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## **Pushed to the edge: Research report on the representation of Roma communities in the Hungarian mainstream media, 2011**

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GÁBOR BERNÁTH AND VERA MESSING

# Pushed to the Edge

Research Report on the Representation of  
Roma Communities in the  
Hungarian Mainstream Media, 2011

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## ABOUT THE WORKING PAPER

The original report was published in Hungarian with the title ‘*Szélre tolva. Kutatási zárójelentés a roma közösségek többségi médiaképéről, 2011*’. This working paper discusses results of a content analysis of the coverage of Roma by the mainstream media in 2011. The analysis is a continuation of the authors two decades’ long cooperation uncovering and analysing the ways in which mainstream media represents Hungary’s Roma communities and contributes to the reproduction of public stereotypes about this ethnic group. The research based on which the report was drafted analysed a wide range of media including largest political dailies, weekly papers, tabloid dailies, internet news portals, and TV news programs. Special attention was paid to the thorough analysis of the visual images published in newspapers and TV news programs.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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The views in this report are the authors’ own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Center for Policy Studies, Central European University.

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## **PUSHED TO THE EDGE**

**Research Report on the Representation of Roma Communities  
in the Hungarian Mainstream Media, 2011**

Gábor Bernáth and Vera Messing

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## 1. INTRODUCTION: NOTES ON METHODOLOGY

This report aims at describing the present condition of the representation of Roma in the Hungarian media. For the sake of comparison with our earlier research results (1989, 1993, 1997<sup>1</sup>, 2000<sup>2</sup> and 2003<sup>3</sup>), the aspects of analysis have been developed on the basis of the methodology used there. This enabled us to evaluate data regarding processes and trends over the past 20 years concerning several issues. Therefore, coding instructions partially rely on previous research experiences, while also containing new elements, such as the use of stereotypes of Roma, the analysis of visual contents accompanying reports, or the additional aspects of analysis in dealing with television materials. At several points, the content analysis based on coding instructions has been expanded with in-depth qualitative analysis of individual topics. Our financial circumstances allowed us to take samples throughout a 5-month period, during which, however, we tried to cover as much of the news media as possible: thus researched materials include the largest left-wing daily and the largest conservative daily, the most widely circulated tabloid, national and local, printed and internet media as well as television channels.<sup>4</sup>

### **Incidental distortions of the sample: top issues**

A recurring problem in the analysis of media representations is that the period of sampling the available sources is necessarily limited, while – owing to their importance or symbolic significance – certain events tend to dominate the media, keeping it continually or repeatedly busy over a period of time. The sample may be significantly distorted by such events and stories: it is well conceivable that in the next couple of months or in the year following the media hype another top issue causes distortions in some

- 1 The analyses made in 1988, 1993 and 1997 covered all articles concerning any of the national or ethnic minorities, published in the two most popular national dailies and four regional dailies during a 6-month period. Data referred to in this paper relate only to 'Roma' content.
- 2 The research sample taken in 2000 included the issues of six national dailies published between 15 October and 15 December, 2000. This investigation was part of a comparative study accomplished in Romania, Serbia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, using similar samples and methods. In: Nationalist Message in Mass Media. Media Monitoring Agency – Academia Catavencu, Media Works, MEMO 98, Roma Press Center — 2001.
- 3 Sources used for this research included national televisions and national political and tabloid dailies that were observed between November 17 and December 1, 2003, as well as articles published in regional/local dailies dealing with minority issues during the given period. Roma Sajtóközpont: Kisebbségi Közösségek a médiában, 2003. november 17-december 1. Kutatási gyorsjelentés. [Roma Media Centre: Minority Communities in the Media, November 17 – December 1, 2003. Flash research report].
- 4 Media were selected according to size of audience, political sympathy, surface and type of media. On this basis, the sample included the two most widely read national political dailies (Népszabadság, Magyar Nemzet); the most frequently visited Internet portals (Origo, Index); one printed and one on-line tabloid (Blikk, Vasárnapi Blikk and Index-Velvet); the local dailies of two regions densely populated by Roma (Új Dunántúli Napló, Észak-Magyarország); and the evening news programs of the four largest television channels (News on MTV1, News on RTL, Este [Evening] on TV2, HírTV [NewsTV] and Híradó 21 [News 21]). As for the printed press, every other issue of the given paper was observed, and as regards the 4 television channels, every fourth day's news program was considered, so that we could cover the entire period. In the case of dailies, we read through the selected issues searching for and coding articles dealing with or mentioning Roma, or referring to this group in any other (visual, associative) way. Using the archives of Internet news portals, we searched for letter sequences 'cigá' [tsig], 'rom', 'kisebbs' [minorit] and, where possible (e.g. in case of origo.hu), we checked articles by browsing the list of daily news. In the case of television news programs, those of MTV, RTL Klub and TV2, stored in the National Audio-Visual Archive (to which we are indebted for its support), were accessible. The news programs of HírTV broadcasted during November were not included in the sample, as the programs of this channel can be downloaded from its home page for one week, while coding started in December; our request to acquire the news programs of November directly from the television channel was refused. However, the results of the analysis are certainly not affected significantly due to these gaps, as altogether 10 news programs were missed.

other way, highlighting other characteristics. Therefore, in order to avoid such distortions, it is worth reviewing the most important stories that took place in the given period, and introduce further aspects of analysis when elaborating data. So let us see then the significant events of the sampling period, the media presence of which would have probably not been so intense had the sample been taken during some other period of time.

The Hungarian **EU Presidency** took place partially during this period; as the adoption of the European Roma Framework Strategy was one of its key undertakings, a large number of the reports dealing with union presidency mentioned this process. 14% of the articles contained reference to foreign politics, and a large part of them mentioned Roma in connection with EU presidency, one media outlet publishing every five reports in this context.

The court proceedings of two outstanding criminal cases / crime series – the **murder of Marian Cozma** (January 2011) and the **serial attacks and killings against Roma** (see framed summary) – also took place during this period. Although the latter started only at the end of March (on the 25th), the media already heralded its coming a month earlier.<sup>5</sup> Both court proceedings received exceptional media coverage – no wonder, since these events have become the emblematic, and in some way divisive, issues of contemporary Hungary. This may be one reason why the rate of crime in media representations is even higher in the period under investigation than it was before (more than a third of the articles – 35% – mentioned Roma in connection with, or with reference to, criminality).

Towards the end of the examined period, in early March, members of right-wing and extreme right organizations wearing uniform were 'patrolling' in Gyöngyöspata, and similar actions were announced in other places of Hungary. As these actions were justified by the organizers with the supposed increase of „Roma crime<sup>6</sup>”, the topic of crime was raised by reports on such events.

The **national elections of Roma self-governments**, taking place in January 9, 2011, ensured a great presence to Roma minority self-governments and Roma organizations in the sample (12% of reports). Two other stories contributed to the weight of this topic: the criminal proceedings against Orbán Kolompár, former president of the National Roma Self-government (NRS), going on during this time as well; and the exposure of frauds concerning the compensation of Roma. Materials dealing with these two events were coded both in the category of „minority self-organizing” and of „criminality”.

5 The fact that we deal with these two issues in the same paragraph should by no means suggest that we agree with the practice, employed by the Hungarian media on several surfaces, making the two stories appear as parallel cases.

6 „Roma crime” is a signalling expression of the radical extreme right parties. The expression refers to criminal acts that were committed by individual of Roma/Gypsy background. The expression – in our opinion – is a racist compound, as it makes a direct links between an ethnic group and a negative action.

## FOCAL EVENTS

Romanian international handball player Marian Cozma was stabbed in the heart and two other players were injured during a fight on the night of February 8, 2009, at the Patrióta bar in Veszprém. Social responses to this incident were greatly determined by the Roma origin of the suspects and their alleged belonging to criminal organizations, making the affair an iconic example of 'Roma crime'.

During a murder series that started in the fall of 2008, Roma people and houses inhabited by Roma were targeted on six sites. Six people died (including a child) and five were severely injured in the attacks, committed by a group of four advocating racist views. The perpetrators, who did not know the victims, murdered them out of anti-Roma hate, in a premeditated manner, attacking from ambush. The serial attacks as well as the unprofessionalism of the proceedings, the outruling of racist motivation for a long time (it was only after the fifth attack that racist motive was taken seriously), the indifference of the authorities left Roma communities feeling insecure and deeply traumatized. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/feedarticle/9564871>

On the 1st March paramilitary militia of the radical extreme right wing groups have arrived to Gyöngyöspata, where they started to march and harass the settlement's Gypsy population by claiming that they will protect the village's population from the increasing 'Gypsy-criminality'. The paramilitary groups have continued marching for almost a month. They were successful to destabilize the local political situation until new elections were called and the nominee of the extreme right wing won the seat of the mayor. More on the case was published by the Guardian (27.01.2012): Poor, abused and second-class: the Roma living in fear in Hungarian village. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jan/27/hungary-roma-living-in-fear>

## How do we know if someone is a Rom/Romnyi?

A special difficulty arising in the analysis of the media representation of minorities is the question: what determines if someone belongs to the given group? The unrealistic scenario where those making an appearance in the report made a declaration to this effect, would be a clear situation. Obviously, more often than not this is not the case: someone else makes a declaration about the people concerned (like in Gyöngyöspata), or the report itself 'reveals' the ethnicity of the subjects (e.g. in cutaways).

Often, however, it is merely the prior knowledge and ideas of the media consumer that identify someone as Roma. This latter situation is especially hard to judge; therefore, cases where the article/report did not make an explicit connection with Roma, which, however, was considered 'obvious', either due to visual effects or the presumed knowledge of the reader (for instance, regarding the admitted ethnic identity of this or that celeb) – were coded as a separate category.

Special attention was given to television materials that were included in the sample not because the persons showing in the report or others referred to in it identified themselves as Roma, or the narration or some other party identified them as such, but considering that some practice of visual editing or other means of meaning attribution generated the same effect. Such practices provide more freedom to the media consumer, whose prior conditioning, visual and other memories, significantly contribute

to the identification of the persons in the given report as Roma or non-Roma. The same situation was faced by our colleagues coding materials, who had to decide in such cases whether a 'Roma-like' name, face, or even an environment looking like a Roma quarter justified the statement: the report is (at least partially) about Roma.

Based on the above considerations, first and foremost we coded<sup>7</sup> reports in which 'Tsigan'/'Roma' appeared explicitly, and/or the Roma aspect was referred to visually or by some other means, and, furthermore, items in which the Roma origins of the speaker is prominent, admitted publicly and widely known. This latter is often the case with reports on celebs, artists or Roma politicians. At the same time, a report on the poorest and wealthiest Hungarian settlements, in connection with a survey made by the Central Statistical Office (CSO), was not included in the sample. Although the poorest settlements are knowingly the villages with an increasing rate of Roma population, we had no reason to assume that this was evident to all (or just the majority of) newspaper readers. These articles were coded only when the report itself alluded to the Roma aspect of this situation.

Situations and stories invested with an ethnic meaning by the media through references or synonyms (i.e. without describing or declaring their Roma aspect) were analyzed separately.

### **Television materials: a new terrain**

To our knowledge, this is the first time that an analysis of news programs in this subject, covering such a large sample and going beyond the scope of classic content analysis, has been undertaken in Hungary. Television materials were usually examined by subjecting a couple of reports to qualitative analysis. We, however, in addition to the questions used in the content analysis of written reports, attempted to expand our investigation by including further aspects that usually emerge during the qualitative analysis of small samples.

## **2. ENVIRONMENT OF MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS: SOCIAL PROCESSES, PUBLIC DISCOURSE AND PUBLIC POLICIES**

Media representations do not emerge in a vacuum: characteristic topics develop, in the sense of coming into being as well as acquiring meanings, influenced by social processes and transformations, the struggle of various interest groups to thematize public concerns, as well as by the fact that interpretations are also dependent on our prior knowledge and attitudes. Social transformations entail changes of the public opinion, too. Even if it would be hard to point out a direct causal relation between media representations and public opinion, it is probably sound to assume some connection between the two. Media representations, on the other hand, are affected by organizational sociological factors to at least the same degree: inequalities in media access, lobbying potential and consuming power of the minority in question, and the various interests emerging within the media organization.

7 Three coders were responsible for coding materials. The reliability of data was ensured by instructing coders, as well as by the parallel coding of a sub-sample. Where the coders notoriously employed diverging codes (thus inter-coder reliability was low), the materials were excluded from the analysis.

The chain of meanings and interpretations are determined by socially and individually held ideas, memories and experiences that affect not only *interpretations* but also *perceptions*.<sup>8</sup> Phenomena of this sort include selective attention, or the understanding of representations contradicting stereotypes as propaganda or exceptions reinforcing the rule.

Classical content analyses of the media are able to reveal the multiple interests and processes behind the production and interpretation of meanings only to a limited extent; basically, they attempt to analyse characteristic topics, and ways or practices of representation. However, when interpreting these, it must be acknowledged that, as cultural products, media texts emerge in specific contexts of manufacturing and distribution, and exercise effects in a receiving environment that is partially determined by the same factors.<sup>9</sup> In recent years, important changes have taken place in this environment in Hungary, regarding social processes and the transformation of attitudes as well as communication processes more directly related to media representations. Examples for the latter include the effective communication of strengthening extreme right wing political groups (Jobbik, Hungarian Guards), just like the severe weakening of the Roma civil movement, or the disappearance of certain cultural tabooizations (like 'Roma criminality').

## 2.1. Social changes

The scope of this study does not allow us to set media representations within the large-scale social processes of the past few years: increasing existential uncertainty due to economic crisis (or crises), or the growing segregation of Roma communities. The former factor obviously augments needs for scapegoating and for blueprints of punishment. The fact, in turn, that there is hardly any space left where Roma and majority people may extensively enter in a partner relationship presuming cooperation, results in the appreciation of media representations that may be less balanced by personal relationships, and of a body of 'naïve' knowledge about Roma.

The question as to which changes of public discourse and attitudes media representations are embedded in, however, is intrinsic to such representations. Apparently, over the past few years vast transformations have taken place in attitudes as well as in public opinion. The fact that extreme right wing rhetoric has become a feature of a parliamentary party represents only a symptom of this shift. More intensive changes are evidenced by analyses<sup>10</sup> based on European Social Survey data, indicating an unprecedented increase in needs for right wing recepies, the intensification of prejudiced attitudes, and the disruption of trust in democratic institutions in Hungary. Besides, however, prejudices against Roma have also intensified, and became more explicit. The fact that subsequent governments – to some extent the previous government, too, but especially the current one – have employed an anti-poverty rhetoric, some of their public policies reflecting the same outlook, may have contributed to this phenomenon.

8 Our analysis heavily draws on theories of social representation, according to which „all received information is distorted by a series of representations 'imposed' on objects and people, [...] and when considering these people and objects, our genetic dispositions, learned ideas and habits, memories and cultural categories maintained about them all add up to make them appear the way in which we see them”. (Serge Moscovici, 2002)

9 For a short description of the approaches by related theories of 'cultural studies' cf. Douglas Kellner, 1995.

10 Cf. e.g. Péter Kerkó - Attila Juhász - Csaba Molnár, 2011.

## THE TOPOS OF 'ROMA CRIMINALITY'

'Roma criminality', as a self-evident category applied in criminal persecution and public discourse, became an important target of Roma civil rights struggles already in the late 1980s. Conceiving of Roma as criminals is a centuries old topos, the maintenance of which has been supported for a long time both by public policy and the institutional structure of criminal persecution. With respect to media representations (already showing, better than anything else, how typical thematizations by the media are exposed to the intertwined processes of public policy, struggle for representation and public opinion), this problem has undergone significant transformations, not only over the past 50 years but also during the recent 10-15 years.

The Hungarian practice of attributing news value to ethnicity only in case when the perpetrator is Roma, but not when he or she belongs to some other minority living in Hungary (or to the majority, for that matter), has naturally contributed to the strenuous assumption of a direct connection between Roma identity and criminality. Although research<sup>12</sup> revealed already in the 1980s that criminality is not any higher among Roma than in groups of a similar social standing, these results have not influenced public opinion about Roma.<sup>13</sup>

However, it was not only prejudices held by the majority or the press that sustained the stereotype of 'Roma criminality', as the institutional structure of criminal persecution was also supportive of this concept for several decades. The so-called 'Gypsy lines', maintained by the police and performing offensive press work, were operated all through the late 1980s. While they stopped functioning around 1989, it was not until the middle of the next decade that 'Roma origins' ceased to be considered a kind of special characteristics in police practices.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless comments alluding to Roma origins still appear every now and then, though infrequently, in some official police lists of warrants. The year 1997 was divisive with regard to media representations. In the content analysis made a year earlier (Bernáth – Messing, 1998), a quarter of the articles concerning Roma presented Roma in a criminal context. In the same year, the publication of ethnic belonging was found to be unlawful by the ombudspersons of data protection and minorities, and, in response this statement, the marking of perpetrators' ethnic belonging significantly decreased in criminal reports.

11 István Tauber – Katalin Végh, 1982.

12 Recent professional and scholarly statements do not influence it, either: In 2009, the National Institute of Criminology also spoke on the issue: "[...] Any statements regarding criminal rates concerning Roma should be considered mere guesswork, subjective perceptions based on personal impressions, as opposed to well-supported conclusions concerning the Roma minority living in Hungary. The use of the term 'Roma criminality' presumes a causal relationship between Roma identity and the prevalence of criminality. It conveys contents apt to be used in scapegoating, putting the Roma minority as it is in a disgraceful situation, and further inciting prejudices and negative feelings against Roma". (Állásfoglalás a magyarországi bűnözési helyzetről, az elkövetők etnikai hovatartozásának nyilvántartásáról és a „cigánybűnözésről” [Stance concerning criminality in Hungary, registering the ethnicity of perpetrators, and "Roma criminality"] <http://www.okri.hu/content/blogcategory/26/52/>)

13 This went on until November 1996, when a confidential order was issued by the national chief of police, which declared that "the use of labels referring to population groups or national or ethnic minorities in the description of persons by the police [...] when issuing warrants or in any other situations is a breach of norms". The document also dispels the notorious assumption that the marking of ethnicity may be helpful in investigations: "to begin with, in most cases, this kind of labelling is unsuitable for the purpose of an unambiguous identification of physical characteristics, and so it is questionable professionally, too".

The novel popularity of 'Roma criminality' is not only owing to the offensive communication of Jobbik that uses it as a foundation of its politics. It was probably after the murder case at Olaszliszka<sup>15</sup> that a shift occurred in public discourse in this regard. At the same time, other, at least two, symbolic events took place in the field of public services as well. At a press conference held in January 2009, the police captain of Miskolc proposed a numeric figure regarding the (assumed) Roma perpetrators with reference to crimes committed during a certain period of time. In response, he was first acquitted, then, as a result of wide-scale protests, quickly reinstituted.

In April of the same year, the parliamentary commissioner of citizenship rights said in an interview that Roma criminality should be called what it actually is, and talked about a "collectivistic social, almost tribal, group" with respect to Roma. Besides actors of Roma public life, the president of the republic as well as other politicians condemned this statement.

With Jobbik becoming a parliamentary party, 'Roma criminality' gained an unprecedented surface in publicity. Conservative politicians now in government, who used to be more lenient in this matter, have adopted a more moderate stance. One example for this is provided by a debate between Jobbik and the prime minister, who said: "finally, in talking about parasites you mentioned crime, also referring to the term 'Roma criminality'. [...] We do not support the kind of politics and thinking that denies reality. [...] I accept that people having certain features are present in larger numbers among criminals, as compared with others, however, I will always protest against any kind of labelling suggesting that one becomes a potential criminal by virtue of being born in a certain group. [...] The government supports clear and straightforward reality talk, in the spirit of the culture of respect. [...] Maintaining this balance enables us to confront reality, while securing human dignity and human respect also to people in the most disadvantaged situation. This is the way in which we can cope with Roma criminality and related social phenomena."<sup>16</sup>

## 2.2. Public discourse

Dominant public discourse in a country is primarily characterized by the limits of social norms that, in turn, are defined partially by laws but mainly by the cultural rules of everyday interactions. There is an ongoing fierce struggle for representation around the demarcation of these limits, too, and not only at the level of politics. There are also less documented changes taking place beyond the sphere of politics, at broader social levels: the advancement of Jobbik may imply a kind of transformation, as a result of which certain social norms have been suspended and rewritten at broader social levels.

14 In October 2009, a car driving through Olaszliszka, thus along the Roma street of the settlement, too, almost whirled a local Roma girl stepping in its way. The driver stopped to make sure the child was not injured, however, at this point her relatives attacked him and beat him to death in front of his children. Hungarian public opinion was shocked by the murder, and public discourse concerning Roma became noticeably more coarse. Perpetrators were sentenced since, and the murder site has become a pilgrimage destination of the extreme right.

15 [http://www.mkogy.hu/internet/plsql/ogy\\_naplo.naplo\\_fadat\\_aktus?p\\_ckl=39&p\\_uln=29&p\\_felsz=6&p\\_felszig=19&p\\_aktus=4](http://www.mkogy.hu/internet/plsql/ogy_naplo.naplo_fadat_aktus?p_ckl=39&p_uln=29&p_felsz=6&p_felszig=19&p_aktus=4)

'Roma criminality' as an explanatory category is certainly a kind of concept that gained space step by step, as prohibitive boundaries were gradually dissolved. A great part of society has accepted it as an explanatory principle: survey conducted by Nézőpont [viewpoint] Institute in August 2008 shows that 'Roma criminality' exists according to 91 percent of the respondents, while 77 per cent agrees that Roma have more inclination to commit crimes than non-Roma.

A survey conducted in a sample of 1,000 teenagers in Budapest in 2010 provides a thorough account of this deeper transformation (Váradí 2011). It is worth to cite the description of "The mechanism maintaining stable anti-Roma attitudes" at length:

*"teenagers belonging to the category characterized by extreme anti-Roma feelings **often make friends with others sharing similar views**. They are the ones who are the readiest to talk about their views regarding minorities, and do so more frequently than others, while **those belonging to the moderately anti-Roma and tolerant categories almost never express their opinion in this matter**. In the perception of the most prejudiced young people, the public sphere of their classroom and the entire Hungarian society appears more prejudiced than in the eyes of their fellows, while considering themselves 'only' averagely prejudiced. Their world is dominated by the norm of anti-Roma attitudes. [...] In addition, any **markedly anti-racist subcultures** able to provide a point of reference in the formation of identity for at least a part of young people is **missing in Hungary**. Furthermore, since, due to school segregation, non-Roma students never meet Roma students in a significant part of schools in Budapest, and they do not have teachers of Roma origins, anti-Roma youngsters **do not acquire direct experiences** that could challenge their prejudices. Most teachers are not equipped with tools to cope with racist manifestations, and the problems described above leave them incapable of undertaking the serious task of dismantling stereotypes. [...] In the absence of an open discussion of various social problems, they are not invested with schemes of thought to question generalizations and develop a need for a complex understanding of problems. A part of young people thinks that it is only some extreme right wing organizations that are ready to talk openly about this matter."*  
(italics mine – gb.)

This accurate analysis incorporates almost all the elements determining the current situation: cohesive power to „break taboos”; lack of fora to express counterarguments; broad and supportive publicity that is considered rougher, enabling the assumption of individual prejudices; and lack of open dialogue.

### 2.3. Politician talk (and its consequences)

With respect to news sources, media representations are primarily determined by manifestations of political and public policy centres, their events and announcements designed in 'ready-to-be-broadcasted' formats. Their content is significantly influenced when the – sometimes prejudiced – statements of politicians are quoted word-to-word. In many respects, there has been a significant shift in political public discourse in Hungary in recent years.

First, as Jobbik became a parliamentary party, a kind of terminology and thematization recalling extreme right wing rhetoric (criminality, 'prolificacy', 'parasitism') entered in mainstream publicity: what previously was heard at extreme fora and demonstrations, is now said out loud in the public

space of the Parliament. However, Jobbik has no exclusivity in terms of making prejudiced statements: instances of false generalizations, stereotypes or, for that matter, hate speech may be observed in the statements of a much more extended circle of people.

It is partially due to these developments that, in the light of extreme right wing rhetoric, previously discarded, but not inciting, forms of speech have slowly become accepted. Extreme right wing talk is dangerous not only for being stigmatizing and providing coarse explanations and solutions, proposed in an aggressive manner, but also for making equally simplified, though coded, explanations socially acceptable, while these, too, are based on prejudices and stereotypes. What is more, this implicit racism is often made more acceptable as those employing it can legitimize their standpoint by confronting explicit racism.

For this reason, less boisterous assertions that are nonetheless generalizing and prejudiced may seem to be acceptable when contrasted with declarations made by Jobbik. One is not startled anymore at hearing how the educational difficulties of Roma children is discussed in a generalizing and stigmatizing manner:

*"The effort they must take in order to do their homework is incomparable... they cannot ask anything from their parents, as they are unable to help their children, and may have even burnt their copybooks as fuel..."*

(Bishop János Székely, Catholic Bishops' conference on MTV, 23.02.2011).

Such undifferentiating statements are quite suitable for hurting all those (the vast majority of poor and Roma children as well as their parents) who have different experiences.<sup>16</sup>

### MISSING GOALS

The regional police department in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county, supported by the Ministry of Social Affairs, issued an anti-usury calendar with the title 'Say no!' in 2009. Visual stereotypes are abounding in its pictures: New Year is represented by a bottle rolling under the table; then you see a mother holding her child on her arm, while smoking; children crying when the money, received as a loan, is gone; broken liquor jars; and an unfinished loaf of bread on the table. According to these representations, it is owing to their own negligence that poor people tend to become involved in usury business (in a country where it is impossible to live on benefits. Considering that usury mostly (though not exclusively) concerns Roma communities, these visual representations are not saved by the fact that the adults and the elder child on the picture have blond hair (especially, since a closer look reveals that it is dyed and already losing colour). The poor are also filthy and disorderly, leaving broken glass around babies crawling on all fours.

<sup>16</sup> Székely, who has lately published a book on Roma studies, has been assigned the task to deal with the religious life and inclusion of Roma, making him an important figure of minority policy.



CAPTIONS: 1.'The beginning of the New Year'; 2.'In milk and honey'; 3.'The loan is gone'; 4.'The loan is due back

## 2.4. How public policies see the Gypsies and Poors

Explanations and assumptions implicit in public policies obviously contribute to the image of Roma communities formed by society. The discursive environment of media representations emerge in a public policy context that is primarily based on a policing approach, abounding in anti-poor rhetoric and insinuations to which Roma are especially exposed, as a result of the strong ethnicization of the image of poverty.

This kind of anti-poor logic – convincingly described as a global phenomenon (Wacquant 2001) – and related rhetorical devices have characterized Hungarian public policy for a long time. Zsuzsa Ferge, one of the most well-known Hungarian experts of social policies, said the following with regard to the employment policies of the government in 2009<sup>17</sup>:

*"They would not accept the notion 'unemployed', in the sense that someone does not have a job because there are no jobs out there. The recent steps made by the government suggest that there are jobs for everyone, so being without job is a matter of individual responsibility."*

17 „...Itt a szegények szívatásáról van szó” [This is all about giving a hard time to the poor]. Interview with sociologist Zsuzsa Ferge by Szilvia Varró. Beszélő, February 2009, 14/2.

The employment program initiated by the previous government with the title 'Road towards work', or its plans regarding the distribution of shopping vouchers (so that a part of benefits can be spent on specific products only when received in the form of coupons as opposed to cash), were founded in (or at least communicated through) the following argument: the unemployed do not want to work, (they have got unused to work, partially as a consequence of the practices of social support), and they spend benefits on booze. Surveys (Darvas-Tausz 2002; Ráczné 2007) indicate, however, that this phenomenon characterizes only a small minority of the people living in poverty. According to a survey conducted by the National Employment Service in 2007, only 5 per cent of those receiving benefits cope with severe alcohol problems. The latest examination of the Roma population, requested by the government in 2010, has revealed that a significant portion of working age Roma do some job, however, they are excluded from registered employment (Marketing Centrum 2010).

Hidden or not-so-hidden stereotypes loom behind a great many symbolic decisions made by the government and local self-governments: this is the case with labelling public employment programs as 'motivating for work', or measures like tying eligibility for allowances to clean yard and tidy house.



TITLE OF PICTURE: New demands set in exchange for benefits. Change: Eligibility is now tied to one-month employment and a tidy household. Új Dunántúli Napló 20. 11. 2010

## CHAINS OF TRANSFORMING MEANINGS: TRANSFORMATIONS OF 'INTEGRATION'

Stuart Hall calls our attention to the fact that ideologies are not constituted by stable and discrete notions but are organized in chains of meanings. This is why a terrain of ideological battles is about presenting these elements in different ways, thereby interpreting them and breaking previous chains of meanings (Hall, S., 1995 (1981)). This is what is going on with respect to meanings and interpretations of the term 'integration', aptly transcribed by using prefixes.<sup>19</sup> Let us see a few examples:

- 'rigid integration': "integration with respect to socio-cultural disadvantages and special educational needs, when essential personal, objective, infrastructural and budgetary/financial conditions are lacking, is only 'rigid integration' that is harmful to everyone."  
(Gábor Kerpen, chair, Teachers' Democratic Trade Union<sup>20</sup>)
- 'forced integration': "[András Tatai Tóth, head of the education working group of the Hungarian Socialist Party (than in the government)] said the following to our paper about the controversial problem of segregation: "The socialist working group is against forcefully closing Roma and non-Roma children into the same class. Experts say opportunities for closing up and coexistence should be secured simultaneously. »It should be ensured that students lagging behind do not hold back their peers in, let's say, maths and physics classes, while children can stay together, for instance, in gym and drawing classes, so that no one is excluded«".<sup>21</sup>
- 'multiple integration': "Doctrinaire solutions of this matter, that is to say, imposing the same kind of integration on everybody and everywhere, are wrong. (...) Minorities should actively aspire for integration".  
(László Sólyom President of the Republic, 2009<sup>22</sup>)
- segregation as 'preparation for integration': "Zoltán Balog [State Secretary of Social Inclusion appointed by the government] criticized former practices of Roma integration. He thinks there should be more schools maintained by the church, where the majority of students are Roma. This would be a way of preparing integration, he said."<sup>23</sup>
- integration that is 'appropriate to them': "Jobbik intends to expand examinations of school maturity to measure the social and emotional abilities as well as the intelligence of children, and to become familiar with their parents as well as their social situation and problems. Children would be assigned the appropriate type of class (normal, supporting socialization, providing special support) on the basis of such examinations and information. Where available, children showing slow development, with IQ results around 80-90, would be placed in classes appropriate to them in an integrated manner."<sup>24</sup>

18 Balázs Váradi provides a good summary of debates concerning educational integration: <http://oktapolcafe.hu/varadi-balazs-integracio-rideg-vagy-nem-rideg-2-1834229>

19 <http://www.hirextra.hu/2009/02/20/az-integracio-tulno-az-oktatason/>

20 <http://www.nol.hu/archivum/archiv-467278>

21 <http://www.nol.hu/archivum/lap-20090228-20090228-34>

22 [http://nol.hu/belfold/balog\\_zoltan\\_magyar\\_lobbi\\_eloskodik\\_a\\_ciganyugyon](http://nol.hu/belfold/balog_zoltan_magyar_lobbi_eloskodik_a_ciganyugyon)

23 <http://barikad.hu/node/50605>

## 2.5. Problems of access the other way round: Roma voices

Besides changes in society, public policy and public discourse, media representations are greatly influenced by the fact that Roma self-organizing has undergone significant transformation: (mostly civil rights) organizations that were defining media representations on the supply side for a long time have disappeared. Neither media routines, nor minority self-governments have been able to assume this role since, while the scarcity of fact finding reports suggests we should relinquish any hope regarding the attainability of community responses by the public. The media keeps referring to the views expressed by local Roma representatives instead of conveying the voices of the people concerned (while a significant part of reports even fails to maintain appearances). This is by no means a self-evident problem: while the Hungarian political elite is elected by the citizenry, local minority representatives were, until recently, elected by majority voters, too. Currently, only registered voters are entitled to elect minority representatives. However, while the rate of registered voters differs from settlement to settlement, overall their number is far behind the actual proportion of the Roma population. In addition, minority self-governments are exposed to a kind of multiple loyalty test vis a vis local authorities – with special regard to their financing. Therefore, minority self-governments obviously does not represent authentic sources of information concerning specific issues (like those demanding the articulation of interests by minority communities against the local power). The representation of various supporting organizations is also very low, even though they, too, should be interested in reaching publicity.

Civil agents formerly playing an important role in thematizing Roma media representations have virtually disappeared by today.

## 2.6. 'Media-contributions'

### 2.6.1. Editorial attitudes and practices

The everyday routines of the media reinforce the excessive and unparalleled domination of the media representations of the Roma community by political actors. Such everyday routines are responsible for the scarcity of on the spot and fact finding reports that could balance and contextualize political communication, showing the potential results of programs contrasted with with the magnitude of problems. The absence of fact finding efforts is generally explained by the lack of time and money; fair enough, however, when a community has weak self-organization and/or no self-conscious members in strong positions, this may lead to the virtual silencing of the community, as revealed by our analysis as well.

On the side of journalists, however, there is more to influence media representations than such routines. A part of mainstream media is also readier to take an opinion on 'Roma' as a social group than before. To be sure, having a political character is not a problem in case of a political newspaper (unlike in case of a public service television, where this causes real concern). However, the assumption of strong notions and extreme standpoints results in an ideologically filtered worldview, only one step away from political propaganda. Magyar Nemzet, the largest share right wing conservative daily paper, took and communicated such an explicit stance:

*„exclusion is really self-exclusion, as prejudices are based on past judgements, so the Roma part of society face the inevitable task or challenge of convincing the majority society that the foundations of such judgments have become obsolete and unjustified since. There has never been anti-Roma racism in Hungary, or if there has or is, it is just too insignificant and*

*untypical to be taken into account.”<sup>24</sup> This kind of perspective, in itself, is becoming influential in terms of the image of Roma as it denies the existence a phenomenon – discrimination – that has been widely documented by academic research, civil right organizations and the experienced by Roma people in everyday life.*

Projections by journalists represent the consequence of similar preconceptions. Analyzing the news program broadcasted by HírTV [NewsTV] on 9 February, 2009, the National Radio and Television Commission (NRTC) sets forth the following viewpoint: “In the program, András Túri secretary of state responsible for the police talked about social conflicts in small settlements at a press conference:

*Controversies arise mostly from the stealing of chicken and then turn into ethnic tensions.*

The narrator added:

*The state secretary responsible for the police did not specifically refer to ‘Roma’, while acknowledging that ethnic belonging causes problems in several disadvantaged settlements.*

By this commentary, the producers of the program completed the statement made by the secretary of state based on their own concept, suggesting that the above types of crimes are exclusively tied to the Roma minority, thereby ethnicizing a criminal practice.”<sup>25</sup>

### **2.6.2. The encounter of public policy and media stereotypes; consciousness**

Occasionally, the police is also active in shaping media representations: like it happened in the case of the report<sup>26</sup> showing the capture of an usurer in Ózd in real time. The narration and selection make it obvious that this is not just a criminal report but also a cultural interpretation. The suspected man and his relative keep yelling and swearing, which is even stressed by the narrator.



CAPTIONS: Police recording; More usurers were arrested

24 <http://www.mno.hu/portal/553674>

25 ORTT: A magyarországi televíziós hírműsorok romaképe a konfliktusok tükrében [Representations of Roma in Hungarian television news programs as reflected by conflicts] [http://www.ortt.hu/elemzesek/21/1271850273magyarorszag\\_i\\_televizios\\_hirmusorok\\_romakepe\\_20100421.pdf](http://www.ortt.hu/elemzesek/21/1271850273magyarorszag_i_televizios_hirmusorok_romakepe_20100421.pdf)

26 TV2 17.02.2011.

Or here is another very likely candidate for proactive police communication: when a man died after his arrest in unknown circumstances, it was repeated twice in the report<sup>27</sup> that he had been in prison for almost 30 years.

A report<sup>28</sup> published by Népszabadság on the announcement of sentence in the murder case at Kiskunlacháza<sup>29</sup> that gained an immense publicity, constitutes another example of biased procedures. The article mentions the persistent but baseless accusation of Roma by locals, then informs about the (hence, baselessly) accusing talk of the mayor, in which "he listed previous cases where Roma or persons assumed to be Roma were the perpetrators" ... – A long list of such cases follows, without being counterpointed, refuted or reinforced by the journalist. Anyone having at least a basic understanding concerning the impacts of media will know without any further explanation what such allusions – expounded with a level of detail totally irrelevant from the point of view of the article, and without being contextualized – are able to do.

### **2.6.3. Tabloidization**

Changing public attitudes and the growing consciousness of some media outlets is revealed by the employment of practices of tabloidization. A criminal suit closing down during the period under investigation, involving a man who had electrified his fence, is a case in point.

#### **UNCLE BARNA, CELEB VICTIM OF 'ROMA CRIMINALITY'**

Barna Szoboszlai from Kesznyéte had fenced off an area in his yard and electrified the fence in June 2008, causing the death of a person on the night of 30 June of the same year. The court of first instance of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county sentenced him for homicide to one year in prison, suspending the execution of the sentence with 2 years probational time. The High Court of Debrecen alleviated the punishment of the 70 years old convict. Blikk [the largest tabloid] as well as Észak Magyarország [the major daily of North Hungary] presented the man as a kind of celeb: for instance, by continually calling him uncle Barna. Reports kept emphasizing his old age (one of them highlighting that he "appeared in front of the court supported with a cane"), picturing him at times in suit, with a grave expression on his face and holding up his fingers while exposing his argument, at other times showing him broken and mired, wearing a pullover. In a grand report published by Blikk (27.03.2011), the elderly man promises in the title to use "Electricity never again", and in the highlighted quote he says "the Roma have also understood that fighting is futile". One of the photos is about a broken window (with a caption referring to unknown perpetrator, while in the text below Roma are accused of it), another shows the supports of the electric wire, while the picture in the center depicts the convict posing with a hoe on his shoulder.

27 TV2 27.12.2010

28 Attila Fekete Gy. : Horák Nóra gyilkosa 19 évet kapott [Murderer of Nóra Horák gets 19 years in prison]. Népszabadság, 23.11.2010

29 Heresay accused Roma with the brutal killing of a young girl in the settlement. The mayor took a lead in expressing public anger, and demonstrations were held against Roma crime. Later on, the perpetrator – a non-Roma – was arrested.

## UNCLE BARNA, CELEB VICTIM OF 'ROMA CRIMINALITY'



CAPTIONS: Uncle Barna: Electricity never again!

He electrified his fence

Importantly, these reports indicate that Hungarian society is getting ready to take the initiative with regard to disciplining "the Roma". In a country where, just like other public services, the police is underfinanced and underperforming, 'Roma criminality' so aptly used in generalizations, scapegoating and stigmatizing, may easily bring a lot of votes, and there is a strong temptation to celebrate 'individual resisters' as heroes. Soon a competition to exploit the popularity of uncle Barna started: he became a candidate of the Alliance Party at the parliamentary elections. Reports suggest that vigilantism and disproportional sentences are acceptable.

Meanwhile, never a word was said about the victim, about the man who died or his family, although this topic could have been framed in terms of emotionality as well.

## ROMA AS APPEARING IN THE RELEVANT REPORT BY TV2



CAPTIONS: 1st-2nd PICTURE: Electrified his fence

Roma in these images are shown from distance as a group constituted by faceless, but loud people. Such representations may enhance the image of Roma as jobless crowd, loafing around the street. For many viewers such images also elicit fear.

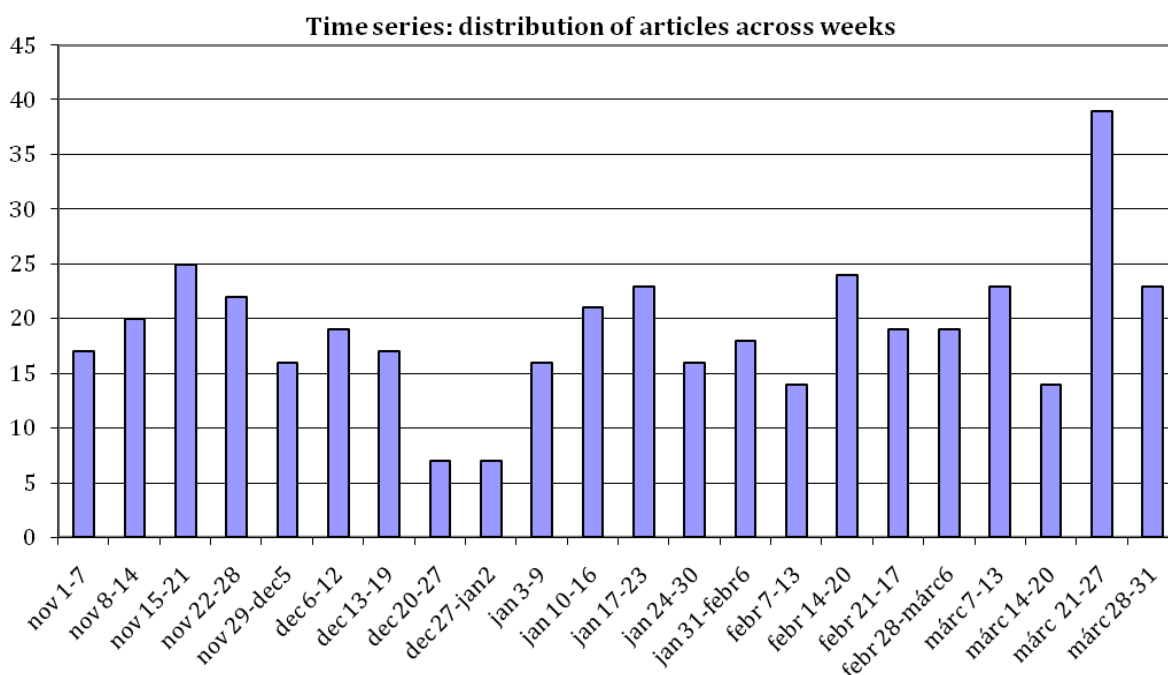
### 3. OUTCOMES OF CONTENT ANALYSIS

#### 3.1. Emphaticity, changes compared with earlier analyses

In the sample taken in 2010-2011, Roma-related reports were published in the media on three out of four days on average. This represents some increase compared with earlier data: in 1996-1997 articles concerning Roma were published every two or three days, while in 2000 every other day in average. For the sake of comparison: an analysis of 1973 on the representation of minorities by the British media found an average of ten relevant articles a day in each periodical under investigation, while another British study detected an even more intense media presence of minorities.<sup>30</sup>

Besides analyzing quantitative indicators, it is important to assess the significance of minority topics in the media as it were. Due to limited funding, we could not undertake this task, however, European comparative research conducted in 2008 revealed that minorities represent a quite marginal topic in Hungarian media, appearing in 3.8% of articles altogether, one fifth of which deals with Roma, while another 13% concerns Hungarian minorities living abroad (Kriza – Vidra 2010).

The temporal distribution of reports on Roma was uneven in 2011, too, with a significant part of materials clustering around one or two widely publicized news stories.



Most of the news stories were published at the end of March, which was the time when the conflict at Gyögyöspata erupted and the criminal trial of the persons accused with the serial murder of Roma was opened. However, greater attention is shown concerning Roma during the second half of November, when the news leaked out that the withdrawal of funding of the Budgetary Council

30 Hartmann, Paul - Husband, Charles (1974): Racism and the mass media; a study of the role of the mass media in the formation of white beliefs and attitudes in Britain. Davis-Poynter, London

would increase the budget of the Public Foundation for Roma in Hungary (PFRH), or in the middle of January, in connection with the election of the National Roma Self-Government (NRS). Differences were observed among media outlets, too: Új Dunántúli Napló published the least articles (one on every other day in average), while in most of the papers Roma related reports were found basically every day.

### 3.2. Dominant topics

Owing to selective attention manifested in the selection of topics, the media, may significantly distort the image of a social group, even if individual reports are 'balanced'. Such is the case when a minority is always discussed with reference to the same problems. Earlier research shows a quite restricted repertoire with respect to the media representation of Roma, basically corresponding to majority stereotypes.

**Table 3.1: Topics. The occurrence of specific topics between 1988 and 2010<sup>31</sup>**

	2010-11	2000	1997	1993	1988
Politics, public policies (of government and self-governments)	33%	18%	27%	31%	6%
Roma self-organization, self-governance	12%	11%	11%	17%	4%
Emigration	2%	-	-	-	-
Roma abroad	5%	-	2%	-	-
Rights protection, minority rights	6%	16%	17%	12%	-
Poverty, social situation	21%	20%	24%	15%	14%
Education	15%	14%	18%	18%	21%
Employment, labor market	12%	4%	8%	10%	14%
Economy, enterprise	8%	2%	2%	5%	-
Culture, arts ... from this celebs	22% 13%	24%	15%	15%	35%
Healthcare	3%	1%	3%	-	-
Discrimination, prejudices, conflicts bw Roma and majority ... from this discrimination ... prejudices, racism	23% 3% 15%	37% 22% 11%	38%	12%	6%
Crime ... from this where perpetrator is non-Roma	37% 8%	25%	16%	15%	37%
Foreign politics, EU	14%	2%	5%	8%	-
Natural disaster	4%	-	-	-	-
N	423	202	304	186	51

31 When interpreting comparative tables, differences between the four samples should be considered. In 2010-2011, two national dailies, 2 internet portals, 2 regional dailies, one tabloid, the tabloid section of an online publication, and the news programs of 4 television channels were coded during a 5-months period between 1 November 2010 and 31 March 2011, observing every other issue of the dailies and every fourth broadcasting of television news programs. Research conducted in 1997, 1993 and 1988 used very similar samples: 2 national and 4 regional dailies were examined during a 6-months period (Messing 2008). The research sample of 2000 was provided by the issues of 6 national dailies published between 15 October and 15 December. Despite differences, the data are suitable for comparison: the time frame is long enough to ensure that differences are owing to the specifics of the sampling period or the selected media.

These data suggest that the representation of Roma in news were dominated by two issues: **majority (national and local) politics and crime**. As compared with previous research, their presence (that had already been intense) increased by 1.5 or 2 times. What this comes down to is that Roma possess 'news value' when they, or the policies targeting them, are subjects of decisions made by politicians, or, alternatively, when they are concerned by criminal cases.

There are many ways to interpret the increase in the rate of references to public policy: one could assume that the situation of Roma was finally included among the most important policy issues. At the same time, it would be also plausible to interpret this shift in focus in terms of exposing, better than anything before, the inequalities in media access i.e. the predominance of government communication. A closer look at the category of 'politics of the government and of self-governments' reveals that governmental politics have the greatest presence (with 17% and 15% of all reports, respectively) in media representations, while local politics are provided a relatively marginal (9%) coverage. Considering, in addition, the low rate of representations concerning minority self-organization (12%) and, furthermore, that one third of these reports deals with the criminal proceedings against the NRS president, the preponderance of the governmental aspect of politics is especially conspicuous.

A comparison of the very high rate of public policy references with the altogether 7 articles that can be characterized as fact-finding reports, or with the almost total lack of presentations about Roma actively trying to improve their own situation (whereas there are numerous programs of this kind in reality), suggests that this disproportionality may involve severe consequences as far as the general view of Roma are concerned. For one thing, it certainly reinforces the stereotype that Roma represent, mainly or only, recipients of benefits. Political statements are rarely counterpointed by the media with data revealing facts about the actual dimensions and potential impacts of policies. Hence, the majority of the audience perceives the contradiction between the seemingly high support expenditures, on the one hand, and persisting destitution, on the other. This contradiction, in turn, is more often than not dissolved by reference to the laziness and undermotivation of Roma.

## Criminality

The other predominant media topic (obviously related to public and political discourse) was crime, involving 37% of reports. This rate is conspicuous even considering that numerous major crime cases went on trial during the period under investigation, some of which were committed against Roma victims. Four major 'cases' defined the crime topic in this period: trial of the Cozma murder case, court proceedings against the serial racist murderers of Roma, events taking place in Gyöngyöspata, and criminal proceedings against the president of the National Roma Self-government<sup>32</sup>. These four cases together represent more than half (55%) of the reports on crime, although with significant differences among media outlets.

32 See framed section on page 4.

**Table 3.2: Rate of reports on crime in different media outlets<sup>33</sup>**

	Rate of articles on crime related to Roma in the given media outlet
Origo	64%
M1	58%
HírTv	58%
TV2	47%
Magyar Nemzet	45%
Index	38%
Új Dunántúli Napló	33%
Népszabadság	32%
Blikk	26%
Észak-Magyarország	23%
RTL Klub	6%
Total	37%

Magyar Nemzet, Origo.hu and television news programs – with the exception of RTL Klub – took a lead in showing Roma in a criminal context. Besides available surface, differences are certainly influenced by the assumed attitude of the audience and the views of editors as well.

Data indicate that Magyar Nemzet, the right wing daily with the largest readership, not only shows Roma in a criminal context in almost 50% of articles, but focuses on cases in which Roma individuals are (suspected) perpetrators of crime. By contrast, the presentation of Roma in the context of crime is decidedly moderate in Népszabadság (left wing daily), except for the trial of murderers of Roma, where, however, Roma represent the victims of crime.

### 3.3. Transforming topics

The media attention received by **Roma self-organization** and **self-governance** stayed more or less unchanged as compared with previous years, due to two events taking place in the period under investigation: the election of the National Roma Self-government (NRS) and the trial against Orbán Kolompár NRS president. Beyond these two issues, NRS hardly appeared in publicity. Meanwhile, political self-organization and civil movements of Roma, operating independently have almost disappeared from the media coverage.

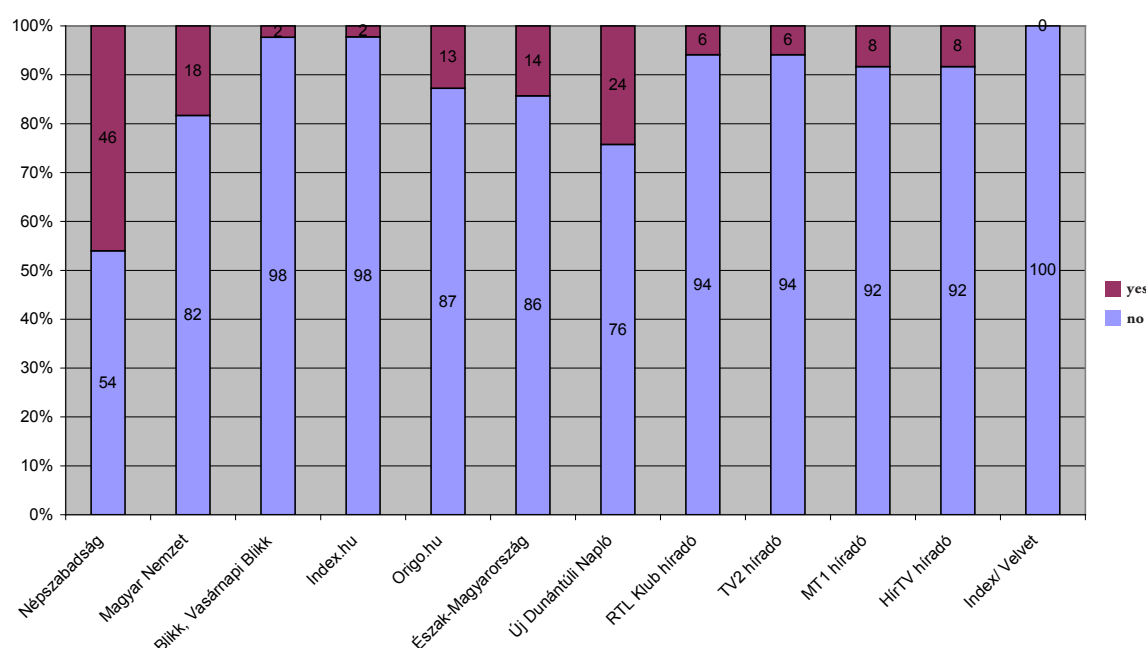
18 out of the 51 articles on Roma self-organization (among other issues) reported on criminal proceedings, that is, more than a third (36%) of the articles dealing with minority self-organization discuss criminal cases related to corruption. Other issues in which minority organizations had been very active before (culture, education, minority rights, rights protection, local conflicts) are hardly, if at all, represented in reports that concern Roma self-organization.

33 Origo.hu and index.hu represent the internet portals with the largest audience. Népszabadság and Magyar Nemzet are the two most widely read political dailies, the former known for its leftist views, while the latter for its right wing sympathies and loyalty towards the current government. Új Dunántúli Napló and Észak-Magyarország are regionally distributed dailies, the former published in Southwest Hungary, and the later in the Northeastern part of the country. Blikk is a popular tabloid distributed nation-wide. M1, DunaTV, RTLklub and TV2 stand for the evening news programs of television channels. M1 is a public service broadcast station loyal to the government, while RTLklub and TV2 are commercial channels.

While in 2003 the presence of minority self-organization was especially strong in the local press, this distinction is not characteristic anymore: the rate of articles discussing this topic is 14% in national dailies and 19% in local ones. However, there is a striking difference between the two local papers in our sample: one third of articles of Új Dunántúli Napló, while only 10% of articles of Észak-Magyarország deal with Roma minority self governments. The reason for this difference is hard to explain: either Roma self-organizing is more active in one region than the other, or the local press is more open towards such topics. Apparently, on-line news media has the greatest capacity to present minority self-organization: one quarter of articles published in the two news portals contained at least references to this topic.

The **topic of education has also undergone significant changes**: while its presence has been apparently the same (14-15%) throughout the years, its importance noticeably diminished by 2011 (Table 3.1). The table below shows that the 15% presence of this topic in the sample is really owing to a single newspaper.

**Presence of education in different media outlets, in proportion of all materials (%);**



Note: vasárnapi translates as 'Sunday'; híradó translates as 'TV news'

More than a third of articles related to education was published in Népszabadság (the largest audience share left wing daily), the only media outlet trying to keep this topic on the agenda. Almost half of its news items on Roma referred to education while in most of the media outlets just a few items covered schooling. Furthermore, a significant proportion of articles discusses various scandals, as opposed to the educational situation of Roma, or ideas of improvement and innovative initiatives.

Again, impediments to media access are striking: the media is unable to identify good practices, otherwise wide-spread and well-functioning all over the country; and the interests of the Roma community remain unarticulated concerning issues such as the new concept of education of the government, or the financial breakdown of 'learneries' (extracurricular, afternoon educational projects, for socially disadvantaged, Roma students) and other educational initiatives. Limited access to television

is indicated by the fact that there were no more than one or two news programs broadcasted by each channel in our sample that dealt with Roma in connection with education.

Labor and **employment** had never been in the focus of Roma representations. This situation has not changed even though the government made employment the flagship policy field concerning Roma programs. The employment of Roma has always been treated in the media characteristically in connection with governmental policies and initiatives; this time apparently increased attentiveness to this field is owing to such the transformation and expansion of the system of public employment.

Reports presenting the white, grey or black employment activities of Roma communities is still

#### ONLY REGISTERED JOBS?

Undermotivated, unused to work: this is a notorious image about Roma in official communication related to employment programs. At the same time, several surveys indicate that, behind high unemployment rates, there is significant actual work performance; the work done by Roma has been driven out of the registered and legal spheres of the labor market (Köllő 2009, Kertesi 2005, NCSSZI 2011), and became part of the non-registered economy. The concerned population is characterized by a wide scope of jobs, from occasional and randomly payed day-labor to stable though not registered employment (Messing-Molnár 2011, Szalai 2002, Váradi 2009, Virág 2008).

very rare in the media, just like the coverage of the causes behind the exceptionally low employment rate and demonstration how the lack of registered jobs affect local life in different parts of the country. This media representation fundamentally contributes to the view of Roma also present in public opinion (and already shared by the previous government) as people adapted to draw on social benefits – for which reason, eligibility should be tied to employment, forcing people unused to work to finally make some efforts in this direction. Save a few exhilarating instances, there are hardly any articles discussing the labor market plight of Roma in conjunction with problems in the background, like disadvantages of settlements, lack of training, educational inequalities, the poor health condition of Roma, or widespread labor market discrimination. A few reports highlighting good practices such as the one on the cucumber producers of Igric, or other Roma farms initiated with the help of outside support <sup>34</sup> were covered, though. Reports presenting the hopelessness of the employment situation of Roma communities with the aim of finding a way out also belong to the rare exceptions.

The decreasing coverage of **poverty** is perhaps due to the fact that the majority discourse shaping public opinion about the Roma poverty is becoming framed by narratives explaining it with criminality and other non-tolerable behavioral patterns (like unwillingness to work, school refusal, etc.), rather than with social and labour market exclusion. This topic characteristically emerges in connection with criminality, employment, education and – especially owing to the European Roma Strategy – foreign affairs. Reports dealing with poverty typically show majority decision makers (politicians, civil servants). An examination of the differences between media outlets reveals that the dominant majority of news on poverty were published in the two large political dailies, and almost half of articles on an online portal while, with the exception of RTL Klub, this subject matter is almost totally neglected by television news programs as well as by origo.hu.

34 For instance: Észak Magyarország 08.02.2011; 11.02.2011; RTL Klub News 07.01.2011.

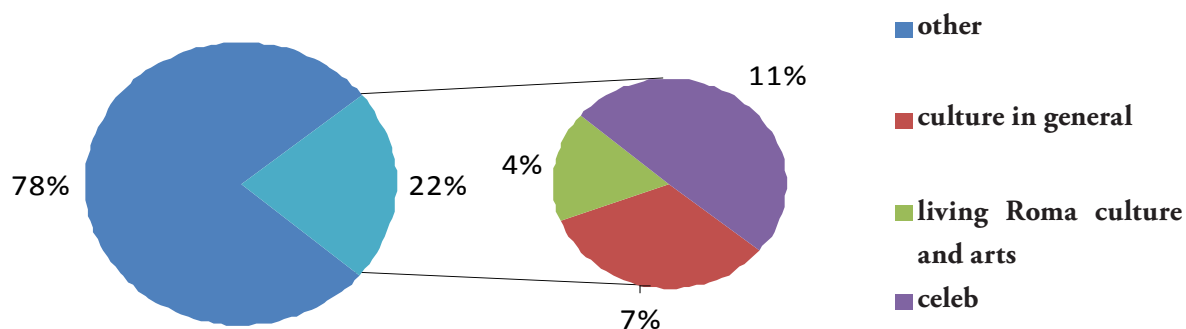
## Living Roma culture? Celeb presence

Considering the entire sample, 22% of reports under investigation deals with culture and arts. At first sight, the high rate of cultural news in media representations of Roma suggests that Roma culture appears in publicity as a living, well-known and recognized culture. In earlier research samples this area was critical in terms of providing a positive image: besides short news items, there were also a great many portraits presenting Roma artists.

In the most recent sample, however, more than half of the publications in this category deals with stories on celebrities. 48% of articles on culture were published in the tabloid media. The bulk of articles that fit this category do not even mention Roma culture (or Roma in general): they present persons, mostly found by talent shows, who *happen to be Roma*. These new talents are not even presented explicitly as Roma, as they have been totally assimilated. Interestingly, this kind of "whitening" even concerns previously strongly ethnicized personalities. Thus the concerned articles are about everything but Roma culture.

Only 16 out of the 95 reports in the category 'culture and media' present Roma culture as a living phenomenon that has been preserved.

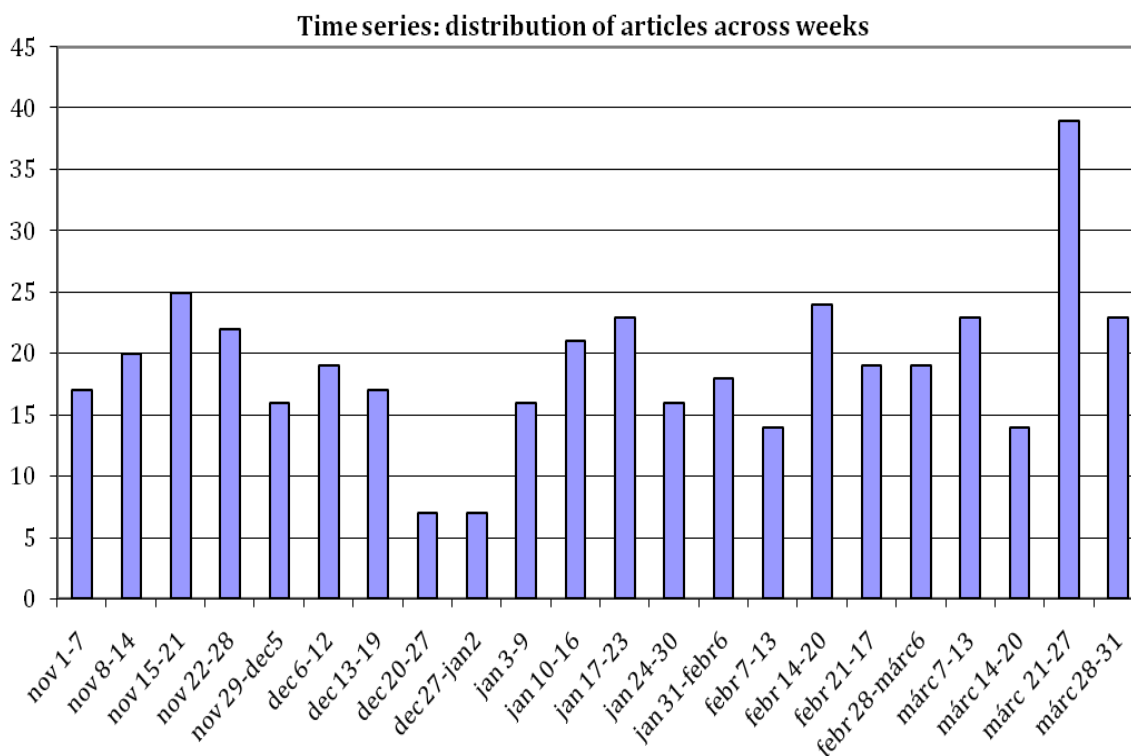
## Further classification of reports on culture



Yet even among these 16 reports there are many uninteresting and brief items about local events, 10 of which were published in the two local papers. Roma culture (apart from celebrities) seldom has any news value for the national media.

### 3.4. Marginalized topics

The coverage of prejudice, discrimination and rights protection has also undergone significant changes in the past two decades. The media presence of these topics steadily increased from the regime change to 1997, which was greatly owing to the thematizing power of the increasingly active Roma civil rights organizations.<sup>35</sup> (Table 3.1) By 2011, however, there was a sharp decline in the significance of these topics in media representations.



Data reveal that these topics were relegated to the background due to the compound effect of several factors:

1. The most significant development concerning media content is the almost complete disappearance of the coverage of **discrimination**. The presence of this topic in the media decreased from 22% of articles in 2000 to 3% in 2011. The reality is just the opposite: Roma are harshly affected by discrimination and unequal treatment in almost all spheres of life, including employment, housing, health care, education, public and private services. According to a survey in 2010, three out of four Roma persons have experienced discrimination because of his/her presumed ethnic background. In contrast to this reality, in the world of the news media only 15 out of 423 news items mentioned

35 Cf. Nationalist message in Mass Media. Media Monitoring Agency – Academia Catavencu, Media Works, MEMO 98, Roma Press Center — 2001.

discrimination, and none of the television news programs did so. Out of these 15 news items only four presented actual cases of discrimination, two of which happened outside Hungary. The rest informed about reports of international organizations and the (disapproving) reactions of the Hungarian government. In sum, we may conclude that discrimination has virtually been deleted from the 'reality' of media. The resulting image coincides with the change of the political and public discourse: the political elite has displaced the discourse on discrimination, and frames phenomena related to the social exclusion of Roma/Gypsies increasingly in terms of blaming the victims: Gypsies being unwilling to work, to keep norms, to adapt, to integrate. This is an alarming and sorrowful development of the public and political discourse that has taken place in the past couple of years.

2. The coverage of prejudice and racism has somewhat increased since 2000. However, this increase may be attributed to the coverage of the conflict in Gyöngyöspata<sup>36</sup> (38%) and of the trial of the racist serial murderers (35%). These two cases are among the most shocking and traumatic events in post-transition Hungary. In both, openly racist groups frightened, physically, mentally and emotionally traumatized (and in the second case killed) Roma people because of their ethnic origin. The affected Roma communities felt that the state was hesitant for some time to intervene firmly. Obviously, the media dedicated a wide coverage to these events, but, less obviously, cases of everyday prejudice and racism were almost non-existent in the world of the news media, despite the fact that the already high level anti-Gypsy attitudes and prejudices increased to a level not seen in a long time in the last 5 years in Hungary. Such distortions – speaking about racisms solely in the framework of racist crime - lead to the perception by the mainstream media's audience that racism and prejudice are attributes of solely the radical extreme right wing powers.
3. The significant decrease (from 16% of the articles in 2000 to 6% in 2011), or the virtual disappearance of the topic of minority rights and right protection, is well demonstrated by the fact such issues were raised mostly by articles that reported on international and domestic organizations' (AI, Helsinki Committee) critiques and the government's disapproval of such criticism. One important reason for this outcome is that a huge number of civil and minority right organizations established after the system change have virtually disappeared since – not only from the media image but also from the Hungarian public scene.

Obviously, these changes cannot be explained by a radical diminishing of everyday practices of negative discrimination. No new legislation taking a firmer stance against discrimination has been passed, and there is no reason to assume that the enforcement of existing legislation has become more effective. Contrarily, surveys reveal that, besides problems of subsistence, unemployment and poor education, it is majority prejudices and negative discrimination that is now regarded as the most critical issues by the Roma population in Hungary. According to a survey Roma people have

36 On the 1st March paramilitary militia of the radical extreme right wing groups arrived at Gyöngyöspata, where they started to march and harass the settlement's Gypsy population by claiming that they will protect the village's population from the increasing 'Gypsy criminality'. The paramilitary groups continued marching for almost a month. They were successful in destabilizing the local political situation to the point that new elections were called and the nominee of the extreme right wing won the seat of the mayor. More on the case can be read in the Guardian (27.01.2012): Poor, abused and second-class: the Roma living in fear in Hungarian village. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jan/27/hungary-roma-living-in-fear>

experienced discrimination,<sup>37</sup> and another recent questionnaire-based research study provide evidence of disadvantaging discrimination concerning more than half of the Roma population – mostly in employment and education.<sup>38</sup>

In earlier research studies, we gave account of the steadily growing media presence of rights protection agencies thematizing discrimination concerning Roma. The majority of organizations has ceased to function since, and the rest of them are unable to publicize widely such cases. At the same time, institutions of the state and Parliament, like the Equal Treatment Authority or the minority ombudsman, apparently cannot find their way towards news media with the largest audience share, either: these two institutions appeared hardly in our sample.

The above also shows how a human rights discourse in the public domain has been displaced by the political elite; it was not *modified* or *overridden*, but simply *annulled*. In addition, a kind of double talk can be observed: one reserved for international communication<sup>39</sup>, reflecting the importance of anti-discrimination efforts, and one destined for national use, in which the term discrimination appears, at most, as part of attempts to deny its presence.

The disappearance of discrimination from publicity involves severe consequences – not only in terms of the media representation of Roma, but also regarding the integration of Roma and their cooperation with the majority. A country where the media is unable to find a way to present stories of social exclusion will sooner or later persuade the society that it has nothing to do with interethnic relations. This kind of representation suggests that Roma are wretched people depending on benefits and deserving a better fate, whose emancipation and social inclusion demands huge sacrifice on the side of by politics and the majority. At worst, Roma are shown as having accommodated to a deviant or criminal lifestyle. According to the resulting worldview emerging from the blend of these two perspectives, there is certainly no reason for the majority to change.

### 3.5. New topics: 'Roma problem' conceived of in European terms

*European affairs* is a novel element in media representations, the career of which is obviously tied to Hungary's EU Presidency and the European Roma strategy announced in this capacity. The two online news portals, the news program of the public service broadcasting television and Magyar Nemzet were outstandingly active with regard to this matter, publishing 16-20% of their reports in the context of EU Presidency. This evidently means that the situation of Roma has been included in the mainstream of public policy communication, even though the articles in the sample mostly amount to short declarations only. Few reports overcome the lack of plasticity of official communications, providing substantial reflections on the strategy.

Besides, a few reports on Roma communities outside Hungary appeared in the news. The present sample, in turn, contains several reports dealing with the situation of Roma in France, Italy, or the

37 Neményi Mária et al. 2010: Az egyenlő bánásmóddal kapcsolatos jogtudatosság növekedésének mértéke – fókuszban a nők, a romák, a fogyatékos és az LMBT emberek [Extent of the increase of legal awareness concerning equal treatment – focusing on women, Roma, the disabled and LGBT people]. [http://www.egyenlobanasmod.hu/tamop/data/MTA\\_1hullam.pdf](http://www.egyenlobanasmod.hu/tamop/data/MTA_1hullam.pdf)

38 Marketing Centrum: Zárótanulmány. Roma társadalom 2010. A kutatás az NFÜ, Új Széchenyi Terv megbízásából készült [Final study. Roma society 2010. Research commissioned by the National Development Agency NDA), New Széchenyi Plan].

39 For instance, in an exclusive issue on Roma of Európai Tükör [European Mirror] published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs [http://www.euvonal.hu/kulugy/upload/M\\_15/rek5/6954/Europai%20Tukor%20marcius.pdf](http://www.euvonal.hu/kulugy/upload/M_15/rek5/6954/Europai%20Tukor%20marcius.pdf), or in an article published by the Finish daily Turun Sanomat, co-authored by László Andor Commissioner of Social and Employment Policies of the EU and Zoltán Balog secretary of the state responsible for social inclusion. [http://balogzoltan.fidesz.hu/index.php?id\\_cikk=13846](http://balogzoltan.fidesz.hu/index.php?id_cikk=13846).

Czech Republic. Writings on Roma communities living abroad constitute another 5% of the sample, which proportion is significant, especially in comparison with previous samples. The problem of the largest minority population has been transferred to an international context by the Hungarian media – that is, by certain papers.<sup>40</sup>

### 3.6. Who are the Roma? – Roma and non-Roma roles

Besides key topics, media representations are characterized by typical actors and roles as well. Only 40% of the actors in reports covering Roma subjects were Roma.<sup>41</sup>

**Table 3.3: Social roles of Roma and non-Roma actors (distribution of roles in percentage of appearances)**

Actor	2011	
	Roma actors	Non-Roma actors
Politician	8%	21%
Lawyer, 'representative of the authority' <sup>43</sup>	1%	11%
Representative of Roma advocacy organization	12%	-
Public service employee	3%	18%
Employee, entrepreneur	2%	2%
Street person, child	25%	11%
Artist, musician, celeb	20%	9%
Criminal (or suspect)	10%	7%
Victim	9%	2%
Independent expert	-	9%
Civil organization, church representative	8%	5%
Other	2%	3%

Data show considerable differences in the typical appearances of Roma and majority actors, reflecting inequalities in access to media and publicity. Whereas members of the majority are characteristically presented in the capacity of decision makers (or supporter of decisions) (such as politicians, public service employees, lawyers), Roma typically appear as the subjects of such decisions: children, street people, housewives. Such an image obviously does not express the social diversity of Roma population. Moreover, there are very few roles Roma are put in that imply social membership at all, and these are almost totally restricted to minority interest representation or music and arts.

It is striking how the representatives of Roma minority self-organizations have disappeared from the media. In 1997 almost one quarter, and in 2000 40% of Roma persons showing in media representations were Roma representatives, politicians or lawyers, which rate has come to below 10% by today. In addition, membership in minority self-governments has become a highly challenged role,

40 Television news programs did not cover issues concerning Roma communities abroad, while on-line news portals and Népszabadság dealt with this topic more extensively, and the rest of papers mentioned it in one or two articles.

41 For more on this problem see the subchapter of the methodological introduction 'How do we know if someone is Roma?'.

42 'representative of the authority' = police, attorney, judge, soldier, (official) civil vigilante, nature conservation guard.

involving white-collar crime and misuse of funds received from tenders or other sources. To be sure, such instances should not be suppressed in the media; the problem, rather, is that Roma organizations have no attached news value in other contexts.

While criminality represents the most notorious topic related to Roma media appearances, 'only' 10% of Roma persons showing in reports are criminals.

### The 'Child' in the context of crime

Another critical trend identified in the research was when news items put Gypsy children in the context of crime. This phenomenon is in parallel with the government's policy to significantly reduce the age limit of punishment, however, images of Gypsy children in such reports directly related these measures to the 'Roma problem'.



#### CAPTIONS:

##### 1st PICTURE

report: Gábor Kállai, camera: Pál György Tóth.  
Electrified his fence;

##### 2nd-3rd PICTURES

Children are suspected;

##### 4th-5th PICTURES

Afraid of the mysterious murderer.

This is a contradiction only at first sight: the disparity indicates the great significance of "insinuations" in media representations: reports concerning crime either refer to "the Roma" of the given settlement (Gyöngyöspata) in general, or draw on suspicions and heresay, as opposed to specific and personified actors. Half of the personified 'perpetrators' (it would be much more appropriate to use the term 'suspects' here) are involved in the criminal trials of the Cozma case and Orbán Kolompár.

Roma professionals or decision makers are hardly seen in such representations: only members of the majority are interviewed as experts.<sup>43</sup> Their absence is all the more conspicuous in American or West European comparison, as having minority professionals express their opinion concerning 'non-minority' issues, too, has become the standard practice of the media there. In Hungary, in turn, Roma professionals are totally missing in news reports, and the featuring of Roma lawyers or employees working in public services is also exceptionally rare.

**Table 3.4: Roma roles in 1997, 2000 and 2011 (in percentage of appearances)**

	2010-11	2000	1997
Politician	8%	17%	16%
Lawyer, 'representative of the authorities'	1%	10%	
Roma self-government	12%	6%	14%
Public service employee	3%	-	-
Employee, entrepreneur	2%	2%	0%
Street person, child, Roma in general	25%	25%	54%
Artist, musician, celeb	20%	11%	5%
Criminal	10%	11%	8%
Victim	9%		-
Independent expert	-	-	-
Civil organization, church	8%	15%	2%

### 3.7. Opportunities of access to media – Roma social roles in media representations

A remarkable modification of the image of Roma in comparison with recent years concerns the strong and steady withdrawal of generalized representations of Roma as a faceless crowd. While such representations massively dominated media representations of Roma in 1997, they have considerably retreated as part of a still ongoing tendency.

Another important change involves the radical disappearance of Roma as politicians or representatives of the law. Such representations amount to less than a tenth of all appearances, although besides arts, politics used to be the only field where Roma were presented as equals to members of the majority in terms of power. This phenomenon may be due to the lessening of the political power of Roma.<sup>44</sup>

43 Even though such lists of Roma experts were provided to the media by a ProgramÖt (program five) campaign.

44 By 2011, the number of Roma has considerably decreased among politicians at a national level as well as among those fulfilling governmental positions

By the same token, the weight of Roma actors undertaking the advocacy of Roma interests have been constantly decreasing since 1997. Back then almost a quarter of Roma actors were representatives of minority self-governments, while their proportion was cut in half by 2011 (often as a result with criminal cases). Even more importantly, representations of civil organizations (although they fell in the same group with churches) radically diminished.

### 3.8. Individualization

According to a survey, a large part of the Hungarian population rejects Roma without having any knowledge about them. It was also proved that rejection was the strongest among people having absolutely no ties with Roma:

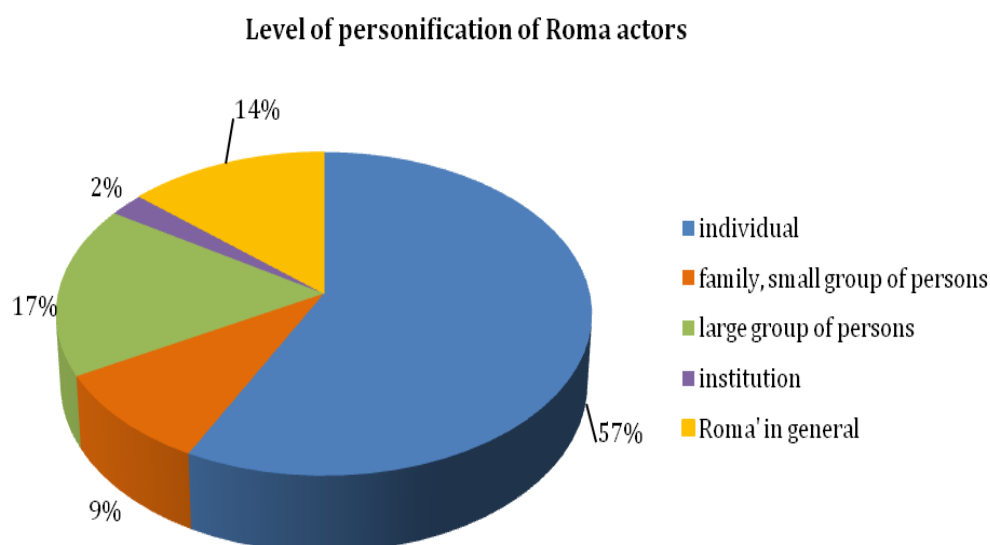
*"at the same time, negative feelings against Roma are strongly affected by the extent of personal relationships with Roma people"*

(Marián 2009)

As opportunities of personal contact are diminishing with increasing segregation in all spheres of life (residence, labour, school), the media has special value in terms of making 'encounters' with this social group (or its members). Thus it is decisive whether Roma are treated in generalized terms, as a faceless crowd, or presented as real persons expressing their opinion. Obviously, it is much easier to identify with persons, while reports operating at the level of generalizations create distance, opening the way towards generalizing interpretations based on stereotypes.

In this sense, the withdrawal of presentations devoid of personification can be considered a positive development: such impersonal images massively dominated media representations of Roma back in 1997 but the situation has steadily improved since. While in 1997 in the majority (60%) of cases Roma were presented in generalized terms, without any specification, currently more than half of the Roma people appearing in the media are shown as persons, while another 9% of representations are about families or small groups.

17% of representations show Roma as a large group (e.g. as 'Roma public employees', 'Roma musicians', the Roma of Gyöngyöspata, etc.), and only 14% of them referred to Roma in general, without any specification ('Hungarian Roma', 'the Roma', 'Roma affairs', 'Roma crime').



It is worth considering whether there are any significant differences in this respect according to the kind of topic under discussion. Personified representations can be found with most frequency in articles dealing with political topics: 70% of actors are shown as persons. Probably, in this context, it is always easy to have a politician or expert speak in the report. Furthermore, articles discussing cultural and local affairs were also unlikely to adopt a generalizing discourse about Roma (5%, 15%, and 6%, respectively).

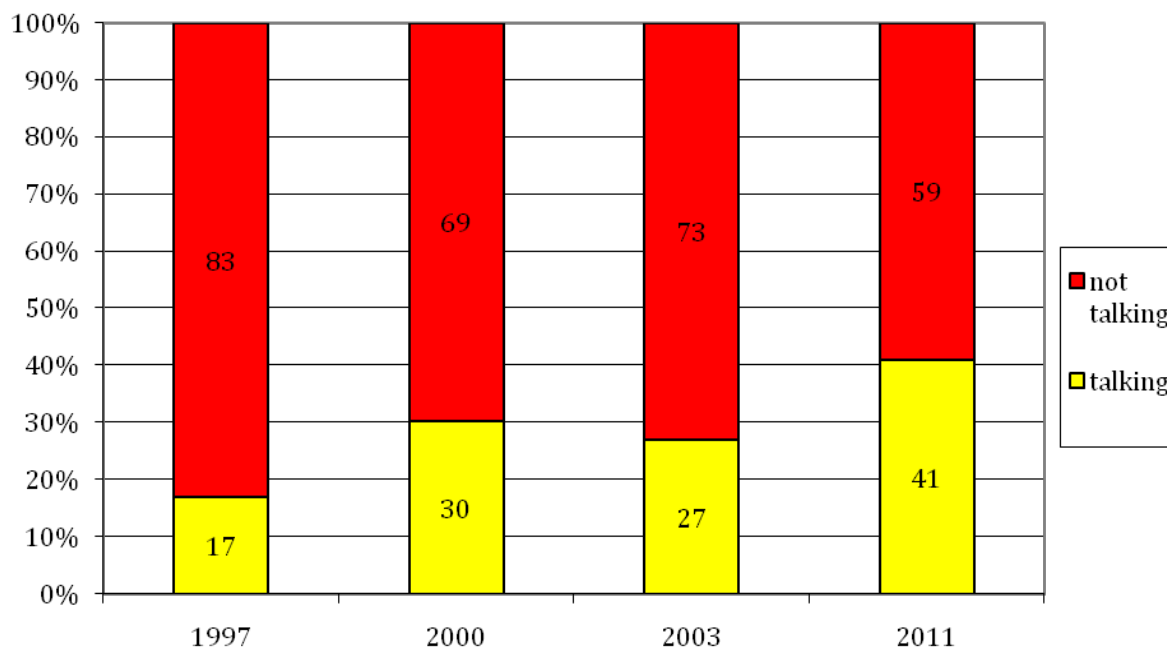
In conclusion, most importantly, the kind of discourse referring to 'Roma in general' has become rare. Reports on Gyöngyöspata form exceptions, as these typically talk about Roma and 'Roma criminality' in general, or, at best, refer to 'Roma of Gyöngyöspata'. 57% of Roma 'actors' presented in these reports form a large group or a population, and only 40% of them are shown as persons.

### 3.9. Immediate voice – opportunities to talk

The other important indicator of individualization is whether concerned persons are given the opportunity to talk directly, whether their opinion is quoted – or merely there is a discussion about the group in question.

15% of the articles qualify as impersonal news reports; in 35% of them Roma persons do not talk, while in 8% their opinion is merely referred to. However, in 40% of reports Roma people talk in person, which represents considerable increase in comparison with earlier data:

**'Voice' of Roma actors 1997-2003**



Cross-categorization is now somewhat more frequent than it had been earlier: there has been an increase in the number of cases where Roma actors are defined not simply by their origins but by reference to some other qualities. Again, there are considerable differences among the media outlets under investigation: every other report talks about Roma without giving them opportunity to talk, or at least quoting their opinion (Magyar Nemzet 51%, M1 58%, HírTv 50%), while on the other political side these attributes qualify media reports only in every fourth cases or even less frequently (Népszabadság 28%, RTL Klub 12%, TV2 Híradó 25%, Blikk 14%). It is still the popular media that provides the most opportunities for cross-categorization, primarily thanks to talent-scouting and celeb programs (it occurs in 64% of the articles published by Blikk), however, 52% of news reports in RTL Klub and 33% of those in TV2 News also make it happen.

### 3.10. Mediatized Roma characteristics

Ideas shared about Roma through media products were coded by our colleagues. The most notorious notions delineating from reports were classified in three groups by means of cluster analysis. The first group includes notions about poverty and living on social benefits; the second group includes notions regarding anti-social behavior and forms of deviance, like aggression, criminality, negligence, and reluctance regarding the acceptance of social norms and social integration; while the third group includes positive connotations, such as talent, or 'good Roma'.

**Table 3.7: Distribution of the occurrence of different kinds of stereotypes by media products (occurrence in the percentage of reports published by the given media outlet)**

	Poverty cluster	Anti-social behavior and deviance cluster	Positive notions cluster
Népszabadság	40	34	2
Magyar Nemzet	25	56	18
Blikk	33	20	51
Index	33	47	29
Origo.hu	10	51	2
Észak Magyarország	46	23	48
Új Dunántúli Napló	33	36	9
RTL Klub	59	12	12
Tv2	18	35	-
MTV1	8	58	-
HírTV	28	50	-
Total	31	37	24

These data show that while Népszabadság, RTL Klub and Észak Magyarország were dominated by accounts concerning poverty and families in need, in other media outlets, like Magyar Nemzet, MTV1, HírTV or Origo.hu negative associations prevailed, such as criminality, aggression, or reluctance to integrate. Blikk supported positive patterns, primarily by presenting the candidates of talent scouting programs. Tv2 and Új Dunántúli Napló were not as keen as the other media outlets to convey any of these notions. There is a remarkable scarcity of positive stereotypes emerging around 'serious' topics, or surfacing in the political press (with the exception of index.hu).

## 4. TELEVISION CHANNELS

For the sake of comparison, the content analysis of television news programs followed the same coding instructions as those used in the analysis of the printed press; its results can be read in the section on content analysis in general. However, there are also specific topics, meaning attributions and typical ways of visual identification calling for a more in-depth analysis.

### 4.1. Television topics

#### Occurrence of different topics in television news programs, 2011

	Television news programs	Entire sample
<b><i>Politics, public policies (of government and self-governments)</i></b>	21%	33%
Roma self-organization, self-governance	7%	12%
Emigration	-	2%
Roma abroad	-	5%
Rights protection, minority rights	3%	6%
<b><i>Poverty, social situation</i></b>	10%	21%
<b><i>Education</i></b>	7%	15%
<b><i>Employment, labor market</i></b>	-	12%
Economy, enterprise	2%	8%
<b><i>Culture, media</i></b>	5%	15%
Health/care	3%	3%
<b><i>Interethnic conflicts, prejudices</i></b>	10%	28%
Crime	40%	37%
Foreign affairs, EU	7%	14%
Natural disaster	12%	4%
Celeb	2%	13%
N	58	423

Treating television and printed press as separate categories, shows that the former was dominated by more sensational and easily digestible themes. Television news programs were relatively more keen on dealing with crime and natural catastrophes (red mud flood and inland inundation), while politics (whether governmental policies concerning minorities or minority politics) or social issues (like poverty or education) were much less discussed in these media outlets. This kind of distribution can be partly explained by the exigencies of genre: it is impossible to discuss large structures and their internal connections in less than a minute. Our investigation covered papers extensively, examining everything appearing on the given surface (including the scarcely published feature stories), while in case of televisions we observed only news reports, corresponding basically to short news items. At the same time, the distinct value of topics may also indicate a widely described trend, especially common among commercial television channels, involving a shift towards easy genres. In comparison to written media, television news programs seldom gave account of local conflicts.

## 4.2. 'Infiltrating' meanings: meaning attribution beyond topics

Visual representations convey further meanings beyond the topics discussed in the reports. Without entering into disputes in art and media theory over the separability of the act of interpretation within processes of reception,<sup>45</sup> it is feasible to assume that various practices of visual framing, selection of meaningful details, or editing may invest images with further implications, the effects of which are not always easy to bring to consciousness. Beyond the various ways of reading television contents (which, drawing on Stuart Hall's classical study<sup>46</sup>, may be classified as dominant, partially or selectively accepting, that is negotiated, or oppositional), there are images having the propensity to mobilize 'prior knowledge' or even stereotypes without leaving time to challenge them. (It is by no means a coincidence that most of these procedures are subjects of professional discussion and regulated among ethical issues.) Meanings insinuated by images are apt to speak out explicitly forbidden ideas. What follows is an analysis of some of the procedures used for this purpose.

## 4.3. Cases of visual and/or associative identification

### 4.3.1. Cross-categorization

Difficulties of identifying actors as Roma, mentioned in the introduction, are especially acute when the given person appears in a role that does not match the stereotypes Roma are associated with. This is the case with materials generally used in tolerance programs, where a minority person is shown in a non-minority role. To put it simply: this kind of 'spontaneous' screen presence implies that the given group is integrated, that Roma are part of our everyday life; by contrast, given extensive stereotyping, when ethnicity is made explicit all the time, the group is more likely to appear as a problem.

At the same time, it would be unwise to assume that interpretations by the receiving party rely on unambiguous decisions. An illustrative example is provided by a recent experiment related to advertisement. A research study conducted by István Siklaki<sup>47</sup> involved the focus group testing of advertisement materials in which Roma and non-Roma actors advertized the same articles, using the same visual framing. One of the research outcomes was that when Roma people were presented in ways that contradicted stereotypes, they were sometimes identified not as Roma but as members of some other social group, like Mediterranean people.

In fact, earlier media research related to Roma (Vicsek 1996<sup>48</sup>; Bernáth—Messing 1998) showed a very low rate of the so-called cross-categorization index. Among the Roma actors coded in Lilla Vicsek's research, there was only one who carried out non-minority tasks in his job (a football player). Other content analyses revealed that Roma mostly appear as a 'problem': actors generally do not have any social roles, preventing their representation in any other capacities but members of a minority. The present research shows Roma without any further social roles in one third of

45 A summary of such disputes is provided, for instance, by Péter György, 1996.

46 Stuart Hall, 1980.

47 These ideas are drawn from a lecture by István Siklaki: Sztereotípiák, reklám, identitás [Stereotypes, advertisement and identity] [www.socio.mta.hu/dynamic/beszedmodok\\_2009nov26\\_siklakii\\_eloadas.ppt](http://www.socio.mta.hu/dynamic/beszedmodok_2009nov26_siklakii_eloadas.ppt)

48 Lilla Vicsek, 1996.

cases, 14% of reports using them as 'illustrations of Roma people'. Nevertheless, there has been an increase in cross-categorizing presentations in the papers. For example, Észak-Magyarország occasionally had Roma people speak in 'we asked the people in the street' type of sections, and this trend is obviously reinforced by Roma stars of talent scouting television programs, attracting great publicity on television as well as in the tabloid sections of papers. In such context, they do not appear as illustrations of the 'Roma problem' anymore.

A simple way of cross-categorization is visual identification, where it is needless to say that this or that actor is actually Roma.

Televisions present Roma frequently in this way, and a part of these images utterly contradict widely shared visual or social role stereotypes. Some situations were brought by life (for instance in reporting on a story<sup>49</sup> when leukemia was first cured using stem-cell treatment in Hungary, the mother of the patient giving the interview was /most probably/ perceived as Roma by the majority of viewers). In other cases, Roma actors made their way into 'ethnically neutral' programs by way of selection. Reports on the victims of the red-mud catastrophe that occurred during this period, attracting great international publicity, often showed Roma children and parents, not only in cutaways but also among interviewees.<sup>50</sup> In these situations the reporter obviously could have found non-Roma interviewees as well. In still other cases it seems like a conscious choice was made: for instance, an archive recording used in a report featuring the popular television character<sup>51</sup>, while instructing Roma youngsters. Or another example, the presentation of a Roma person as an epileptic patient who talks about a new surgery procedure in a hospital ward<sup>52</sup> naturalizes the sense that Roma may be 'one of us'.

#### CROSS-CATEGORIZATION: ROMA POLICE SPOKESPERSON AND FLOOD VICTIMS



Considering the multiplication of representations of this kind, it seems like the Roma community has good chances to appear in the television as a community living with us. Given that it is not at all likely that editorials consisting in mostly (or only) middle-class journalists maintain intense connections

49 TV2 19.12.2010.

50 E.g. HírTV 20.12.2010; RTL Klub 04.11.2010. In the latter case, this conscious selection did not work two weeks later (16.11.2010): when discussing the same topic in the same news program, Roma children appeared only in cutaways in connection with a camp, and this time they were not interviewed.

51 RTL Klub 16.02.2011.

52 RTL Klub 08.03.2011.

with minority communities, it seems like conscious decisions are in the background. (This kind of acknowledgment is behind policies adopted by large and recognized media corporations like the BBC that established an institutional unit called Diversity Database, responsible for providing editorials with stories and characters to be interviewed, which are interesting for one or another reason – and, at the same time, come from Pakistan, the Caribbean communities, etc. Civil programs initiated in Hungary with the same purpose have not been very successful, and we could not identify any organized activities of this kind at individual media outlets, either.)

#### *4.3.2. Practices of visual insinuation and manipulation: visual stereotypes*

At the same time, visual and associative identifications also include cases of manipulation and insinuation. Some of the visual topoi mobilizing our existing knowledge, including stereotypes, are deeply ingrained notions held for ages, while others just come, get reinforced and then go, offering their place to newcomers. For instance, a visual topos emerging in recent years is the brawny Roma man or teenager, a visual stereotype that is often interpreted as a self-representation of Roma (in fact, many people have posted such self-portraits on Facebook), and examples are even assembled diligently by some internet portals (so that, due to cross-referencing, they are among the first hits of Google's image browser).

#### **Visual stereotypes in cutaways (in percentage of all television reports using cutaways):**

Excise goods, great affluence	7%
Gaping Roma crowd	11%
Animals	13%
Neglected outfit	7%
Threatening men	7%

Television materials in the sample seldom or never employ visual stereotypes that were popular before, like images of jewelry or excise goods indicating flagrant affluence.

#### *4.3.3. Representation of Roma community: the gaping crowd*

There are also easily noticeable visual topoi that not only convey strong additional meanings but are also serviceable for identifying the ethnic character of the story. These include the visual stereotype of the **gaping and idle Roma crowd**, appearing in cutaways at a distance. In these images voices are unheard and facial expressions are indiscernible.

55 out of the 58 coded reports included cutaways,<sup>53</sup> 18 of which displayed Roma (or partially Roma) crowds. Almost half of these (8) presented Roma in such a way.

Currently, this is the most prevalent topos of the Roma community in television cutaways.

<sup>53</sup> 3 reports were actually news releases using still images, while the anchorperson made an announcement.

## THE MOST COMMON VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF THE COMMUNITY



Although detailed studies are not available to support this assumption, we think that such images, recalling the conventional elements of tourist movies shot in the third world, would be normally cut out in any other circumstances (for instance, when showing a crowd gathered at an accident scene).

Footages of this kind – especially those showing dirt roads, or dilapidated houses of Roma colonies in the background – often support the identification of Roma actors.

## VISUAL INSINUATION



CAPTIONS: 1st; 2nd; 3rd PICTURES: Afraid of the mysterious murderer

The crudest example for this kind of practice was a report<sup>54</sup> shot in Kovácsvágás, a village densely populated by Roma located in a crisis zone, about the violent death of an elderly woman. At the time of shooting, the perpetrators were unknown to the police; in the report a relative of the victim makes an insinuating remark: there is all kinds of talk going on here. Meanwhile, a cutaway footage sneaks in, showing the first dilapidated house of the local Roma colony (counterpointed by the neat building of

54 TV2 13.03.2011

the victim, which is surrounded by a fence), and then we see pictures of children taken from behind, as they are walking down the road leading to the Roma colony, carrying dinner cans. Fortunately, this is an extreme example of grossly manipulative procedures in the sample. In the case of people gaping at the location of filming, the footages were at least shot at the filming location, while the cutaways used in the report on Kovácsvágás are not in the least related to the story: they might as well have been shot, for that matter, in the hall of the local mayor.

#### 4.3.4. Emotional and conceptual framing

A recent large-scale qualitative analysis<sup>55</sup> of the representation of Roma in television news programs<sup>56</sup>, commissioned by the National Radio and Television Commission (NRTC), examined news reports on the Cozma murder case and the attacks at Tatárszentgyörgy<sup>57</sup>. Although this study analyzed practices related to two specific cases as opposed to media representations of Roma in general, many of its conclusions are important for us.

Thus noteworthy conclusions were drawn regarding procedures of emotional dramatizing used in the media. According to the study,

*“the murder case at Veszprém, as well as other criminal cases related to Roma in Hungary, were highly suitable for dramatizing these acts and presenting them in an emotional frame. Topics of this kind included the memorial service and funeral of Marian Cozma, on the one hand, and the brutality of the criminal act and descriptions of the ‘Roma mafia at Enying’, on the other. These representations reinforced a kind of attitude of recipients referred to as ‘mindless reading’, i.e. automatic gut reactions founded in the prejudices of viewers, which makes it impossible to elaborate information in a rational manner.”*

This kind of emotional framing was almost missing in representations of the murder case at Tatárszentgyörgy:

*“Expressions of mourning were represented in strikingly different manners in the two cases in the materials of all program providers but the Hungarian Public Television. Accounts of mourning reactions all over the country and the grief of the sportman’s family were abounding (and frequently repeated) in reports on the murder of Marian Cozma. Besides the tragedy, this approach was justified by prominence<sup>58</sup>, a factor considered to support news value by professional literature. By contrast, representations of mourning reactions were strikingly scarce in the studied reports about the dual murder at Tatárszentgyörgy, even though, in theory, such reactions can be considered natural and are commonly shown when a child is murdered.”*

55 ORTT: A magyarországi televíziós hírműsorok romaképe a konfliktusok tükrében [NRTC: Representations of Roma in Hungarian television news programs as reflected by conflicts] [http://www.ortt.hu/elemzesek/21/1271850273magyarorszagitelevizioshirmusorokromakepe\\_20100421.pdf](http://www.ortt.hu/elemzesek/21/1271850273magyarorszagitelevizioshirmusorokromakepe_20100421.pdf)

56 News programs on Duna TV, Echo TV, Hír TV [News TV], Magyar ATV, MTV, RTL Klub and TV2 were analyzed twice a week (from 8 to 14 February and from 23 February to 1 March, 2009).

57 In the Cozma murder case Roma individuals were accused of the killing, while in Tatárszentgyörgy Roma were shot dead (a child and his father) by a group of racist serial killers. For a description of the case see the first framed summary on page 4.

58 The deceased person as well as a part of mourners were well-known sports people and public figures.

Instances of emotional framing also occurred in our sample: examples include infotainment materials<sup>59</sup> presenting the situation of Roma families in Szabolcs following inland inundation, which made use of powerful images and the human drama. These recordings (seldom shown in news programs) employed various editorial, narrative and visual strategies much rather suitable for emotional identification than for bringing forth problems and discussing solutions.<sup>60</sup>



An inverse example concerns a short report<sup>61</sup> using strongly manipulative emotional framing in telling about a person's death caused by electric shock baton in police custody. It is emphasized twice in the report that the person had been imprisoned for almost 30 years – a fact that hardly contributes anything to understanding circumstances leading to his death, but certainly suitable for suppressing nascent feelings of solidarity.



59 TV2 25.11.2010, and RTL Klub 28.03.2011.

60 Ferenc Hammer provides a thorough analysis of representations of poverty in Ferenc Hammer: Közbeszéd és társadalmi igazságosság [Public discourse and social justice]. Médiakutató, Spring 2004.

61 TV2 27.12.2011

During the narration, the camera zooms in on people gathered on the snowy street, scanning on a simple cubic building and then a messy bedroom (that either originally looked like that, or was left this way by the police after perquisition – it is up to the viewer to decide one way or the other).

#### 4.3.5. Editorial framing

Something like this is going on in contextual meaning attribution, where editors provide an interpretative frame by showing two reports with totally different contents and significance one after the other. A case in point was the editorial decision of a television channel to air a report on fiestas organized after release from jail<sup>62</sup> preceding a news item accounting of events that took place in Gyöngyöspata.<sup>63</sup>

The same editorial practice is described in the NRTC study with reference to the broadcasting of Hír TV on 8 February, in which the Cozma murder case was presented side by side with a report on violent crimes committed in Heves county (introduced like this: "Roma reject charges"), and then followed by an announcement about how "*witnesses of usury cases in Ormánság were threatened with death*".

Even without referring explicitly to Roma in this latter news release, it is obvious what constitutes the link between the stories, and how they reinforce one another. As the NRTC study has put it:

*"the context of the preceding bundle of news and the fact that the so-called usury cases were previously presented to the Hungarian public as being tied to certain groups of Roma clearly implied that this was also about a form of 'Roma crime'".*

An even cruder manifestation of the same editorial concept can be found in a news program of Hír TV broadcasted on 25 February 2009. Here the association with 'Roma crime' is made in connection with the murder case at Tatárszentgyörgy (i.e. where the victims were Roma):

1. Tatárszentgyörgy: the national police chief, at first gingerly, sets forth assumptions regarding potential links between the attacks committed against Roma people.
2. Criticism of government activities related to public safety. This is followed by two announcements concerning cases violent crime.
3. "*A Roma family of six attacked the police in the parking lot of the Tesco at Siófok.*"
4. "*Border guards were attacked by a young man near Tiszabura, a settlement with a mostly Roma population.*"<sup>64</sup>

#### 4.4. Themes, motifs

##### 4.4.1. Narrative motif

It is a commonplace in social psychology that selective perception has a significant role in generating and maintaining stereotypes: as revealed by a great many experiments, the value of certain stories and motives, compatible with our knowledge, is augmented by perception, while contradictory ones

62 HírTV 06.03.2011

63 For a description of the case see framed summary on page 4.

64 Quoted in: ORTT [NRTC]

are often suppressed already at this stage. In many respects, the reception of media contents, and even editorial decisions regarding the news value of specific events, are determined by such processes. When selecting materials, editors are influenced by existing motifs, i.e. pieces of knowledge that invest certain events with greater news value than they had before. In such cases 'contextual news value' is also enforced: for instance, the topic of **aggression following road accidents** in the period after the Olaszliszka incident.<sup>65</sup>

#### OLASZLISZKA RELOADED: BERCEL



CAPTION: 1st PICTURE: Lynching atmosphere after accident

The sample contains two related instances. One concerns the sledge accident at Bercel, where children running out the road with their sledge resulted in serious injuries. The statement made by the victim's father reveals how a part of media reports framed the story: "you need not make comparisons with Olaszliszka", he said. The other news story<sup>66</sup> involves a police interference at Ibrány; the involvement of Roma is disclosed by the narrator, who informs the viewer: „besides the police, civil guards and minority representatives were trying to calm people down.”

In many respects, Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county<sup>67</sup> itself has become a topos as the '**location of crisis and depressing poverty**'. Cutaways in materials dealing with poverty or social political interventions tend to be shot in this area with much more likelihood than others, or how crime cases related to poverty get into the news more readily as long as they take place in Borsod.

#### 4.4.2. Linguistic topoi: linguistic stereotypes and buzzwords

##### 'Kinship' as identifier

In recent years 'kinship' has had an exceptional career among metaphores used in identifying Roma. Irrespective of the actual degree of kinship, this label has become functional in describing relevant conflicts<sup>68</sup> mobilizing several dozens of people, from mass fights to traffic accidents as well.

65 A care driver was lynched after he run over a Roma girl in Olaszliszka in 2006. The girl was not injured, but the family and kinship, who saw the accident thought she got serious injuries and stratet to beat the driver, who died in front of his children sitting in the car. This tragic incident marked a turning point in interethnec relations and the public opinion.

66 Both cases were drawn from M1 (broadcastings on 05.12.2010 and 09.12.2010); within four days, there were 2 cases of this kind receiving great publicity.

67 This county in northeastern Hungary is one of the largest crisis zones, with high rates of Roma population and ghettoizing settlements.

68 Like an incident taking place in Miskolc, when – as related by boon.hu – „at least 25 people rushed out from the houses” to attack a passanger who had disgraced two teenagers on the bus for their noisy gum chewing. <http://www.boon.hu/miskolc/csendre-intette-a-gyerekeket-a-rokonok-elt246rtek-az-orrat/news-20110308-03085918>

In the period under investigation, the broadcasting of HírTV on 6 March concerning legal modifications planned by the government related to so-called 'after release parties' employs the following narration: **"Young and elder members of the broader kinship** gather [on such occasions], **and music plays on into the early hours.** (...) in some parts of the country, such parties are held almost every day, therefore (!) participants could be imprisoned, just like when breaking rules protecting property rights." Besides the interesting causal explanation (suggesting that penalties depend on the extent to which the same act is committed in the environment), the report draws on expressive terminology, reinforced by cutaways: pictures of people with obscured faces waiting in front of what appears to be a prison building, only one of them – the sharp figure of an elderly man wearing a hat, who gives a hug to the released person – standing out from the crowd; expensive cars, and chicken soup cooking in a cauldron.



Editorial bias is revealed by the ambiguities of the report. Obviously, it is not just the family that may wait on a freshly released person; references to kinship here support the identification of actors as Roma. The selection of footages is also manipulative: had such images of wealth characterized after release parties, the statement that "in some parts of the country, parties like that are held almost every day" would certainly not hold true. In addition, this footage is supposed to be only one of many circulating on the Internet (the narrator refers to an increasing number of recordings available on the Internet, adding that video crews can be hired to make them). Thus the editor certainly had several recordings to choose from, yet he picked one showing expensive cars and rich chicken soup as emblematic elements. It is underscored in the report that: *"in some places these events have acquired a status comparable to that of name-days or weddings"*.

This report of HírTV was successful in presenting Roma as worthless criminals – as evidenced by the comments that can be read on pages publishing the recording. It is not our business to analyse these comments, and we know that opinions expressed in them are not at all representative of the entire Hungarian population. Yet it remains a fact that comments appearing on three, fairly different, portals<sup>69</sup> in connection with the recording were dominated by remarks referring to Roma and the wealth of the people showing in the report. Identification as Roma and outrage over wealth were also consensual among commenters who, responding to each other's inputs, made ironic remarks on survival crime and living on benefits, often associating the event in question with Roma culture.

As compared with this analysis, our sample included consciously positive representations as well as visual practices that would be instructive in analyzing professional flaws. In some of the materials, it would be difficult to point out or prove intentionality, yet it can be hardly assumed that the practices employed in producing them have emerged from a sheer lack of information.

69 Among the first few hits, there is a portal providing free access to comments, which cannot be characterized by explicit racism: Index, [http://forum.index.hu/Article/showArticle?na\\_start=0&na\\_step=30&t=9207539&na\\_order](http://forum.index.hu/Article/showArticle?na_start=0&na_step=30&t=9207539&na_order); a news; another one called Hírfal (news wall) collecting news stories [http://belfold.hirfal.hu/a\\_szabadulobulik\\_miatt\\_szigoritanak\\_a\\_torvenyt-video-3856182.html](http://belfold.hirfal.hu/a_szabadulobulik_miatt_szigoritanak_a_torvenyt-video-3856182.html); and also [http://subba.blog.hu/2011/03/07/lol\\_a\\_szabadulobulik\\_miatt\\_szigoritanak\\_a\\_torvenyt](http://subba.blog.hu/2011/03/07/lol_a_szabadulobulik_miatt_szigoritanak_a_torvenyt).

## 5. IN PLACE OF CONCLUSION

Our data reveal an unprecedented degree of criminality, commonly employed practices of insinuation and implication, and a host of ready-made truths in the media representations of Roma. Previously widely reported cases of discrimination, in turn, have disappeared from the scene (although discrimination is still extensively experienced by Roma); in this new 'reality', prejudices are supposed to be characteristic only on for the extreme right. Poverty as a dominant topic has been replaced by instances of norm infringement, and in adopting to a general tendency of tabloidization, Roma culture appears primarily as manifested in the miscellaneous affairs of celebrities, who happen to be Roma.

Trends in media representations expose a host of dilemmas impossible to reveal by means of content analysis. To be sure, questions may be raised without engaging in further research, however, responses to the current discursive and media environment can be devised only by means of a thorough analysis and broad debate. How to respond, for instance, to the challenge that, becoming considered more or less a swear word, *political correctness* has declined and, as opposed to opening up the way to honest discussions devoid of taboos, this has resulted in the deterioration of opportunities of inter-ethnic dialogue, of the media access of Roma and of their participation in discourse of which they are subjects.

The prevailing tendency appears to drive towards the domination of extreme right wing rhetoric, the development of a kind of 'mainstream' public discourse that is equally prejudiced and based on generalizations and stigmatizing procedures, and the almost total withdrawal of discourses on human rights. The current discursive environment promotes the deterioration, rather than the improvement, of communication opportunities supporting dignity and equality (not to mention other important assets, such as solidarity), or the representation of the diversity of Roma views. Norms prescribing that arguments should be grounded in facts, numbers or other data, and refined when necessary, so that nobody thinks they can get away with *en bloc* statements regarding Roma, can hardly be enforced in this situation. Is not it possible that this kind of correctness has actually never (that is, not even when it was practiced) been interpreted by a great part of Hungarian society as anything but – to put it very simply – a repressing instance it could not identify with, while being equally unable to find a kind of correct way of speech that keeps reflecting on common stereotypes?

Yet is it possible at all to start a dialogue where relevant forums have diminished more than ever, and the public sphere, including that of Roma, has broken down into awfully parallel or often even mutually exclusive pieces of truth? Especially when this communicative space has become so segmented, turning into an 'insiders', or 'tribal', public sphere, that it thwarts inter-group communication?

While the popularity of online media provides opportunities of self-expression and self-organizing to the Roma population as well, the role of filters ensuring that certain explicitly racist arguments are not published in the mainstream media has gradually diminished, with the shifting of preferred ways of information acquisition towards segmented community media. This kind of controlling mechanism was not about intentionally suppressing unwanted contents, but based on enforcing age-old professional codes of practice grounded in fundamental principles such as 'the other party should be heard, too', or 'statements should be supported by evidence'. This is an especially challenging shift for marginalized and stigmatized groups like the Roma minority, as it is not only internal communication and the creation of forums within the community that these groups are bound to realize; in fact, it is

a fundamental prerequisite of social recognition that such groups have the capacity to shape a much broader scope of contents they are concerned by. Well, who, how many of us, would be interested today in a Roma Internet portal?

Such questions are never discussed, remaining outside even internal public spheres easy to identify and address, like that of journalists or professionals. At the same time, research has shown for many years that elements apparently determined only by economic factors, like the daily routines practiced by editorial departments or their sources of information, cause severe distortions and biases. Exclusive reliance on press conference and one-way communication, widespread practices of (re)publishing ready-made materials, avoidance of fact-finding, omission of evidence or data to support statements, notorious failure to let concerned people express their views – these problems cause a lot of woe and worry regarding the lack of time and money. However, there is more to such concerns than the deterioration of quality. It is not the given media outlet that suffers the greatest damage due to practices that fail to invest sufficient energy in establishing living contacts and providing the staff with evidence-based information regarding the problems communities are coping with. The real victims are the people concerned by this kind of talk, whose subjugation is reproduced by a kind of media representing them in carefully selected roles, who are often doomed to silence, and whose stigmatization is conveyed without being balanced with any counterpoints.

It is high time to deal with all these questions.

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