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978-0-521-00910-2 - The East European Gypsies: Regime Change, Marginality, and Ethnopolitics

Zoltan Barany

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## The East European Gypsies

### *Regime Change, Marginality, and Ethnopolitics*

This book is the first attempt by a social scientist to explain the age-old predicament of Gypsies (or Roma), Eastern Europe's largest ethnic minority, and their relationship to the region's states and societies. Professor Barany comparatively examines the Gypsies' socioeconomic and political marginality and policies toward them through seven centuries and in seven East European states. He illuminates the reasons why the Roma have consistently occupied the bottom of social, economic, and political hierarchies regardless of historical period or geographic location. Barany argues that the current nostalgia of many Gypsies for the socialist period is easy to understand, given the disastrous effect of the postcommunist socioeconomic transformation on the Roma's conditions over the last decade. He explains the impact of Gypsy political mobilization and the activities of international organizations and NGOs on government policies. This pioneering multidisciplinary work will engage political scientists, sociologists, and historians as well as students of ethnic and racial studies.

Zoltan Barany, Associate Professor of Government at the University of Texas, has written extensively on East European politics, military affairs, and ethnic issues. His most recent book, as co-editor, is *Russian Politics: Challenges of Democratization* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

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ZOLTAN BARANY

*University of Texas*



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*In memory of my father*

*Bárány István*

1930–2000

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## Acknowledgments

The decade of the 1990s fairly accurately corresponds to the period in which I devoted a substantial part of my professional life to learning, thinking, and writing about the Roma (Gypsies), ethnic politics, and marginality. This book is the culmination of this endeavor. I have gathered many debts and am happy to acknowledge them.

My interest in the Gypsies and ethnopolitics was sparked by a coincidence. I spent the momentous year of August 1989–August 1990 at the Research Institute of Radio Free Europe in Munich. In the spring of 1990, the Institute's principal publication, the weekly *Report on Eastern Europe*, featured a series of articles analyzing the conditions of the Roma in East European states. Ronald Linden, then Director of Research at RFE, happened to ask me to write the article on the Hungarian Gypsies. As I began to research the article, I became enthralled by its subject; this initial curiosity turned into a long-term interest in marginal groups and ethnopolitics. Thus Ron, albeit inadvertently, is responsible for getting me started.

A couple of years later Sam Nolutshungu of the University of Rochester invited me to join the Social Science Research Council's Working Group on the Security of Marginal Populations. Through that project I came in contact with a number of scholars whose comments and writings made me reevaluate my assumptions and rethink my arguments. But I am most grateful to Sam, who, with unfailing kindness and munificence, encouraged me to think about some of the theoretical issues in this volume. His sudden passing at the age of fifty-two in the summer of 1997 was an enormous loss to many.

From the time of my arrival in my department in 1991, I have been blessed with a friend and colleague who has been interested in my work and generous with his ideas, advice, and time. Gary P. Freeman has patiently – and often on short notice – read versions of my papers, chapters, and grant proposals through the years. His questions, criticisms,

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and insights have improved the quality of my work. Conversations with Gary about the key issues addressed in this book have prompted me to sort out my thoughts and look at my subject from different perspectives. This book would be very different without his contribution.

In recent years the Roma have become a fashionable subject of research. Regrettably, a number of academics and activists have jealously guarded their sources, blocked access to their internet newsgroups, and made my work more difficult than it ought to have been. Happily, there are many more counterexamples. I could not possibly list all those who assisted my research in a variety of ways, but I want to mention by name Adam Bartosz, András Bíró, Nicoleta Bițu, Nora Costache, Lena Cruceru, Savelina Danova, Nicolae Gheorghe, Alex Grigor'ev-Roinishvili, Ildikó Haraszi, Karel Holomek, Milena Hübschmannová, Dan Ionescu, Vera Klopčič, Elena Marushiakova, Zdeněk Matějka, Marta Miklušáková, Andrzej Mirga, Mirjana Najcevska, Klára Orgovánová, Scott Parrish, Dimitrina Petrova, Livia Plaks, Vesselin Popov, Edit Rauh, Michael Shafir, Emilija Simoska, Ilona Tomova, Luan Troxel, Michal Vašečka, Ivan Veselý, Klára Veselá-Samková, and Cătălin and Elena Zamfir. I am especially grateful to three old friends, Dimitrije Buzarovski, Iván Völgyes, and Larry Watts, who went out of their way to ensure that my visits to Macedonia, Hungary, and Romania were productive. Thanks are also due to the politicians, experts, activists, and ordinary people who were willing to be interviewed for this book. Naturally, all of them are acknowledged in the notes, with the exception of those requesting anonymity. The transcripts of these interviews are in my possession.

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Throughout the past decade my father, István Bárány, spent many hours and forints hunting down, purchasing, and mailing source materials and coordinating my travel plans. To the denouement of his long illness he maintained a keen interest in the way the manuscript was taking shape, and it saddens me beyond words that he did not live to see its publication. Though they had little direct impact on this book, my family and friends – Lotti Bárány, Marion Fellenzer, Steven and Judith Franden, Valentine and Zsuzsi Lovekin, Mac McIntyre, Lisa Montoya, Doug Phelan, and Joan Yamini – have offered encouragement and/or diversion. I am most grateful to my wife, Patricia Maclachlan, for her support of my work even when it took me away from home for months at a time. She patiently put up with my “Hungarian moods” and kept her good cheer throughout, which is all the more remarkable as she was completing her own book on the Japanese consumer movement while I was working on mine.

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