (including children) and authoritarian ‘security’ measures have cultivated an atmosphere of antagonism and hostility towards Roma communities in Italy in which anti-Roma violence is tolerated and is on the rise. Although Italian authorities, goaded by a sensationalist media, have been targeting Roma since 2006, it was not until 2008 when developments in Italy took a more sinister hue. The OSCE (2009, p. 7) notes that ‘the growing number of illegal camps or settlements, coupled with some media and politicians highlighting crimes allegedly committed by Roma in an often inflammatory way, contributed to the revising of old anti-Romani prejudices and stereotypes’. Throughout May, June and July 2008, several legislative interventions aimed at addressing the ‘security crisis’ caused by crimes allegedly committed by irregular migrants and Romani persons in Italy were either discussed or adopted by the Italian Parliament. The measures taken by the authorities were sustained by aggressive anti-Roma rhetoric by local and national politicians, as well as by the stigmatization and deployment of negative imagery of Roma in national and local media (Amnesty International, 2008, p. 7). The measures taken by Italian authorities include: forced evictions, anti-Roma statements, the expulsion of EU citizens and ethnic profiling. Each is discussed in turn below.

An intensification of *forced evictions* followed the so-called Security Pacts, which were signed by the Mayors of Rome and Milan in May 2007, and by mid-2008 similar pacts were in force in at least 18 different cities or regions around Italy. Clearly discriminatory segregation practices these pacts which included proposals to build four specially designated Romani camps outside of Rome to host up to 1000 Romani people each. Contrary to international law on the right to adequate housing, some of those evicted were not provided with alternative accommodation, and many reported that their possessions were destroyed (OSCE, 2009, pp. 21–22). Under Article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Italy has an obligation to prevent *hate speech*, which includes ensuring that ‘any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitute incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law’. Statements by political elites have gone hand in hand with a series of attacks on Roma communities across Italy which politicians have failed to condemn.

One controversial legislative intervention relates to the *expulsion of EU citizens* from Italy if they possess a criminal record. The EU issued a Directive (2004/38/EC) on the right of citizens of the EU and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of member states, which was implemented into Italian law through

a Legislative Decree on 2 March 2008. The Decree states that immigrants, including citizens of EU member states, who have been sentenced to more than 2 years in prison will be expelled from Italy. Notably, an expulsion decision may not be taken against EU citizens or if the person in question has resided in the EU member state for the previous 10 years, except if the decision is based on imperative grounds of public security. On 25 June 2008, the Minister of Interior Roberto Maroni stated in a parliamentary debate that as part of an initiative to conduct a census of people living in Roma settlements, the fingerprints of Romani persons, including children, would be taken and registered. *Ethnic profiling* generated the most attention from the international political community but was justified by the Italian authorities as a means of protecting Roma. The EU Race Equality Directive prohibits the collection of data on an ethnic basis. The accumulated effect of the hostile measures enacted by the Italian authorities galvanized Roma activists to respond, although they did not answer with a united voice. Significantly, this activism occurred at the transnational level, with the EU acting as the focal point for transnational Roma organizations.

Response of the Transnational Roma Movement

Transnational social movement organizations are defined as 'international non-governmental organizations engaged in explicit attempts to [change] some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution in society' (Smith, 1999, p. 591). Supranational institutions, for their part, have become an important resource for transnational social movements; as della Porta & Diani (2006, p. 44) point out, '[t]he presence of supranational entities tends to change the criteria according to which actors define themselves, as well as their strategies'. Moreover, European integration has certainly contributed to the remobilization of ethnic minorities in western European states, 'providing them with a new interlocutor and new goals' (della Porta & Diani, 2006, p. 44). As a consequence, new opportunities for mobilization and participation in the transnational political context become more readily available for social movement actors (Tarrow, 1995; Marks & McAdam, 1996; della Porta & Tarrow, 2005; Zippel, 2006). The EU acts as the site of social movement activity due to the breadth and depth of its policy remit, its prominence on the world stage and its leverage over member states' political and legislative structures. In the early 1990s, the prominent Roma intellectual Nicolae Gheorghe spotted the potential of the EU:

Roma activists and intellectuals are beginning to work together to create a network of groups and organizations which can tap into the corridors of power in the European Union in an effort to improve the social, economic and political situation of Roma in Europe. (Gheorghe, 1991; cited in Guglielmo & Waters, 2005)

The European Parliament in particular has held formal exchanges of information with various types of civil society associations (Marks & McAdam, 1996; Lahusen, 2004; della Porta, 2005; della Sala & Ruzza, 2007), with Roma activists contributing to this 'stalagmite mobilization' in the transnational political context.

Whilst social movement research has traditionally focused on the role of the state as a target for contentious activity, the role of transnational actors has gradually accumulated (Chatfield *et al.*, 1996; della Porta *et al.*, 1998; Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Khagram *et al.*, 2002; Teune 2010) and the significance of the EU as a site of social movement activity has

been detailed (Imig & Tarrow, 2001; Ruzza, 2007; Coen & Richardson, 2009; Jutta & Locher, 2009). Roma activists have established links with Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), Commission officials and political elites in member states, meaning that ‘the EU provides an environment where Roma can express themselves’.⁴

The strategies of Roma activists can be described as non-violent and focus on interest articulation targeted at political elites/authorities and the media. In response to events in Italy, there have been solidarity demonstrations, petitions and discursive interventions disseminated through e-newsletters, bulletins, press releases and public pronouncements. Roma activists are faced with a number of strategic dilemmas, however. Whilst the Roma movement is fragmented, with organizations pursuing a bilateral approach to lobbying the EU and drawing attention to events in Italy, their specific responses underscore the tension between transnational identity and national belonging. Table 1 outlines how transnational Roma organizations have responded to the Italian Roma crisis, and sets out whether the arguments they have articulated have reaffirmed Roma as constituting part of the Italian nation, or have constructed Roma as a transnational community. Six key arguments were used by transnational Roma organizations, three of which (citizenship, discrimination and segregation) are national in orientation and attempt to confirm Roma as belonging to the Italian nation, therefore placing the responsibility of care and protection in the hands of the national government. Only one argument has an explicitly transnational orientation (EU Roma Policy/Strategy), whilst two (racism and anti-Roma) retain neither a clear transnational nor national orientation.

Following the decree adopted by the Italian Government in November 2007 legalizing the expulsion of EU citizens who are criminals, the Brussels-based *ERIO* issued a statement accusing the Italian authorities of pursuing an ‘aggressive racist campaign against Roma in Italy’ (*ERIO*, 2007). Furthermore, the *ERIO* notes that the most worrying aspect of the decree is that it is aimed so openly at Roma. The *ERIO* also invoked a number of EU standards to challenge the legality of the decree, including the EU Charter for Fundamental Rights, which declares that ‘[e]very citizen of the Union has the right to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States’ (Chapter V, Article 45) and prohibits collective expulsions (Chapter II, Article 19); and the Maastricht Treaty, which introduced EU citizenship and conferred on every citizen a fundamental and personal right to move and reside freely. For the *ERIO* (2008b, p. 1), ‘the Roma community in Italy is predominantly made up of European citizens. They should enjoy the same rights and protection against discrimination as other European citizens residing in Italy’. The *ERIO* urged the Italian Government to adopt policies for the smooth integration of Roma communities and ensure for them equal access to education, employment, housing, health care and public services. By highlighting the inability of Roma to access the full catalogue of citizenship rights, the

Table 1. Arguments used by transnational Roma organizations in response to the Italian Roma crisis

Transnational Roma organization	Argument used	National or transnational orientation
<i>ERIO</i>	Racism, Citizenship, EU Roma Policy	Evidence of both
<i>ERRC</i>	Segregation, Racism, Discrimination	Overwhelmingly national in focus
<i>ERTF</i>	Discrimination, Anti-Roma, Citizenship	Evidence of both
<i>ERPC</i>	Racism, EU Roma Strategy	More transnational in focus

ERIO (2008b) is able to demonstrate discriminatory policy towards Roma. The ERIO also used the Italian Roma crisis to ask the European Commission to 'ensure that the principle of equal treatment is strictly followed by each member state, to adopt a horizontal approach concerning Roma's situation in Europe and to propose as soon as possible a specific European Roma policy'. The Executive Director of the ERIO, Ivan Ivanov, outlines the need for a coherent EU policy on Roma, 'ignoring the Roma issue in Europe is not a political option anymore' (ERIO, 2008c, p. 1). He maintains that 'Roma advocacy organizations such as ERIO are now in a position to be a driving force for the European equality and social inclusion agenda' (ERIO, 2008c, p. 1). Whilst earlier Roma activism had been dominated by a rights discourse (particularly human rights), citizenship and racism came to the fore during the Italian crisis as well as other longer held claims such as the creation of a targeted EU Roma policy.

The Budapest-based *ERRC* is a public interest organization which uses the tool of law to redress discriminatory practices against Roma across Europe. At the beginning of the Italian Roma crisis, the ERRC used existing networks with *osservAzione*, an organization which fights discrimination against Roma in Italy, and sent a letter to the Italian President, the President of the Italian Council of Ministers, the Minister of Interior and the Italian national anti-discrimination body calling on the Italian authorities 'to use the powers of your office to rescind the racist Pacts for Security and ensure respect for the housing rights of the Roma implicated, many of whom will apparently be made homeless' (ERRC, 2007, p. 2). Moreover, they requested that the authorities in Italy comply with international legal obligations and adopt housing policies and programmes which avoid homelessness and the further segregation of Roma (ERRC, 2007, p. 2). With the signing of the so-called security pacts in May 2007 to address the perceived problem of Roma living in camps in Rome, Naples and Milan, the ERRC argued that these were 'discriminatory' (ERRC & *osservAzione*, 2007) in a press release. In collaboration with *osservAvione*, the Geneva-based Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) and a further Roma NGO, the ERRC subsequently submitted written comments to the United Nation's Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, drawing attention to the segregation of Roma with regard to housing and specifically arguing that recent events have meant that Roma are separated and treated differently from the rest of the population (ERRC, *osservAzione* & *Sucar Rom*, 2008, p. 14). In a letter sent to Jacques Barrot, the EU Commissioner for Justice, Freedom and Security in September 2008, the ERRC and the Open Society Institute expressed their concern at the lack of action taken by the EU with regard to the fingerprinting of Roma, and apprehension 'that the Commission's endorsement of the actions by the Italian government against Roma could set a dangerous precedent, stigmatizing Roma in Italy and exposing them to gross human rights violations' (ERRC & Open Society Institute, 2008, p. 1). The ERRC frequently worked in collaboration with other organizations and consistently reaffirmed the idea that Italy had a duty to protect Roma, emphasizing that Roma were part of the Italian nation and should not be segregated from the majority.

The Strasbourg-based *ERTF* is affiliated with the Council of Europe and promotes a transnational identity amongst Roma. The main goal of the ERTF (2009, p. 11) is the elaboration of a Charter of Rights for Roma to address the living conditions of Roma and to 'underline that the Roma constitute a transfrontier European people with a cultural identity and are citizens of the countries in which they live. As such, they are entitled to the recognition and preservation of their identity and to equal rights as citizens'. On the eve of

the second EU Roma Summit in Córdoba in 2010, it called on the EU to ‘recognize the Roma as a pan-European minority, both citizens of the countries in which they live and citizens of the European Community’ (ERTF, 2010, p. 2). In July 2008, the ERTF released a protest note which condemned the Italian authorities’ anti-Roma activities and urged ‘the pursuit of a safe and secure life of all Roma living in Italy’ yet also called on the international political community to do more (ERTF, 2008). Its 2009 annual report (ERTF, 2009, p. 13) again drew attention to discriminatory policy in Italy expressing ‘its deep concern not only at the discriminatory measures taken but also at the lack of reaction from the international community’. Clearly there is both national and transnational dimensions to the work of ERTF, but it tends to place the onus on the international political community to improve the situation of Roma.

The *ERPC* is an informal gathering of NGOs, including ERIO, ERRC, Amnesty International, and the European Network Against Racism, which operates at the transnational level in the broader areas of human rights, anti-discrimination, anti-racism, social inclusion and Roma and Traveller rights. In response to the Italian Roma crisis, it set up an online petition denouncing anti-Romani hate speech and racism and collected almost 10,000 signatures. The ERPC (2008, p. 1) negotiated both the national and transnational dimensions to events in Italy urging the European Commission to ensure ‘that the rights of EU citizens are being protected against state abuse perpetrated on grounds of ethnic or national origin. To come up with an EU Roma strategy aiming at making Roma inclusion an urgent priority, to provide leadership and coordination for Member States in their responsibility to ensure the respect for the rights of their Roma citizens’. The elaboration of an EU Roma Policy is the ultimate goal for ERPC which would be distinct from the Charter of Rights for Roma demanded by the ERTF. The ERPC (2008, p. 2) urged the Italian authorities as a matter of urgency to take all necessary steps to provide adequate protection to Roma and to refrain from engaging in racist speech against Roma persons.

Conclusion

The article has outlined how Roma activists responded to the unfolding crisis in Italy by elaborating arguments in the transnational political context so that the EU would intervene. The ERIO and the ERTF both attempted to affirm the citizenship of Roma, thus anchoring Roma as a constituent component of the Italian nation whilst simultaneously calling on the EU to do more. The ERIO and ERPC advocate the elaboration of an EU Roma Strategy, thus tacitly acknowledging the transnational dimension to Roma identity and placing an eventual political resolution in this framework. But does the emphasis on the transnational dimension mean that member state governments are absolved of their responsibility to their Roma communities, who effectively become a ‘European issue’? The evidence presented here demonstrates that the transnational political context acts as an important resource for Roma activists which amplifies their voice beyond the national political context, but it is not clear whether the construction of a transnational identity impedes integration efforts in Italy. Moreover, the Italian Roma crisis and the response of Roma activists expose the ‘double jeopardy’ (Vermeersch, 2006, p. 182) inherent in Roma identity and illustrate the need to consider both the national and transnational political contexts in tandem (McGarry, 2010). Additionally, the ERRC is keen to stress that Roma ‘belong’ in the national political context and therefore duties of care and protection ought to be the responsibility of national governments. The Italian Roma crisis is

emblematic of a broader EU-wide phenomenon where Roma communities are treated as an ethnic 'other', as not constitutive of the dominant nation, who do not belong; therefore, governments and societies regard Roma as an unwanted presence and defer to the EU to solve this 'problem'.

Notes

1. Personal interview with Catherine Joyce, Blanchardstown Development Project, Dublin, Ireland, 10 October 2006; and electronic communication with Lívía Járóka, MEP, 24 July 2009.
2. Personal interview with Belinda Pyke, Director DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities on Anti-Discrimination. Brussels, 4 November 2008.
3. The visa requirement was removed in 2000 for other Central and Eastern European accession states.
4. Personal Interview with Joachim Ott, Coordinator, Roma Policy Coalition, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. Brussels, 4 November 2008.

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