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Forced settlement of the Roma in Poland – the 60th anniversary of the 1964 ban on wandering

**Przymusowe osiedlenie Romów w Polsce –
w 60. rocznicę zakazu wędrowki z 1964 roku**

Abstract

The history of the Roma in post-war Poland under the communist rule shows the utopian nature of the previous ideologically driven system. The state authorities of the Polish People's Republic sought to achieve the goal of a homogeneous society in which there was no place for ethnic minorities or cultural differences. Set against the background of the processes of ethnic homogenisation of the Polish society, Romani people were a highly distinct group, standing out from the rest of society. They never hid their identity. The state's pursuit of its vision of a homogeneous socialist society left its mark on the lives of Romani people, who were denied the right to wander by the authorities in 1964. Ultimately, the consequence of the forced settlement was that instead of the opening up to the changing reality expected by the authorities, Romani people were faced with the need to protect their own cultural identity from external threats. The collapse of the communist system in Poland and the political changes initiated in 1989 put an end to the forced assimilation of Romani people. In the new political reality, the myth of a unified ethnic structure of the Polish state was abandoned.

Keywords: The Roma in Poland, forced settlement, assimilation

Streszczenie

Dzieje Romów w powojennej Polsce pod rządami komunistów pokazują utopijność poprzedniego systemu podporządkowanego ideologii. Władze państwowe PRL dążyły do zrealizowania postulatu jednolitego społeczeństwa, w którym brak było miejsca dla mniejszości etnicznych i odmienności kulturowych. Na tle procesów homogenizacji etnicznej społeczeństwa, Romowie stanowili grupę mocno odrębną, odstającą od reszty społeczeństwa. Nigdy nie ukrywali swojej tożsamości. Realizacja przez państwo wizji jednorodnego społeczeństwa socjalistycznego odcisnęła się piętnem na życiu Romów, którym władze odmówiły w 1964 r. prawa do wędrowki.

Ostatecznie konsekwencją przymusowego osiedlenia było to, że Romowie zamiast oczekiwanego przez władze otwarcia na zmieniającą się rzeczywistość, stanęli przed koniecznością ochrony własnej tożsamości kulturowej przed zagrożeniami płynącymi z zewnątrz. Upadek systemu komunistycznego w Polsce i zapoczątkowane w 1989 r. przemiany polityczne położyły kres przymusowej asymilacji Romów. W nowej rzeczywistości politycznej porzucono mit jednolitej struktury etnicznej państwa.

Słowa kluczowe: Romowie w Polsce, przymusowe osiedlenie, asymilacja

Introduction¹

The Romani people have become a permanent part of Poland's cultural landscape. They have always been associated with a nomadic lifestyle – an important aspect of their identity. In fact, it was wandering that provided the Roma with economic stability and the opportunity to earn a living². In Poland, the Roma are an internally diverse and relatively small group. According to the 2021 National Census, there are 11,800 Romani people in Poland³. They are divided into a number of groups differing in language, degree of attachment to tradition and wealth.

Among Poland's other national and ethnic minorities, the Roma are undoubtedly the most exotic and intriguing group, yet the least familiar to those around them. This is probably due to the fact that the world of the Roma is hardly accessible to those outside their circle. As Jerzy Ficowski said, there are three common preconceptions about the Roma, who are perceived as “demonic”, “criminal” and “sentimental”. As for the “demonic” image, the Roma are seen as individuals endowed with supernatural powers, which instils a sense of superstitious fear in people. Next, the “criminal” image means they are seen as individuals who are particularly prone to breaking the law. Last but not least, the “sentimental” image leads to the Roma being treated as people who lead a life of love for music and wandering. Ficowski points out that these perceptions of the Romani people are usually combined with a complete ignorance of their true nature⁴.

The change of the political system in Poland after the Second World War affected all areas of the country's social and economic life. When Poland was brought under the influence of the Soviet Union, the Marxist conception of the state was adopted. The concept of a socialist personal model that was uniform

¹ The article is a synthesis of two monographs written by the author: Piotr J. Krzyżanowski, *Między wędrówką a osiedleniem. Cyganie w Polsce w latach 1945-1964*, Gorzów Wielkopolski 2017, pp. 374 and Piotr J. Krzyżanowski, *Między przymusowym osiedleniem a presją asymilacyjną państwa Cyganie/Romowie w Polsce w latach 1964-1989*, Gorzów Wielkopolski 2021, pp. 444. Together, these publications present the history of the Roma in the communist reality of Poland in the years 1945-1989.

² E. Dębicki, *Wczorajszy ogień. Ptak umarłych II*, Gorzów Wielkopolski, Stowarzyszenie Twórców i Przyjaciół Kultury Cygańskiej im. Papuszy w Gorzowie Wielkopolskim 2012, pp. 5-94.

³ Główny Urząd Statystyczny (GUS) [Central Statistical Office]. Narodowy Spis Ludności i Mieszkań 2021 [The National Population and Housing Census 2021]. Wstępne wyniki NSP 2021 w zakresie struktury narodowo-etnicznej oraz języka kontaktów domowych, 11.04.2023.

⁴ J. Ficowski, *Cyganie w Polsce. Dzieje i obyczaje*, Warszawa 1989, p. 8.

for all citizens required the state authorities to take measures to make it a reality. They did so in a planned manner.

The state promoted homogeneity and uniformity in the identity of citizens, who were to be indistinguishable from one another. Any deviation from the uniform identity of the citizens was of concern to the authorities. Under such conditions, the nomadic lifestyle of the Roma was considered by the ruling communists to be an anachronism. The state authorities felt that the Roma lifestyle clearly differed from that of the rest of society. By their mobility, the Roma violated the rules set out by the state, such as the obligation to register, the obligation to go to school or the obligation to work.

As citizens of the Polish People's Republic, the Roma not only had to integrate with the rest of society, but also – like all citizens – they had to accept and comply with the behavioural standards of the socialist state, which differed from those known and observed so far. The measures taken by the state authorities were to settle the nomadic Roma and give them permanent employment, referred to as their *productivization*. What characterised the measures taken by the authorities was their conformity to political objectives.

This article aims to present the different stages of the state authorities' efforts to forcibly settle the Roma and assimilate them. The time frame covered in the article is 1945-1989, i.e. the period of the communist rule in Poland. During this period, the state authorities' assimilation measures towards the Roma were top-down and were carried out in different ways, depending on the general situation prevailing in Poland.

In 1952, the state authorities launched a campaign to force the Roma in Poland to settle down. The state authorities wanted to achieve their goal through a wide range of coercive measures. The legal coercion used by the authorities sometimes lost its legal character (which would be in line with positive law) and involved violence and psychological terror⁵.

The authorities' actions against the Romani people reached their climax in 1964, when Romani caravans were forbidden to wander and any attempt to do so was severely punished. The actions of the state authorities were centrally planned, had a long-term character and did not produce the expected effects until the mid-1970s.

⁵ P. J. Krzyżanowski, *Między wędrówką a osiedleniem...*, op. cit., pp. 177-193.

In the 1970s, the Roma were getting used to settled life, familiarising themselves with the rules, and learning first-hand the behaviour patterns of the Polish majority. During the last decade of the Polish People's Republic, the ruling communists did not particularly interfere in the internal affairs of the Romani people. The introduction of martial law in Poland in December 1981 was not a watershed moment for the Roma either. The state authorities did not see the Roma as a danger; nor did they expect them to be politically active or able to hide opposition activists in their midst. Moreover, Poland's difficult social, political and economic situation, as well as a series of strikes, meant that the Romani issue had to be pushed into the background. However, until the collapse of the communist system in Poland in 1989, the state authorities controlled all forms of Romani activity, such as the activities of Romani associations and song and dance ensembles. The article is a synthesis of two monographs. It is published on the 60th anniversary of the 1964 ban, imposed by the state authorities of the People's Republic of Poland, which denied the Roma the right to wander.

1. From wandering to forced settlement

The years 1945-1948 marked a period of intensive wandering by Romani caravans in Poland. Wandering Roma blended into the throngs of people travelling on Polish roads at the time. They joined the multitude of travellers moving and crossing the country in the aftermath of WWII and the altered borders. Many of them arrived in post-war Poland from the eastern areas of the Second Polish Republic. They tried to live their lives as before, travelling in caravans from place to place and engaging in their traditional activities: music-making, blacksmithing, horse trading and fortune-telling⁶.

The freedom to roam encouraged family reunification and allowed them to recover from the trauma of the years of extermination during the Second World War. In the first post-war years, the main routes travelled by wandering Romani people were located in the western and northern parts of Poland. One of the main routes passed through the following cities: Wrocław, Zielona Góra, Gorzów Wielkopolski, Stargard, and Szczecin⁷.

⁶ J. Ficowski, *Cyganie na polskich drogach*, Kraków-Wrocław, pp. 199-218.

⁷ P. J. Krzyżanowski, *Romowie na Ziemi Lubuskiej w polityce bezpieczeństwa wewnętrznego państwa w latach 1945-1989*, [in:] *Kwestia romska w kontekście bezpieczeństwa wewnętrznego*, eds. E. Szyszlak, T. Szyszlak, Wrocław 2013, pp. 41-42.

Sometimes local authorities were concerned with the arrival of larger Romani groups. In October 1945, for example, large groups of wandering Romani people arrived in the Poznań Voivodship. The situation was so serious that it raised concern of the then Poznań Voivode, who, in a circular of 21 October 1945, instructed his subordinate district governors, town mayors and regional plenipotentiaries to take action together with the security authorities to do away with the wandering Roma camps. The Roma were to be forced to work and individuals who resisted were to be placed in barracks. Central government in Warsaw, however, did not agree with the Poznań Voivode, considered his orders to have no legal basis, and eventually revoked the circular⁸.

It must be noted that the first months after the end of WWII were not a safe time for the country's inhabitants, including the Roma. For instance, on the night of 14 to 15 June 1945, a group of five armed people attacked a Romani camp pitched in a forest near the village of Skowierzynek (Celejów commune, Puławy county). The Romani people were robbed of one horse and a musical instrument (a two-row accordion). After the robbery the perpetrators left in an unknown direction⁹.

The communist authorities did not seem to notice that the Roma community in Poland is not homogeneous, but is divided into different groups and families. The members of the Polish Roma group [Polska Roma] were the most attached to the tradition of wandering in caravans¹⁰. However, what mattered most to the state authorities was the division of the Roma into those who wandered and those who had a settled lifestyle. The latter included the Romani people from the Bergitka Roma group (the mountain Roma), who had not wandered for a long time and lived mainly in southern Poland.

Until 1952, the authorities did not interfere with the life of wandering Romani people, focusing their attention on the mountain Roma. In the first place, the authorities attempted to reduce the number of members of the largest group, which resided in the Kraków Voivodship. They were to be resettled to the so-called Recovered Territories and employed at the State Agricultural Farms (PGR).

⁸ P. J. Krzyżanowski, *Między wędrówką a osiedleniem...*, op. cit., pp. 201-203.

⁹ Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej w Warszawie [Archives of the Institute for National Remembrance in Warsaw]. IPN BU 831/8223. Raport posterunku MO w Celejowie w sprawie kradzieży na szkodę Cyganów konia oraz harmonii, 16 VI 1945, k. 2.

¹⁰ P. J. Krzyżanowski, *Między wędrówką a osiedleniem...*, op. cit., pp. 46-52.

The institution responsible for the recruitment campaign and the resettlement was the provincial branch of the National Repatriation Office (PUR) in Kraków. The first Romani people were transported to the Western and Northern Territories in April 1950. The resettled Romani families were offered accommodation and temporary material aid. They were mainly relocated to designated settlement areas in the Szczecin and Greater Poland Voivodships. This operation demonstrated a lack of knowledge of Romani people's mentality, who had never farmed the land and lacked such skills. Many were unaccustomed to hard physical work. In addition, the Roma made a living from occupations that required mobility, such as blacksmithing and boilermaking. As a result, many of the resettled Romani people abandoned their work and returned to their hometowns¹¹.

The situation of the Roma in Poland was deeply affected by the enactment of the Socialist Labour Discipline Act¹² in 1950. Its entry into force coincided with the passing of the Act of 21 July 1950 on the Six-Year Plan for Economic Development and Building the Foundations of Socialism for the Years 1950-1955. National minorities living in Poland, including the Roma, were to contribute to the implementation of the Six-Year Plan, which was aimed at building the foundations of socialism in Poland¹³.

One of the conditions for the achievement of this goal was to increase labour productivity in all branches of the national economy. To boost labour productivity, the legislator pointed to the need to strengthen socialist labour discipline. In the light of the Constitution of 22 July 1952, the Polish People's Republic was a republic of the working people¹⁴. The Roma, who had a nomadic lifestyle and did not take up permanent employment, could therefore not be regarded as

¹¹ P. J. Krzyżanowski, G. Pytlak, *Komunistyczny eksperyment z 1950 roku „resocjalizacji” Cyganów – akcja przesiedleńcza Bergitka Roma do Państwowych Gospodarstw Rolnych w województwie szczecińskim*, [in:] *Cyganie/ Romowie w Polsce. Dawne i współczesne konteksty 1964 roku*, eds. B. A. Orłowska, P. J. Krzyżanowski, Gorzów Wielkopolski 2015, pp. 113-128.

¹² Ustawa z dnia 19 kwietnia 1950 r. o zabezpieczeniu socjalistycznej dyscypliny pracy (Dz.U. 1950 nr 20, poz. 168) [Law of April 19, 1950 on securing socialist labor discipline (Journal of Laws 1950 No. 20 item 168)]

¹³ P. J. Krzyżanowski, *Między wędrówką a osiedleniem...*, op. cit., pp. 93-96.

¹⁴ Konstytucja Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej uchwalona przez Sejm ustawodawczy w dniu 22 lipca 1952 [The Constitution of the Polish People's Republic adopted by the Legislative Sejm on 22 July 1952] (Dz.U. 1952 nr 33 poz. 232 [Journal of Laws 1952 No. 33 item 232]).

working people. According to the authorities, it was necessary to 'productivise' the Romani population following the Soviet model. For communists, the first years of the Six-Year Plan were of the greatest importance, and it was during this period that the central and local authorities were the most active in the resettlement and 'productivization' of the Romani people. The nomadic lifestyle led by the Roma was considered an anachronism.

The Romani people who were citizens of the Polish People's Republic were also part of the socialist society that should create a specific type of person in line with the ideological assumptions. On the one hand, they were to meet the criteria associated with the right personality type, but on the other hand, they should also influence the development of institutions and a social structure conducive to the creation of the desired personality type.

The year 1952 marks the beginning of a period when the state apparatus of the Polish People's Republic carried out activities aimed at replacing the traditional nomadic Romani lifestyle with a settled one. The authorities wanted to achieve their goal through the so-called productivization of the Romani population, i.e. permanent employment of the Romani people in socialised workplaces. Their efforts were accompanied by a large-scale propaganda campaign aimed at convincing the wandering Romani people of the pointlessness of 'vagrancy'. The propaganda campaigns, however, did not bring the intended results. The Roma were reluctant to respond to propaganda and to the authorities' assurances that their own fate would improve through settlement and permanent employment.

The basic act creating a legal framework for the settlement campaign was the Resolution of the Presidium of the Government of 24 May 1952 on the assistance for the Romani people in the process of adopting a settled lifestyle and the accompanying instruction for national councils. The Resolution of the Presidium of the Government was implemented particularly intensively during the Stalinist period¹⁵. This resolution obliged the local administrative authorities to take extensive measures for the settlement and the so-called productivization of the Roma. To this end, Group II of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers issued an

¹⁵ P. J. Krzyżanowski, *Kwestia cygańska*, [in:] *Aparat bezpieczeństwa wobec mniejszości narodowych w Polsce w latach 1944-1956*, ed. J. Szymyk, Warszawa 2019, pp. 196-209.

instruction to its subordinate units, which laid down the principles of propaganda influence on nomadic Romani people and the identification of the needs of the settled Roma. Presidiums of national councils at all levels were to pay particular attention to the housing conditions of the Roma and to sending their children to school. The authorities made it clear for the first time that they would tolerate only those Romani people in the Polish People's Republic who had abandoned their nomadic lifestyle and taken up permanent employment.

A condition for the success of the settlement campaign and the so-called productivisation of the Roma was to establish how many Romani people there were. It was therefore decided to create a register of the Roma in Poland. On 2 September 1952, the Chief Commander of the Citizens' Militia (MO) issued Order No. 71/52 on the registration and control of the movement of the Roma population. The operation was codenamed: action "C" (Cyganie – the Romani people). Its plans were drawn up by provincial and district headquarters of the MO in cooperation with presidiums of provincial and district national councils. The method of operation was also agreed with voivodship and district committees of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR). Action "C" was carried out throughout Poland from 22 to 24 September 1952. A total of 296 survey teams were deployed, registering 8,878 Romani people (4,802 settled and 4,076 nomadic ones)¹⁶. The census showed that the largest groups of the nomadic Roma were found in the Poznań, Warsaw, Olsztyn, Wrocław and Zielona Góra voivodships.

Since only a part of the Romani people were registered in 1952, the authorities resumed this task three years later as part of the so-called *passportization* of the Romani population. The centrally planned operation was preceded by a reconnaissance of the location of wandering Romani caravans and the number of people in them by local headquarters of the Citizens' Militia. The so-called *passportization* was carried out throughout Poland from 7 to 10 March 1955. A total of 6,174 people from 271 caravans were included; 2,415 temporary identity certificates were issued and 1,304 civil status certificates were drawn up. The Romani people who received identity cards had to fill in additional questionnaires. These contained personal data and fingerprints. The questionnaires were included in a special file created at the Bureau for Population and Personal Identification of the National Headquarters of the

¹⁶ P. J. Krzyżanowski, *Kwestia cygańska*, op. cit., p. 202.

Citizens' Militia. The file was to be used by the operational divisions of the Citizens' Militia, and the data contained therein was to prevent the issuing of a second identity card¹⁷. The *passportization* action was intended to make it easier for the authorities to control the wandering Roma and to provide them with identity documents.

The actions of the administrative authorities, carried out on the basis of the Resolution of the Presidium of the Government of 24 May 1952 on the assistance for Romani people in the process of adopting a settled lifestyle, were met with resistance from the Roma. The vast majority of Romani groups continued to wander, occasionally making sham gestures of loyalty to the authorities. For example, to check how they would be treated by the local authorities, the Romani people made declarations of settlement in a particular town and then – after a short stopover – left again in an unknown direction. This led to tensions and increased prejudice on the part of the state authorities against the Roma, who, in turn, could not understand the behaviour of the officials. They assumed that these were temporary measures.

With time, the authorities came to the conclusion that it was a mistake to focus on material aid for the Roma and to hope that the example of settled members of their community would encourage nomads to abandon their wanderings. They also considered that the state policy towards the nomadic Roma to date had been too liberal, which was a consequence of insufficient persistency in enforcing compliance with the legal order. Negative stereotypes of the Roma were resurrected in the press and on the radio. The nomads were branded as vagabonds and thieves, a nuisance to those around them. This move was intended to facilitate the long-planned ban on wandering. The change in attitude of the state authorities automatically reshaped the image of the nomadic Roma in the public consciousness, creating widespread resentment towards wandering caravans.

The settlement campaign was conducted under the banner of combating social parasitism and an idle lifestyle. The social attitude commonly affirmed by the authorities, expressed in so-called 'honest work', did not take into account distinctive Romani customs. Because of their illiteracy, they were generally assigned to unskilled jobs or attempts were made to train them for a profession. The lack of even

¹⁷ P. J. Krzyżanowski, *Akcja osiedleńcza Cyganów/Romów w PRL w świetle materiałów archiwalnych*, [in:] *Świat Cyganów. Problemy Romów*, eds. C. Obracht-Prondzyński, B. Dejna, Gdańsk 2017, pp. 263-266.

a rudimentary knowledge of their customary law meant that many jobs could not be done by the Roma for customary reasons. For example, it was impossible for them to work as street sweepers, clean up cemeteries, work in laundries or in hospitals. Equally unsuccessful were attempts to have them settled in the countryside to work as farmers.

During the Stalinist era, the communist authorities intended to organise a camp in the grounds of the former Auschwitz extermination camp intended to 're-socialise' the Romani people. When Jerzy Ficowski revealed this idea, this plan was abandoned¹⁸.

2. The ban on wandering

In 1958, the state authorities started work on a law which would ban vagrancy. The bill, drafted in the same year, was based on the Act of 17 October 1958 on the permanent settlement of nomadic persons adopted by the National Assembly of the Czechoslovak Republic¹⁹. In addition to the mandatory imprisonment of six months to three years for persons persistently leading a nomadic lifestyle, the provisions of the Act obliged the national councils to provide comprehensive assistance to all persons converting to a settled lifestyle. In particular, this concerned the provision of suitable work and proper housing conditions²⁰.

However, the Czechoslovak solution proved unfeasible in the Polish reality. For this reason, the state authorities finally abandoned the plan to regulate the ban on wandering by means of a separate law. Instead, they decided to use various means of harassing the wandering Roma in order to finally put an end to their travels. It must be noted that the state authorities pursued the plan to settle the Roma without any real material means to provide the settlers with housing appropriate to the size of their families and to guarantee material resources during

¹⁸ P. J. Krzyżanowski, *Kwestia cygańska*, op. cit., p. 178.

¹⁹ Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej w Warszawie [Archives of the Institute for National Remembrance in Warsaw]. IPN BU 1585/24533, Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych, Ustawa z dnia 17 października 1958 r. o stałym osiedleniu osób wędrownych (the text of the Act translated into Polish).

²⁰ Article 1 of the Act of 17 October 1958 on the permanent settlement of nomadic persons read as follows: The national councils shall provide all-round assistance to persons leading a nomadic lifestyle with a view to enable them to make the transition to a settled lifestyle; in particular, they shall be obliged to assist such persons in obtaining suitable work, a place of residence and to systematically influence them by means of educational measures towards becoming honest working citizens.

the time needed to learn the Polish language and a profession. For example, the Ministry of Internal Affairs abandoned the concept of building new substandard apartment blocks for the Roma. The housing needs of Romani families were to be met within the framework of centrally planned housing economy system. Romani people could only be allocated flats in old buildings or adapted facilities. An exception was made for wealthier Romani people who could afford to co-finance the construction of new buildings²¹.



Romani caravan in the 1950s/1960s.

Source: National Digital Archives. Jerzy Ficowski's Audiovisual Archives.

The fact that the Romani people rejected the idea of life proposed to them by the authorities had to lead to a confrontation. In 1964, the state authorities decided to eradicate the nomadic lifestyle led by the Romani people completely. Wandering was declared unlawful by the state authorities of the People's Republic of Poland. The decision to forcibly settle the Roma was made on 5 February 1964 at a meeting of the Advisory Board of the Ministry of Internal Affairs²².

²¹ Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej w Warszawie [Archives of the Institute for National Remembrance in Warsaw]. IPN BU 1585/24507, MSW, Dezyderat Nr 63, Informacja o realizacji dezyderatów Sejmowej Komisji Spraw Wewnętrznych w sprawie pomocy ludności cygańskiej przy przechodzeniu na osiadły tryb życia w okresie od marca do października 1964.

²² P. J. Krzyżanowski, *Między przymusowym osiedleniem a presją asymilacyjną państwa. Cyganie/Romowie w Polsce w latach 1964-1989*, Gorzów Wielkopolski 2021, pp. 45-47.

The measures taken by the state authorities involved settling the nomadic Roma and pressing them to assimilate. The objectives of the assimilation measures undertaken were encapsulated by those in power in three words: “stabilisation”, “adaptation” and “productivization”. The (spatial) “stabilisation” (of Romani lifestyle) was equal to the elimination of nomadism as a mass phenomenon. “Adaptation” meant that Romani people were to adapt to the conditions of settled life, and the aforementioned “productivization” involved employing Romani people in socialised workplaces. Achieving the set objectives required the development and implementation of rules of conduct to be followed by state authorities at different levels. The actions of the state authorities were perceived by the Romani elders as a threat to the Romani identity.

It must be noted that the ‘stop the caravans’ campaign undertaken in Poland in 1964 constituted a kind of threshold between the traditional nomadic lifestyle of travelling Romani people and the new settled lifestyle.

3. Bronisława Wajs – Papusza

Bronisława Wajs is now regarded as the most prominent Romani poet. Papusza’s poetic talent was discovered by Jerzy Ficowski. She was part of the last generation of Romani people who still wandered and the first generation to be forced into a settled life. Against her will, the poet was drawn into the ideological atmosphere of the settlement campaign. The state authorities repeatedly mentioned Papusza as an example of a successfully settled Romani woman²³.

The legend of the Romani poet Bronisława Wajs-Papusza was born during her lifetime²⁴. It is therefore worth recalling her profile here. Bronisława Wajs, or Papusza, was born on 17 August 1908 in Sitaniec, in the municipality of Zamość, in the Lublin voivodship. She spent her childhood and teenage years travelling in a caravan. It was a special caravan, where the families had strong musical traditions: Wajs, Krzyżanowskis, Dębickis, Korzeniowskis, Jaworskis, Siwaks and Zielińskis. They were part of a caravan orchestra of harpists. Papusza announced their performances. In 1953, Papusza and her husband Dionizy Wajs settled in Gorzów Wielkopolski.

²³ P. J. Krzyżanowski, *Między przymusowym osiedleniem a presją asymilacyjną państwa...*, op. cit., pp. 269-277.

²⁴ P. J. Krzyżanowski, K. Wasilewski, *Papusza – od napiętnowanej do bohaterki*, [in:] *Bronisława Wajs – Papusza (1908-1987) – biografia i dziedzictwo*, ed. D. A. Rymar, Gorzów Wielkopolski 2017, pp. 67-83.

She taught herself to read and write, which was against the Romani customs. She debuted in 1951 in *Nowa Kultura*. Three books of poems were subsequently published: *Pieśni Papuszy* (1956), *Pieśni mówione* (1973) i *Lesie, ojciec mój* (1990). Papusza was appreciated by non-Romani people, but within her own community her ability to learn to write and read was considered an undignified occupation, at odds with Romani tradition. Papusza's poems were inspired by the wandering caravan life and nature.

On 13 April 1962, Papusza was admitted to the Polish Writers' Union (Związek Literatów Polskich), which was an important distinction. The poet received ID No. 969. Papusza did not actively participate in the works of the Polish Writers' Union, focusing instead on caring for her ailing husband Dionizy Wajs, who was twenty years her senior. In 1984, the poet received another accolade; she was honoured by the Minister of Culture and Art of the Polish People's Republic with the badge "Zasłużony Działacz Kultury" [Distinguished Cultural Service Award]. The award was presented in Gorzów Wielkopolski.

Papusza stayed in touch with well-known Polish poets: Julian Tuwim and Jerzy Ficowski. After Jerzy Ficowski published his book *Cyganie polscy* [The Polish Roma] in 1953, Papusza was accused by the family elders of betraying age-old secrets, since even contacts with strangers were then considered by Romani people as a betrayal of their own community. Papusza paid for this with a severe illness and intense anxiety that plagued her almost until her death. She spent the last years of her life with her sister in Inowrocław. She died there on 8 February 1987.

The memory of Papusza stays vivid and is nurtured until today. Her statue has been erected in Gorzów Wielkopolski, and one street has also been named after her. Significantly, Papusza was included among the 60 distinguished Polish women who have influenced the course of history at the exhibition *From the History of Polish Women*. The exhibition opened in 2004 at the Theatre Museum in the Grand Theatre – National Opera in Warsaw. Also in 2004, the Polish Post issued a postcard with Papusza's image and a passage from her poem *Lesie, ojciec mój*.

It is important to mention two other significant events related to the poet. In 2013, Angelika Kuźniak's book *Papusza*²⁵ was published and a film with

²⁵ A. Kuźniak, *Papusza*, Wołowiec 2013.

the same title, directed by Joanna Kos-Krauze and Krzysztof Krauze, was released in Polish cinemas. In 2022, a play was staged at the Juliusz Osterwa Theatre in Gorzów Wielkopolski entitled Papusza znaczy lalka [Papusza means doll], directed by Jacek Głęb. The book, the film and the play all tell the story of Papusza as the first people's poet whose poems were written down and translated into Polish.



Bronisława Wajs-Papusza

Source: National Digital Archives Jerzy Ficowski's Audiovisual Archives.

4. Assimilation pressure from the state

The Romani settlement campaign was coordinated by the Inter-Ministerial Commission for work relating to the settlement and productivization. It comprised representatives of the following ministries: education, health and welfare, labour, agriculture, municipal services, culture, as well as representatives of social organisations, including the Polish Committee for Social Assistance, the Polish Red Cross and the Women's League. During the period of the Commission's activity from 1964 to 1971, there was a strong assimilation pressure from the state towards Romani people.

The activities of the Inter-Ministerial Commission were based on close cooperation with the National Headquarters of the Citizen's Militia. Officers of the criminal division of the National Headquarters of the Citizen's Militia attended the Commission's meetings and kept its members informed of the scale of crime among Romani people. For example, in 1966 the Commission members were informed

of an increase in the number of crimes committed by the Roma and a change in the structure of crime among Romani people. It emerged that the number of thefts of chickens and less valuable items had decreased. Such thefts were mainly carried out in the countryside. The decrease in the number of such thefts was linked by the Criminal Service Branch of the National Headquarters of the Citizen's Militia to the fact that Romani caravans were stopped²⁶.

It may therefore come as no surprise that the nomadic lifestyle that distinguished Romani people was considered unlawful by the state authorities. The actions of the state authorities were accompanied by propaganda. Propaganda, i.e. influencing people's behaviour through the emotional and subconscious spheres, played a significant role in the activities of the state authorities. On the one hand, it showed the wandering Romani people in a negative light, while on the other hand, it emphasised the positive qualities of settled life. Since the organisers of the propaganda and its addressees, i.e. Polish society (non-Romani people), had similar "knowledge" of the Romani community, which was based on the same stereotypes, it was easy to cause resentment towards the Roma resisting the settlement campaign. With propaganda, the authorities used camouflage to justify to the public the use of violence against wandering Romani people.

The official discourse was that the Roma must be settled in order to improve their living conditions, eradicate their illiteracy, train them in socially useful professions and put an end to their "parasitic lifestyle". In reality, however, the state authorities wanted to control the Romani community in the same way as all other citizens in the country. It would be difficult to understand the reasons for this attitude of the state authorities towards the Roma if it were obvious that the aim was to radically change their previous lifestyle, i.e. to settle and employ them to facilitate social control of Romani people. However, once the public was persuaded that the Romani people lead a "parasitic lifestyle", previously referred to as "a loathing of work", in which the crimes characteristic of the Roma, for example stealing horses, livestock, burglaries, extortion, etc. play a central role –

²⁶ Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej w Warszawie [Archives of the Institute for National Remembrance in Warsaw]. IPN BU 1585/6421. Informacja Departamentu Społeczno-Administracyjnego MSW oraz organów spraw wewnętrznych prezydium rad narodowych w zakresie osiedlania koczujących Cyganów w okresie od 1 maja do 31 sierpnia 1966 r.

it was easy to label the settlement campaign and the so-called productivization of the Romani community as a cure, and to justify the need to radically change their lifestyle with the need to fight crime²⁷.

This kind of behaviour and the resulting propaganda followed the behavioural patterns implemented in other socialist countries, led by the USSR, where regulations against parasitism were included in the criminal codes. Such provisions were in fact never introduced in Poland. This does not change the fact that the Roma were recognised by the state authorities as an ethnic community with exceptional criminogenic tendencies. Consequently, a number of preventive measures were taken against the Romani people. The criminal divisions of the Militia kept records of crimes committed by Romani perpetrators. Similar statistics were not kept for any other national minority group in Poland. The Citizens' Militia conducted systematic reconnaissance of Romani families; attention was paid to their fulfilment of their registration obligation, and identity cards of arriving Romani people were checked.

At the end of 1968, the state authorities concluded that the main objective of the settlement campaign had been achieved, which meant that migration as a mass phenomenon had been eradicated. It was considered a success that all the Romani people in Poland had a permanent place of residence (registration), that 87% of Romani children had been included in the education system and that the number of Romani people taking up permanent employment had increased. The Ministry of Internal Affairs estimated that between 100 and 150 families wandered during the summer season. Finally, in May 1971, the Inter-Ministerial Coordination Commission was dissolved and the field coordination teams were subsequently dissolved. Thus, the state authorities considered that the Romani issue in Poland had been resolved²⁸.

Meanwhile, the Roma unequivocally recognised the state as an oppressor and did not want to come to terms with the idea of life imposed on them by the authorities. This is evidenced by the content of letters (complaints, protests and petitions) written by the Roma to the highest-ranking party and state authorities. Demanding the restoration of the right to wander, the Roma usually raised the issue of the injustice they had suffered from the state authorities and tried to appeal to

²⁷ P. J. Krzyżanowski, *Między wędrówką a osiedleniem...*, op. cit., pp.82-98.

²⁸ Ibidem, pp. 113-120.

the conscience of the addressee. In their letters, Romani people would enumerate the negative effects of forced settlement: apathy, mental illness, alcoholism, and drug addiction²⁹. Nevertheless, any hopes the Roma had for the fulfilment of their demands proved to be vain.

5. Housing conditions

It was a major difficulty for the state authorities to provide housing for Romani families. In the first few years after the 1964 ban on wandering³⁰, the living conditions of Romani families were particularly difficult. Some families occasionally lived in tents. The lack of flats meant that large and multi-generational families usually had to fit into a small space. It was not uncommon to see as many as a dozen people living in two or three rooms.

As a result of the ongoing settlement campaign, Romani people were generally housed in primitive barracks or residential buildings devastated by the war, or lived in their wagons on barely paved sites, often without access to basic sanitary facilities. The sanitary-epidemiological services have repeatedly raised alarms about the difficult housing conditions of Romani families. For example, a note prepared in 1966 by the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare included information that in most cases Romani families lived in conditions that did not meet basic sanitary requirements (no water supply or sewerage), which could lead to outbreaks of infectious diseases³¹.

Settlement thus meant vegetation in very difficult conditions with neighbours who would be generally averse or even hostile. It was only with time that the housing conditions of the forcibly settled Romani people began to improve. It should be noted that the authorities developed rules for the allocation of flats to Romani families. The basic premise was not to allow an excessive concentration of Romani families in one place. It was assumed that the dispersal of Romani families would break down their group solidarity and accelerate assimilation.

²⁹ P. J. Krzyżanowski, *Między przymusowym osiedleniem a presją asymilacyjną państwa...*, op. cit., pp. 290-300.

³⁰ Ibidem, pp. 120-139.

³¹ Ibidem, pp. 207-209.

6. Employment

The so-called productivization of the Romani population, planned by the authorities, was to play an important role in the socialisation of the Roma. However, the measures taken by the authorities were met with resistance. This was due to the fact that Romani people traditionally made a living from occupations which required mobility such as horse-trading, blacksmithing, boilermaking, music-making or fortune-telling provided by Romani women. It must also be noted that due to the lack of education, the Roma were usually offered simple and lowest paid manual jobs, which they did not want to do. Also, the authorities did not take into account that many Romani people were unaccustomed to hard physical work.

The inclusion of the Roma in the socialist concept of man required every adult male to work professionally³². However, among the Roma, it was mostly women who were breadwinners. This was fostered by the traditional occupations of Romani women such as fortune-telling and magic. Men, too, pursued occupations appropriate to their lifestyle. The employment of Romani people in the state labour organisation system, both men and women, faced fundamental customary obstacles. The state authorities did not realise that the evolutionary changes taking place in the social roles of individual members of the Romani family, subject to a centuries-old tradition, required a much longer period of time than that set by the ad hoc settlement and employment of Romani people. They were generally treated as unskilled workers and no consideration was given to their previous traditional jobs and skills. The jobs offered sometimes went directly against their customs and brought with them the threat of defilement and therefore exclusion from the Romani community.

The initiators of the settlement campaign decided to make use of the musical activities of the Roma. For this reason, the authorities initially supported the formation of Romani musical ensembles, all the more so because performances by Romani performers were favourably received by the public. Between 1950 and 1960, Romani ensembles were set up, and their artistic activities were financially supported by the state. The most well-known Romani bands were the “Roma” band operating in Kraków and the “Terno” Romani band founded in Gorzów Wielkopolski by Edward Dębicki³³.

³² P. J. Krzyżanowski, *Między wędrówką a osiedleniem...*, op. cit., pp. 94-133.

³³ Edward Dębicki was born in 1935 in Kalusz in the Volhynia Region (northwest of present-day Ukraine). He spent his childhood and youth travelling in a caravan. He grew up surrounded by a caravan orchestra,

The state authorities intended to present ‘Romani folklore’ to bring the Roma closer to the rest of society. Among other things, the state authorities influenced the formation of Romani bands, their organisation, their functioning and controlled their repertoire. However, due to the resistance of the Roma, the establishment of only one representative Romani band in the country did not succeed.

With the decision by the state authorities in 1964 to forcibly settle Romani people, the favourable climate for the establishment of new Romani music ensembles and the expansion of those already in operation changed. The musical activities of the Roma were clearly linked by the authorities to nomadic lifestyle of Romani people. Since 1964, music-making was to become only one of the ways in which the Roma could make a living legally, not the main one which enabled them to move freely. The liberalisation of passport regulations in Poland, introduced in the early 1970s, opened up the possibility for Romani bands to perform in Western Europe and the United States. The trips of Romani bands to the West, like those of other Polish bands, were intended to lend credibility to the state authorities, to show that the Polish People’s Republic was a free country. Most members of Romani bands and their soloists chose to stay in exile during this period and pursued artistic careers in the West.

7. Education

The introduction of Romani people to live in the non-Romani environment required them to speak and write Polish. The Roma did not and do not have their own written language. For this reason, the Romani community did not understand the fight against illiteracy waged by the Polish authorities which covered all illiterate citizens. Some Romani children started school but dropped out after a few years, failing to

in which the traditions of music-making were passed on from generation to generation. The family instrument in the orchestra was the harp. The Romani poet Bronisława Wajs, also known as *Papusza*, was from Edward Dębicki’s caravan. In 1952, the caravan finally stopped in Gorzów Wielkopolski, and Edward Dębicki began attending the Gorzów State Music School, from which he graduated with honours. In 1955, he founded the Romani artistic group “Kham”, renamed a year later to “Terno”. Edward Debicki is an accordion virtuoso, a composer, as well as a poet and a writer. He was the driving force behind the International Meetings of Romani Bands *Romane Dyvesa*, which have been held in Gorzów Wielkopolski since 1989. In 2012, Edward Dębicki was awarded the *Gloria Artis* Gold Medal for Merit to Culture.

graduate even from primary schools. This is because they were traditionally assigned other social functions once they were biologically capable of starting a family.

The inclusion of the Roma in the institutionalised education system was intended to make it easier for them to function in the context of settled life. The state authorities assumed that the process of educating Romani people would help achieve two goals: the elimination of illiteracy among adults and the inclusion of Romani children and young people in compulsory education³⁴.

Educational authorities faced resistance from adult Romani people who did not want to learn to read and write. For this reason, they were considered a lost generation in terms of their education; instead, the state authorities decided to focus on the education of Romani children and young people. It was felt that bringing Romani children and young people into an institutionalised schooling system would enable them to be properly educated. The attempt to eliminate illiteracy among Romani people failed and the lack of education exacerbated the process of marginalisation of the Roma, despite the gradual elimination of their nomadic lifestyle.

Plans for education as a means of integrating the Roma into the life of the Polish majority also failed. Although a significant proportion of children and young people from Romani families were included in primary education, not all graduated from primary schools. Also, those who completed primary education tended to miss the opportunity to further their education at secondary level. There were numerous obstacles in the process of teaching itself. Neither parents nor their children enjoyed learning. It was the family environment and not the school that was the source of knowledge for the younger generation of Romani people. The elderly were the ones who passed on cultural patterns to the young. The mere fact of enrolling a child in school was merely an administratively enforced fulfilment of a duty. The government's hopes for an educated young Romani generation capable of entering the workforce in various sectors of the socialised economy proved to be vain.

8. Health care and social assistance

The issue of extending universal health care to Romani people, which was part of state social policy, faced serious obstacles. On the one hand, this process was

³⁴ P. J. Krzyżanowski, *Między wędrówką a osiedleniem...*, op. cit., pp. 134-150.

carried out with resistance from Romani people themselves, and on the other hand, it encountered difficulties associated with the functioning of the state health service in the reality of the communist state.

It must be noted that the change in lifestyle proved to be painful for the Roma. The health effects of forced settlement – such as trauma, apathy, mental illness and alcoholism – soon began to manifest themselves. The Roma were left to their own devices with these problems and did not receive sufficient support from the state. As shown in the archival documents, the state authorities remained silent about the illnesses among the Roma that were linked to the effects of forced settlement and did not take into account the fact that traumatic events disintegrate people's personalities. Only those who could demonstrate a regular source of income or were unable to take up regular employment for health-related reasons were covered by health care. As a result, not all Romani people had access to state health care services. It is noteworthy that in 1964 the Ministry of Health and Welfare introduced separate preventive and medical examinations for settled Romani people. Based on data from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2,046 people were screened preventively in March 1964. Following the examinations, 1,210 people received free outpatient treatment, 141 people were placed in hospitals and sanatoriums, and 1,846 people were vaccinated³⁵. In 1965, preventive examinations were carried out for the Roma in all voivodships. These most frequently included chest X-rays, skin checks and dental checks. Romani families were informed that they were entitled to free medical care.

In turn, the system of material support for settled Romani families was based on the institution of social care workers, whose role was primarily to help the Romani families equip their dwellings with the necessary household equipment (furniture, kitchen utensils, sanitary facilities) and to provide advice on keeping the dwellings clean. Social care workers were also supposed to ensure that Romani families had proper relations with their Polish neighbours. As a rule, no material assistance was given to families where no one worked and the children did not attend school. Neither was material aid given to families of convicted or suspected criminals. The Citizen's Militia informed the local authorities of each of these cases in order to stop the benefits.

³⁵ P. J. Krzyżanowski, *Między przymusowym osiedleniem a presją asymilacyjną...*, op. cit., p. 202.

9. Romani associations

Romani associations were to play an important role in the assimilation of the Roma. The statutes of the associations provided for the inclusion of the Romani community in the mainstream of Poland's social, political and cultural life and the 'shaping' of Romani people into useful citizens of the Polish People's Republic³⁶. The Ministry of the Internal Affairs was the body supervising the activities of socio-cultural associations. The Association of Settled Romani People, based in Wałbrzych, was the first to be registered in post-war Poland in 1951. It operated in the Wrocław Voivodship. The association was to achieve these goals by persuading the Roma at meetings to abandon their nomadic lifestyle. They gave lectures and presented papers indicating the concern of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) and the government to improve the living conditions of the Roma and, above all, to provide housing and permanent work. The association's daily work was to eradicate Romani habits such as begging, vagrancy and fortune-telling. The Association of Settled Romani People was also to work with school authorities to bring Romani children into the mainstream educational system. In the following years, associations such as the Cultural and Educational Association of Romani People "Nowe Życie" in Tarnów, the Podhale Cultural and Educational Association in Nowy Targ and the Cultural and Educational Association of the Roma in Gdańsk were established, among others³⁷.

It must be noted that the authorities' efforts to bring Romani people together in organisations whose character was imposed by the state were not successful. Romani associations also did not play a major role in the productivization of the Roma and their assimilation. The control exercised by the authorities over the associations did not give the authorities full insight into the Romani community. The reluctance of Romani people to join the artificially created organisations meant that their activities were short-lived and only regional in nature. Another important factor was the issue unresolved by the authorities concerning the funding of the associations' activities. As a consequence, the state authorities abandoned the idea of creating Romani associations.

³⁶ P. J. Krzyżanowski, *Stowarzyszenia cygańskie w PRL – geneza, działalność i znaczenie*, [in:] *Nie tylko partia? Organizacje społeczne w Polsce Ludowej 1944-1989. Geneza. Funkcjonowanie. Znaczenie*, ed. T. Ruzikowski, Warszawa 2017, pp. 181-200.

³⁷ P. Krzyżanowski, *Między przymusowym osiedleniem a presją asymilacyjną...*, op. cit., pp. 217-226.

10. Conflicts of Romani people with the Polish majority

The settled life of the Roma generated conflicts with their Polish neighbours. When settling down, Romani people had to integrate their own identity with their surrounding environment. This was not easy, as Romani people were unexpectedly confronted with a different, dominant culture. Until the forced settlement, the two communities did not have ongoing or very frequent contact with one another. When there were misunderstandings or feuds, Romani people moved to another location. This prevented the development of conflict situations³⁸; after the forced settlement, however, this was no longer possible. Both communities, which were different and did not understand each other's differences, had to exist side by side. The Polish majority had a number of widespread stereotypes of the Roma. In their relationship with the Polish majority, the Roma established a cultural pattern characterised by distance and aversion to their neighbours. For Sławomir Kaprański, it is no coincidence that the wider conflict occurred at a time when mutual contacts between Romani people and their neighbours became more intense. At that time, the number of permanently settled Romani people increased dramatically. Forced to abandon their travels, they continued to be mobile, went abroad temporarily or emigrated to support their families which stayed in Poland³⁹.

The largest-scale conflicts took place in 1981 in Konin and Oświęcim. On 9-10 September 1981, Konin witnessed fierce street incidents caused by mutual animosities between Polish and Romani people. The incidents were so serious that the army intervened alongside the Citizen's Militia⁴⁰. The events in Konin were triggered for a trivial reason, as reported in the local press, by an argument over a cigarette between a young Romani man and a Pole. A fight ensued between the two, in which other people, both Romani people and Poles, got involved.

³⁸ J. Talewicz-Kwiatkowska, *Osiedlenie i co dalej? Polityka państwa i sytuacja społeczna Romów w Polsce*, [in:] *Cyganie/Romowie w Polsce. Dawne i współczesne konteksty 1964 roku*, eds. B. A. Orłowska, P. J. Krzyżanowski, Gorzów Wielkopolski 2015, pp. 102-103.

³⁹ S. Kaprański, *Ewolucja postaw antyromskich w Polsce: kozioł ofiarny, ofiara zastępcza, rasistowska mowa nienawiści*, [in:] *Cyganie/Romowie w Polsce. Dawne i współczesne konteksty 1964 roku*, eds. B. A. Orłowska, P. J. Krzyżanowski, Gorzów Wielkopolski 2015, pp. 73-89.

⁴⁰ P. J. Krzyżanowski, *Między przymusowym osiedleniem a presją asymilacyjną państwa. Cyganie/Romowie w Polsce w latach 1964-1989*, pp. 313-317.

Another conflict occurred around 21 October 1981 in Oświęcim. At around 6 pm, one of the Roma living in Oświęcim beat up a Pole. An agitated crowd tried to lynch the perpetrator. In the aftermath of the riot, Romani people had their cars set on fire and windows broken in their flats. Order was restored in the city late in the evening following the intervention of the Citizens' Militia. The following day, the inhabitants of Oświęcim began to gather in the city centre, demanding that the city authorities take the Roma in hand. The Committee for the Expulsion of the Roma was established. The Citizens' Militia intervened again to calm the crowd. The state authorities were taken by surprise by the events in Konin and Oświęcim. They eventually concluded that their origins lay in forcibly changing the age-old way of life of the Roma in Poland.

11. Consequences of the state's assimilation pressure

It may come as a surprise from today's perspective that during the Polish People's Republic era virtually the entire administrative apparatus of the state was involved in assimilation measures against the Roma. In the first place, the actions of the authorities deliberately targeted the customs and internal structure of the Romani community in an attempt to sever traditional ties. Through a variety of actions, attempts were made to undermine the authority of Romani leaders in favour of the state authorities. These hit-and-miss actions were carried out on the basis of myths and misconceptions relating to the Romani community. This is evident from documents describing the implementation of the settlement campaign⁴¹. The lack of knowledge and experience led the authorities to use Soviet behavioural models, which were treated as irrefutable. Their actions were burdened with excessive bureaucracy and most of them were doomed to failure from the start.

It must be noted that the reasons behind the state authorities' decision to forcibly settle and assimilate the Roma were quite complex. The main reason for the authorities' resentment towards the Roma was that they violated the social order with their lifestyles and tried to live beyond the pale. Such a state of affairs could not go unaddressed by the state, whose aim was to extend full control over Romani life. The decision of the state authorities was also influenced by aspects related

⁴¹ P. J. Krzyżanowski, *Między wędrówką a osiedleniem...*, op. cit., pp. 201-235.

to the advance of civilisation, which was difficult to dissociate from. The world around the Roma, its challenges and needs were changing rapidly. With accelerated industrialization and technological progress, the previous life of the Roma was seen by the state authorities of the Polish People's Republic as a relic that did not fit in with the rapid transformations taking place and the changing reality. Ultimately, conflict between the Romani community and the state was inevitable. The state actions resulted in the confrontation of two different lifestyles – one based on the centuries-old tradition of a closed community with the style proposed by the authorities. Interestingly, the 1964 ban on wandering issued by the communist authorities was not met with social resistance or even public criticism. A surprising consensus emerged between the attitudes of the Polish public and the state pursuing its settlement campaign plan. This was the result of the state authorities' recognition of the Roma as a group that openly transgressed established norms.

Settlement was the first and most significant stage leading to the destruction of Romani culture. The next stage was the period of their transition into a settled lifestyle and so-called productivization, which were subject to the ideology of the state and regulated by law. What followed was a period that began to tear apart the existing social ties among Romani people, which were unsuitable for the new conditions. The Roma abandoned their traditional occupations too, out of necessity, in favour of those assigned to them in the process of productivization.

At the time, none of the ideologues of the forced settlement campaign considered the consequences it would have for the Romani community⁴². The actions of the state authorities leading to Romani settlement were only successful when they used force against the Roma; with no respect for Romani identity, the authorities ruthlessly followed the objectives they wished to achieve. It must be noted that the state authorities were trying to pursue the plan to assimilate the Roma without any real material means during the time needed to learn the Polish language and a profession.

As a consequence of the forced settlement campaign, the Roma lost their nomadic identity, were deprived of what had been an essential component of their customs and traditions, and were cut off from centuries-old traditions. The Romani

⁴² J. Talewicz-Kwiatkowska, *Osiedlenie i co dalej? Polityka państwa i sytuacja społeczna Romów w Polsce...*, op. cit., pp. 93-110.

social structure was also damaged, traditional ties were broken and families were dispersed. The current places of residence of Romani people in Poland are a consequence of their forced settlement during the communist period in Poland. Their largest concentrations are in big cities and medium-sized towns.

The change in state policy towards national minorities resulted in the mobilisation of Romani communities. A new chapter in the history of Romani people in Poland was opened. In 1990, the 4th Romani World Congress, the International Romani Union, was held in Jadwisin near Warsaw. A social Romani movement also emerged, initially in Gorzów Wielkopolski, Oświęcim and Tarnów, and later in other Polish cities. Since 1995, the Papusza Association of Creators and Friends of Romani Culture in Gorzów Wielkopolski has been continuously organising the International Meetings of Romani Bands *Romane Dyvesa*. It is currently the largest show of Romani artistic work in Europe⁴³.

In 2005, the Roma in Poland were granted the legal status of an ethnic minority under the Act on National and Ethnic Minorities and on the Regional Language. The Act guarantees equality before the law for all citizens belonging to national and ethnic minorities. At the same time, the Act prohibits actions aimed at forced assimilation, administrative change of national or ethnic relations, persecution of minorities or their members and preventing them from exercising their rights⁴⁴.

Time has shown that although the history of the socialist state came to an end, the Romani issue has not lost its relevance for the state authorities. The Roma continue to safeguard their distinctiveness. Since 2001, government programmes have been implemented in Poland for the benefit of the Romani community. The Programme for Social and Civic Integration of the Roma Community in Poland for 2021–2030 is currently being implemented.

⁴³ L. Bończuk, *Romane Dyvesa („Cygañskie Dni”) w Gorzowie Wielkopolskim*, [in:] *Kustosz cygańskiej pamięci. Księga dedykowana Edwardowi Dębickiemu*, eds. P. J. Krzyżanowski, B. A. Orłowska, K. Wasilewski, Gorzów Wielkopolski 2019, pp. 149-176.

⁴⁴ Ustawa z dnia 6 stycznia 2005 r. o mniejszościach narodowych i etnicznych oraz o języku regionalnym (Dz.U. 2005 nr 17 poz. 141).

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