

Bulgaria

Introduction

Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov

After the war between the Russian and Ottoman Empires in 1877–1878, the subsequent San Stefano Peace Treaty, the Berlin Congress and adoption of the Constitution in April 1879 in the city of Tarnovo, a new Bulgarian State was created. The Roma in Bulgaria, until then for centuries subjects of the Ottoman Empire, became Bulgarian citizens and found themselves included in new social and political realities, to which they had to adapt and find their place in them.

In the conditions of the new Bulgarian state, the Roma were not initially organised as a community and were looking for ways to achieve civic emancipation as individuals. The case of Atanas Dimitrov, presented in the first part of this chapter, is specific and, to some extent, even unique. At first glance, this case is not part of the process of Roma civic emancipation. Seen from the distance of time and in a broader historical context, however, the example of Atanas Dimitrov still has its place in the history of the Roma and their civic emancipation in the region of Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe.

The emergence of an organised Roma civic movement is directly related (more precisely, even provoked) by the deprivation of large parts of the Roma in Bulgaria of their legitimate civil rights in the early twentieth century. The so-called Tarnovo Constitution from 1879 promulgated citizenship and equality for all inhabitants of the country (i.e. including Gypsies) – Art 57 (All Bulgarian subjects are equal before the law), and Art 86 (Voters are all Bulgarian subjects above 21, who have civil rights and political rights) (Конституция, 1945). At least from a legislative point of view, all Bulgarian citizens were declared equal, but only circa two decades later, on the 3rd of May 1901, a *Law for the Amendment of the Electoral Law* was debated and voted by the 11th National Assembly (at 61st Extraordinary session). The amendment was proposed by the government, headed by Petko Karavelov, which came to power as a coalition between the Democratic Party and the Progressive-Liberal Party. According to the provisions of this law, item 2 under Art 4 and Art 7 (Who is banned from voting) a text ran as follows: “In that number the Gypsies non-Christians, as well as all those Gypsies without any fixed abode” (Държавен вестник, 1901, p. 3). In this way Muslim Gypsies (at that time the majority of Gypsies in Bulgaria) were deprived of voting rights, as well as nomadic Gypsies (more exactly, those without administrative residence registration). Following this parliamentary discussion, despite the objections raised, the law was voted almost unanimously, with 90 votes for

out of 96 present (Стенографски дневници, 1901, pp. 1922–1923). Only the representatives of the left-wing political parties voted against, including the Bulgarian Workers Social-Democratic Party (the future Communist Party). The new law for the amendment of the election law immediately came into force by Decree No 271 of Prince Ferdinand I (Държавен вестник, 1901, p. 3).

The reaction of the Gypsies, however, surprised Bulgarian society. Immediately after the adoption of the amendment to the Electoral law, an improvised Gypsy conference was held in 1901 in Vidin where the protest against the limitation in the electoral rights of Gypsies was voiced (Marushiakova & Popov, 1997, p. 29). Even more surprising was that Gypsies commenced a real campaign rejecting the adopted amendments, in which they were supported by Dr. Marko Markov, an ethnic Bulgarian, a lawyer and famous (and eccentric) public figure at that time. Dr. Marko Markov was born in Tulcea (now in Romania), studied at Robert College in Istanbul, and continued with law studies at the Universities of Bern and Zürich. Subsequently, he defended his doctoral thesis at the University of Liege. In the 1880s he was one of the forerunners of the future communist movement in Bulgaria (Стоянов, 1966, pp. 213–220).

The idea of the need for the civic emancipation of Roma and their struggle for equal citizenship rights should not be considered to have been brought in “from the outside” by non-Roma. Along with Dr. Marko Markov, other leaders of the protest initiative were Gypsy men – Ramadan Ali, a *muhtar* of the Gypsy mahala in Sofia, and Ali Bilyalov, his assistant (a second *muhtar*). Initially, they drew up a petition demanding equal rights for Gypsies with the remaining Bulgarian citizens. The petition was presented to the Chairman of the National Assembly, and as there was no answer to make it more convincing, a decision was taken for holding a Gypsy congress (Вечерна поща, 1905a, p. 2).

The Congress took place in the San Stefano restaurant in the centre of Sofia on the 19th of December 1905 (see the published materials in Marushiakova & Popov, 2021b, pp. 33–69). Dr. Marko Markov chaired the session of the Congress, which elected him as chair. The leadership also included Ali Bilyalov from Sofia, Ali Mutishev from Plovdiv, Iliya Uzunov, Ali Mola, Riste Mustafa, Evtim Ikononov, and others, was elected (Вечерна поща, 1905b, p. 2). A telegram was sent with the decisions of the Congress to the Prince Ferdinand of Bulgaria (Ibid.), and the Congress’ petition for the revoking of the amendments in the electoral law, denying Gypsies of election rights, was submitted on the Parliament Deputy Chairman Dobri Petkov (Вечерна поща, 1905c, p. 2).

The development of civic consciousness among the Roma in Bulgaria is only one side of the process of their social integration. However, in order to successfully end this long process, a move in the same direction from the other side is also necessary, i.e. Bulgarian society to be open towards Gypsies and towards their aspirations for equal status within the Bulgarian nation. In the case of the violated civil rights of the Gypsies, the reaction of politicians, the press and the Bulgarian public opinion as a whole, point to something quite clear – the entirely legitimate citizenship demands of Gypsies were not only rejected and not taken seriously at all but also ridiculed. That is why there was no response from state institutions (National Assembly and the Prince) to the petition approved by the

Gypsy Congress and there was no reaction by the Bulgarian Parliament or to the telegram sent to the Palace. Dr. Marko Markov himself was subject to constant ridicule, and he was given the sobriquet ‘The Gypsy King’ (Каназирски-Верин, 1946, p. 79). Eventually, he could no longer endure this and left the capital Sofia and settled in the city of Ruse (Mui Shuko, 1916, p. 138), where he died in 1939.

In the new national context of the independent Bulgarian state, some other forms of the public life of the community, inherited from the Ottoman Empire, were preserved and developed. Gypsy guilds (*esnaf*) had also experienced changes under the new conditions, and they changed their forms and social functions (Marushiakova & Popov, 2016b). This is not just about their legitimation under the conditions of the independent Bulgarian State, e.g. the transformation of the old Porter’s Esnaf in Lom into professional association in 1896 (Тахир, 2018), but also about the creation of new associations, such as *Porter’s Association ‘Trud’* (Labour), founded in Kyustendil in 1901 (the flag of the Association is still preserved), and the *First Sofia Flower-selling Association ‘Badeshte’* (Future) headed by Ali Asanov, founded in Sofia in 1909 (Ibid.). Something more, another phenomenon was ushered – the creation of officially registered public organisations that should defend the social positions of Roma in Bulgarian society as an ethnic community.

The first historical source in this direction is the *Statute of the Egyptian Nation in the Town of Vidin* (Устав, 1910; see also Marushiakova & Popov, 2021b, pp. 69–76). This historical document designates Roma as *Egiptyani* (‘Egyptians’ in Bulgarian), which directly correlates with *Kipti* (i.e., Copts, as in Ottoman empire), and with the Congress in 1901. The organisation in Vidin is a significant step forward in the development of organisational forms in the process of Roma civic emancipation in Bulgaria (Marushiakova & Popov, 2017a, pp. 42–46). The Statute describes already known practices for the selection of a *muhtar*, his assistant, and his councillors. ‘Muhtar’ is an administrative term used in the Ottoman Empire in the sense of a leader/chieftain chosen by the inhabitants and endorsed by the authorities of a village or a town district. This practice continued, especially for the Gypsy neighbourhoods in the cities, also during the new independent Bulgarian State, for example in Sofia, where Ramadan Ali has held this post for almost two decades, since 1888 when has been elected unanimously (by 230 votes) by the Gypsies in the Gypsy mahala as their leader (DA Sofia, f. 1 K, op. 2, a.e. 1848, l. 1–15). However, in addition to the already established matters in the Statute, there were also several new and meaningful points. The first thing to note here is the name itself – this already was not just about a Gypsy mahala but instead about the whole of the ‘Egyptian Nationality’ in the city and the region. This means that the Gypsies are represented in it as a collective entity on an ethnic basis which promotes, under the rules of the Statute, their representatives who, in turn, communicate with the authorities on behalf of the community. From its side, the governing bodies (the muhtar and Supreme Council) assume certain responsibilities and obligations, e.g., to protect the “common moral and material interests of their compatriots”, to protect them from the authorities, to solve internal problems in the community, etc. Together with this, according to Art 10, one of its main goals is to “awake civil consciousness among the people” (namely the civic, i.e., their position as an

equal part of the Bulgarian society and the Bulgarian civil nation). The prime mover of the organisation in Vidin was the Constituent Commission, whose chairman was Gyulish Mustafa (designated as 'reserve sergeant', i.e., in past he was on permanent service in the Bulgarian army); his deputy was marked with two names, Ahmed Neyazimov and Tako Munov (Усрав, 1910). The Statute introduced also ethnic symbols – Art 19 describes the stamp of the organisation in which centre is depicted 'St George' on a horseback with a spear in his hand stuck in a crocodile (Ibid.). The *Statute of the Egyptian Nation in the Town of Vidin* is the only known historical evidence for the existence of this first Roma organisation in Vidin. It can be assumed that the organisation existed for only a relatively short period of time; soon after its establishment, a period of hostilities and conflicts began in the Balkans, which included two Balkan Wars (1912–1913) and the First World War, with many Roma men being mobilised as part of the Bulgarian army and its military operations, and the organisation likely ceased to exist (in any case, no other historical evidence of its activities are preserved).

The transition of the Roma civic movement after the First World War has been carried out by the younger generation, after the local authorities abandoned the old practice of electing Gypsy representatives and started to appoint directly mayoral deputies, who had far more limited functions. This eventually pushed Roma to seek other means of securing their own representation in society.

It was at this very moment that the figure of Shakir Pashov appeared, whose activity gave new dimensions to the processes of Roma civic emancipation, to whom the second part of this chapter is devoted. His overall public activity in the period between the two world wars marked the beginning of a new stage in the development of the movement for Roma civic emancipation in Bulgaria and reflects the searches in different directions of the best way for the Roma in Bulgaria.

The third part of this chapter combines the portraits of Nikola Kochev, Nikola Terzobaliev and Gospodin Kolev, who are representatives of three generations of Roma communists from the city of Sliven. All of them see the development of the Roma civic emancipation by solving the common social and political problems in the composition of the Bulgarian nation and present another vision for achieving an equal position of the Roma in the Bulgarian society.

Atanas Dimitrov

Elena Marushiakova, Vesselin Popov and Plamena Stoyanova

The life story of Atanas Dimitrov (1874–1916) is a vivid example of how some individuals from the Roma community manage to break the centuries-old social stereotypes and gain social realisation even in conditions that are not only unfavourable but, in practice, almost excluding such a possibility. Both in the past and today, the case that a Gypsy

from a poor mountain village in the Balkans could become a philosophy doctor at an elite university in Germany in the late 19th century has often caused mistrust or at least bewilderment. It turns out, however, that this really happened, as incredible as it may seem at first glance. The preserved historical information about him is relatively little and fragmentary, but sufficient to allow us to present, albeit very briefly, this man of a unique destiny for a Rom of that time.

Atanas Dimitrov was born on January 18, 1874, in the village of Gradets, located near Kotel, in the region of Sliven (Димитров, 1934, pp. 129–130). Noteworthy is also that another famous Gypsy was born in the same village: Mustafa Shibil (killed in 1856), a legendary highwayman in the times of the Ottoman Empire (for more details cf. Marushiakova & Popov, 2001, pp. 48–52).

Atanas Dimitrov's father, Dimitar Valkov Mislyagov, was a "Bulgarian Gypsy" (i.e. an Orthodox Christian) and earned his living as a horseshoe-maker (Димитров, 1934, p. 130). Some authors write his surname as Mislyakov (Нунев, 2008, p. 10), which is the most common variant of this surname, common among Bulgarians and Roma in the region. Atanas Dimitrov's family lived for generations in the village, inhabited at that time mainly by Bulgarians (today this village has a predominantly Roma population).

Atanas Dimitrov completed his primary education in his native village. His teacher at the time in the village school wrote:

The then headteacher there, Hristo V. Dimitrov, a native of the same village, noticed the mental abilities of the Gypsy Atanas, so he supplied him with textbooks, protected him from the jokes of his classmates, who often teased him about his nationality, helped him with redesigned clothes and often with food at home on holidays. [...] To be able to study in a warm place, he was allowed to work in the head teacher's office in the afternoon. (Димитров, 1934, p. 130).

The headteacher at the school in Gradets, Hristo V. Dimitrov, was confident in the abilities of Atanas Dimitrov, and at his own expense sent him to study at the high school in Sliven. At the high school, Atanas Dimitrov impressed the director Kozhukharov, who personally reviewed his notebooks and written works. The teachers also appreciated him and halfway through the year, he was awarded a state scholarship (Ibid., pp. 130–131).

Atanas Dimitrov was also supported by Iliya D. Gudev, a native of the village of Gradets, from a rich family and a famous philanthropist, at that time a school inspector, later director of the high school and mayor of Sliven (Юбилеят, 1937). The letters that Atanas Dimitrov wrote to Iliya Gudev over the years are preserved. For years he began his letters to Iliya Gudev with the address "Dear Patron". In a letter from Jena in 1894, he wrote:

Rare are the people who help with heart. I was happy to have grown up between you and the Teacher Hristo [Dimitrov], to have achieved this. As a sign of deep gratitude, I am sending you my portrait – let it remind you of the one whose eyes you opened [...]

Eternally grateful, Atanas. (DA Sliven, f. 386 K, op. 2, a.e. 108, l. 1).

In 1893 Atanas Dimitrov graduated with honours from high school in Sliven. On the recommendation of the High School Teachers' Council, the Ministry of Education granted him a state scholarship to study philosophy at the University of Jena in Germany.

The choice of the University of Jena was not accidental. In this German university, where Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, Johann Christoph Friedrich (von) Schiller, etc. taught, and where the young Karl Marx defended his doctoral dissertation, studied at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century many of the prominent intellectuals, founders of the new Bulgarian academia (Няголова, 2012).

Atanas Dimitrov's life as a student was not easy at all. As he wrote in his letters to Iliya Gudev, "the scholarship is not sufficient in any way" (DA Sliven, f. 386 K, op. 2, a.e. 108, l. 1), and it was paid with delays, so he had many debts awaiting to be paid. Due to limited financial opportunities, he was not able to return to Bulgaria during the holidays for five years. In 1894, there was an earthquake in the region of Kotel and he learned about it from the German press. His native village was heavily damaged, everything was destroyed, and his mother was ill (Ibid., l. 2). Atanas Dimitrov worried a lot about his family; the following year some of his relatives (including his sister) died, his mother continued to be ill and sent him letters that she wanted to see him (Ibid., l. 2–4). He did not have the financial means to return to Bulgaria and visit his relatives, so he wrote a letter to his teacher Hristo Dimitrov, asking him "to tell my mother that it is not possible for me to come", and "to comfort her somehow with a little optimism" (Ibid., l. 4).

Atanas Dimitrov's relations with the other students from Bulgaria were also not very good. After a student seminar, during which a discussion arose, he got into an argument with his Bulgarian colleague, about which he self-critically remarked: "I, of course, am not completely innocent" (Ibid.), i.e. subsequently considered that he had reacted too sharply. He was, as he described himself, "hot-tempered" for which he has his own explanation:

By the way, I have been used to this kind of quarrel. In no class in Sliven have I been without enemies and enviers. (Ibid.)

Interesting is the explanation that Atanas Dimitrov gives for his complete devotion to learning – he defines himself as "taken out of the mud and now enjoying the fruits of science in renowned Germany" (Ibid.). He writes about himself:

My life has been full of troubles and I have found solace only in academia. Hated, despised, envied by others, I have tried to keep the presence of mind. (Ibid.).

Throughout his stay in Germany, Atanas Dimitrov worked tirelessly for the successful completion of his education and his development as a scholar. Moreover, he had to make up for some gaps in his high school education (e.g., to learn Greek and Latin, which he

did not study in Bulgaria, and which was mandatory for German universities at that time). His work schedule, described in detail in his letters to Iliya Gudev, is impressive – he got up very early every morning, walked a little, and from 7 am to 8 pm worked for 11 hours a day, with only three short breaks (Ibid.). This exhausting work had an impact on his health. He often visited a doctor who was adamant that he was too exhausted and needed a break:

I went to the doctor at the clinic to prescribe something. I go to him often. After examining me, I sang the old song again – he had said this before – that after such tiring work, I needed to change the climate either to go to Bulgaria or Switzerland or at least to some baths for at least 1–2 months. Personally, the work does not tire me, but still, the words of the doctor must be taken into account. (Ibid., l. 1).

Despite the health problems, due to lack of funds and especially due to his excessive commitment, Atanas Dimitrov, during his entire five-year stay in Germany, only once managed to go for a short vacation in a village near Jena (Ibid.).

Another important circumstance should be noted here. In addition to his studies at the university and the preparation of his doctoral dissertation, Atanas Dimitrov had taken on another additional work, which required a lot of time and effort. It concerned the translation into German of the novel by Ivan Vazov *Under the Yoke*.

A few more words need to be said about this novel and its author. Ivan Vazov, called in Bulgaria “the patriarch of Bulgarian literature”, and especially his novel *Under the Yoke*, occupies a special and important place not only in the history of Bulgarian national literature (this is, in fact, the first Bulgarian novel) but also in the overall history of the formation and the development of the Bulgarian nation during the modern era.

First published in 1889–1890, this novel, and the ideas embedded in it, despite its undoubtedly outdated form and means of expression (including even the obsolete vocabulary used, which makes it difficult to understand in the literal sense by modern generations), continue to be particularly relevant in Bulgaria today. The novel *Under the Yoke*, depicting the struggles of the Bulgarian people to reject the rule of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of the new Bulgarian nation-state, became an extremely important symbol of the reviving Bulgarian nation (according to the interpretation of Bulgarian national historiography) and continues to perform the same public functions nowadays.

In this context, it becomes clear that the German translation of Ivan Vazov’s novel *Under the Yoke* for Atanas Dimitrov (as well as for all his contemporaries) was not just a routine publishing activity, but had a much broader social and cultural dimension. The young Bulgarian nation, which received its official recognition after the establishment of the new Bulgarian state, sought its reception in Europe and the world, and one of the ways to do this was to acquaint and promote to European readers its history and its contemporary cultural achievements, one of which was the novel itself. In this sense, the translation of Ivan Vazov’s novel *Under the Yoke* in key European languages was a very

appropriate form for achieving this aim. Atanas Dimitrov himself, as can be seen from his letters, saw his efforts to translate the novel as a fulfilment of his patriotic duty, which reveals the dimensions of his civic national identity.

All this explains, why after arriving in Jena, along with adapting to the new conditions and studying at the university, Atanas Dimitrov had begun to actively work on the translation of the novel *Under the Yoke* into German. This means that he not only saw his stay in Germany as an opportunity to get to know and join the values of European civilization but, at the same time, he wanted to show Europe the historical and cultural merits of the young Bulgarian nation. It is not entirely clear exactly when he began work on the translation of the novel. In any case, in 1895, as can be seen from his letters, he was already quite advanced with the translation, which was completed (at least in its original form) in 1896 or, as he wrote, in 1898, “the novel I translated with the permission of Vazov 2 years ago with [the help of] my landlady” (Ibid., l. 506). Atanas Dimitrov actually received permission to translate the novel only after the translation had been completed, through a friend from Jena, who met Ivan Vazov and told him that Atanas Dimitrov was translating his novel into German. Ivan Vazov was very interested in both the translation and Atanas Dimitrov himself and the possibilities for his future academic career after his return to Bulgaria, and by the mediation of his friend he gave him practical advice in this direction (Ibid.).

Atanas Dimitrov himself had no experience with publishing and no contacts with publishing houses in Germany, so Ivan Vazov’s novel *Under the Yoke* in his translation, which he constantly refined over the years, was published only two years after his death (Wasoff, 1918; for more details on the publication of the novel, see Савов, 2000; Петков, 2020).

In 1898, after five years of hard work and many deprivations, Atanas Dimitrov successfully completed his education and defended his doctoral dissertation *Psychologischen Grundlagen Der Ethik J. G. Fichte’s: Aus ihrem Gesamtcharakter Entwickelt* (Psychological foundations of J. G. Fichte’s Ethics: Developed from Its Overall Character) with a very high assessment (*magna cum laude*) at the University of Jena (Dimitroff, 1898; Димитров, 2003–2005).

Atanas Dimitrov’s dissertation is dedicated “with gratitude to my patrons and friends Mr Hristo V. Dimitrov and Mr Iliya D. Gudev” (Dimitroff, 1898, p. 3). And as Atanas Dimitrov himself wrote in a letter to Iliya Gudev: “Yes I dedicated it to you and Mr Dimitrov, dictated to me my feeling of deep gratitude” (DA Sliven, f. 386 K, op. 2, a.e. 108, l. 22).

Atanas Dimitrov was experiencing very hard his return to Bulgaria and his clash with Bulgarian realities. After repaying all his loans and debts to his landlords for the rented accommodation, it turns out that he had no means to return to his homeland; therefore, he again turned to his patron Iliya Gudev, who granted him a loan of BGN 150 for this purpose (Ibid., p. 5). In another letter to him, he described very emotionally his departure from Germany and the emotions he was experiencing at the time:

The parting with dear Germany, from landlords with whom I spent 5 years, from comrades – Germans, from dear teachers, and others, was difficult for me. Instead of the joy of returning to my homeland, I felt only sadness and pity. [...] One Social Democrat watched me kneeling in tears and kissing the German border soil [...]. Finally, he comes to me and drags me to the train for Vienna – only then do I come to my senses. [...] From Vienna to Sofia, I remained in my first state again – apathy to everything around me, even more so to the signs that show that nothing special [good] awaits me in Sofia. My forewarning did not deceive me. (Ibid., l. 22).

After arriving in Bulgaria, Atanas Dimitrov remained for some time in Sofia, where he toured state institutions and awaited his employment. Although in one of his letters to Iliya Gudev he wrote “I do not want much, I do not seek to occupy high positions [...], I only want peace [...] to serve the king and the fatherland” (Ibid.), he had a strong desire for an academic career and hoped to get a job at the Higher School (Sofia University). However, it turned out that this was not so easy because, in addition to a number of bureaucratic requirements (appearing in state exams, the presence of publications in Bulgarian learned journals, etc.), the appointments of civil service were influenced by other factors:

The whole administration in Sofia made a bad impression on me, at every step – only politics and disgrace, both among the bureaucrats and among the enlighteners, and moved by all this [...], I had the desire to get out of the walls of these bureaucratic buildings immediately. [...] On the one hand, morally killed and shaken by the impression, on the other hand, the unknown makes me wait for my appointment. (Ibid.).

In Sofia, Atanas Dimitrov managed to arrange an appointment with Ivan Vazov who, at that time, was Minister of Public Education. Ivan Vazov took the problems of Atanas Dimitrov to heart, but proved powerless to help him due to the existing administrative norms, and gave him pragmatic advice – to accept a temporary appointment as a teacher in Sofia or the countryside, and gradually settle his assignation at the university (Ibid.). Atanas Dimitrov was disappointed with this prospect (apparently his expectations for a quick academic career were higher), but he was forced by circumstances to accept his appointment as a teacher of psychology, logic and German at the high school in the Danubian city of Ruse.

Atanas Dimitrov's stay in Ruse and his adaptation to the Bulgarian realities turned out to be a difficult period in his life. His letters to Iliya Gudev contain numerous complaints about a number of problems, including a lack of sufficient funds. Apparently nervous about the situation in which he found himself, he sharply broke off relations with his benefactors Hristo Dimitrov and Iliya Gudev and restored the friendship after about a year as a result of a long correspondence and long clarifications of the misunderstandings. In the end, the good relations were restored, and for the rest of his life, Atanas Dimitrov treated them with great respect and thanked them for the help they had given him over the years. Moreover, when in 1912 Iliya Gudev had problems with unpaid

loans, Atanas Dimitrov, through his well-known lawyers, provided him with legal advice for their solution (Ibid., l. 12).

New problems also arose for Atanas Dimitrov, this time with the military institutions, which insisted that he complete his regular military service for one year, although due to his official position he should be released from this obligation. Criminal case 1104/1901 was filed against him in the Sliven District Court (Ibid., l. 9). Eventually, after lengthy bureaucratic procedures, the case was dropped.

Gradually, however, Atanas Dimitrov's problems began to be solved. In 1901, he moved as a teacher to the high school in Gabrovo (the first Bulgarian modern school, established in 1835, in the conditions of the Ottoman Empire). There, he became actively involved in the social and cultural life of the city and gave a few public lectures. One of these public lectures, *Psychology of Temperaments*, given on the literary-musical morning of December 15, 1902, was published as an article in two issues of the journal *Мисъл* (Thought) (Димитров, 1903a).

This period of Atanas Dimitrov's life was especially fruitful. Within a few years, he published a series of articles (some of them with sequels in several issues of the same journal) and reviews on various topics (Димитров, 1901; 1902ab; 1903ab; 1904ab; 1905; 1906). Through these articles, he not only met the formal requirements for the position of university lecturer but, at the same time, made him known in the public space. The titles of the articles and reviews published by Atanas Dimitrov are indicative because they reveal the wide range of his multifaceted scholarly interests: *The Distribution of Sciences According to Prof. Wundt* (Димитров, 1901); *The System of Natural Sciences (According to Wundt)* (Димитров, 1902a); *Nationalism: A Note* (Димитров, 1902b); *Psychology of Temperaments* (Димитров, 1903a); *Suggestion and Hypnosis* (Димитров, 1903b); *Why We Like Maxim Gorky* (Димитров, 1904a); *"Nietzsche's Philosophy as a Cultural Problem" by P. Narkolov* (Димитров, 1904b); *Friedrich Schiller: On the Occasion of the Centenary of His Death* (Димитров, 1905); *The Pedagogues and the University* (Димитров, 1906).

It is interesting to note that most of these articles were published in the journal *Мисъл* (Thought), subtitled 'Journal of Science, Literature and Criticism' with editor-in-chief Krastyo Krastev, which established itself in the public space as a forum for pro-European humanities and fiction during this period. It should be borne in mind that the literary circle *Thought*, which published this journal, was in a state of sharp conflict with Ivan Vazov, whom they considered "outdated" and inconsistent with modern developments in European thought. However, this did not turn out to be an obstacle for Atanas Dimitrov to continue his work on editing the translation of Vazov's novel *Under the Yoke*.

After a short period during which he worked as a school inspector in Sliven (Димитров, 1934, p. 131), Atanas Dimitrov won a competition for a lecturer in German at Sofia University, where he began working on February 1, 1904 (Алманах, 1940, p. 163). However, his problems did not end there. On January 3, 1907, a group of students organised a demonstration against the Bulgarian prince Ferdinand and booed him at the official opening of the National Theatre. The next day, the Council of Ministers issued a decree closing

the university and dismissing all professors, associate professors and lecturers, and thus Atanas Dimitrov was again unemployed for more than a year. These events had a wide public response, and after the new government came to power in January 1908, the dismissed university professors were reinstated in their old jobs, and the university began to function normally.

From 1908 until he died in 1916, Atanas Dimitrov taught German at Sofia University. During this period he also published many articles and reviews, but more with pedagogical issues, mainly in the journal *Училищен преглед* (School Review), published by the Ministry of Education (Савов, 2002). He continued to keep in touch with his old friends from Sliven, Hristo Dimitrov and Iliya Gudev, as well as with his relatives in Gradets and tried to help his native village to make a better road to it (DA Sliven, f. 386 K, op. 2, ae 108, l. 20). He died young, at only 42 years old, after a heart attack in Sofia, on January 20, 1916 (Алманах, 1940, p. 163; Няголова, 2012, p. 13).

In his will, Atanas Dimitrov donated his personal library to the Sofia University Library, containing more than 400 volumes, mainly books in German, purchased during his stay in Jena (Димитров, 1934, p. 131).

In our plan of interest, undoubtedly the most interesting question is whether and how the ideas of Roma civic emancipation are present in the life and work of Atanas Dimitrov. At first glance, the answer to this question is unambiguous – in the preserved texts written by Atanas Dimitrov (this includes both his published articles and his correspondence), the “Gypsy topic” is not present anywhere. Perhaps the only exception that can be interpreted as indirect evidence in this regard is a postcard sent in 1913 to an unknown relative (daughter?) of Iliya Gudev (DA Sliven, f. 386 K, op. 2, a.e. 108), which depicts Esmeralda (the famous heroine of the novel *Notre-Dame de Paris* by Victor Hugo). Based on all this, many people would conclude that Atanas Dimitrov was ashamed of his Gypsy origin and did not want Bulgarian society to know about it, and therefore stayed away from the problems of Roma civic emancipation.

However, the situation is much more complex and ambiguous, because, as witnessed by the famous Bulgarian philosopher Dimitar Mihalchev, who was a student and then a colleague of Atanas Dimitrov, and who knew him very well, Atanas Dimitrov did not hide his Gypsy origin at all (Михалчев, 1939, p. 213). It would be much more accurate to say that Atanas Dimitrov did not problematise his Gypsy origin, and did not look at it as an explanation (and justification) for all his life problems and failures. For him, this origin is something given that does not need to be discussed, especially in personal correspondence with his two patrons Hristo Dimitrov and Iliya Gudev, who knew very well about the problems arising from this origin, and it was they who helped him overcome much of these problems.

In fact, for Atanas Dimitrov, the issue of identity is solved precisely in the context of the dichotomy ‘society – community’, which has been discussed many times so far. For him, the civic national identity is unconditionally the leading one (cf. above, “I only want to serve the king and the fatherland”), and his community identity remains relevant

in the family environment and does not need to be demonstrated publicly (a model which continues to be relevant not only in Bulgaria but in many other places in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe).

Atanas Dimitrov's views in this regard are revealed in one of his first published articles, dedicated specifically to the issue of nationalism (Димитров, 1902b, pp. 484–487), about which a few more words should be said. In this article, he, in modern scientific language, opposes the primordial understanding of the nation since its inception and affirms the new, constructivist understanding of the modern European civic nation. He begins his analysis with examples that show that the names of some European countries (and the respective nations) do not correspond to the historical origin of their population (e.g. France, Prussia, etc.). He then cites numerous examples of celebrities who have acquired symbolic significance for various European nations, although, in fact, they are of a different, “foreign” ethnic origin (as the most famous example in this regard he quotes Napoleon Bonaparte), and emphasised, in particular, that in many cases these individuals have been bigger patriots and have contributed more to the development of the civic nations to which they belonged than their “native” representatives. In this circle of the representatives of other ethnic communities who were included in European civic nations, he also included the Jews; in the same way, as part of this pattern, can be interpreted the Gypsies as well, as a similar type of historically diasporic nation living without its own state. Particularly indicative of Atanas Dimitrov's views (which he apparently adhered to in his life) is the conclusion of this article: “The idea that the foreign element has the greatest influence on the development of a nation seems like a genius paradox, but in all this, it has the advantage that it provokes in man thoughts of a universal nature and dulls the weapons of narrow-minded nationalists.” (Ibid., p. 487).

Based on the views of Atanas Dimitrov on civic national identity presented in this way, another, different and nuanced answer can already be given to the question of his attitude to the problem of Roma civic emancipation. For him, the solution to this problem is the full integration of the Roma into the respective civic nation in the countries where they have lived for centuries, i.e. the civic national identity in his case is in a dominant position over community ethnic identity, without, however, even a hint found that this should lead to the destruction of the latter and to complete ethnic assimilation.

As unexpected as it may seem, thanks to these views, which determined his entire life destiny, Atanas Dimitrov had a significant impact on the fate of the Roma in Bulgaria at a critical moment for them. It is about the time of the Second World War, in which Bulgaria was an ally of Nazi Germany, which pursued a policy of genocide against the Gypsies in the occupied territories and expected a similar policy from its allies. In the Bulgarian public space and respectively in the state policy in the 1930s practically entirely absent was the racist “Gypsy discourse”, so common in other countries at that time. The ideas of racial hygiene reached Bulgaria too but failed to influence Bulgarian academia and society. Even when the issue of the Roma was raised in this context, the reaction was unequivocal. As a reaction to a public lecture on racial hygiene held by Prof. Dr. Stefan

Konsulov in which Gypsies were pointed as an example of “inferior” race, one of the most respected and influential philosophers in Bulgaria, Dimitar Mihalchev, wrote a special article *Racism under the Protection of Biology* (Михалчев, 1939), in which he exposes the ideology and policy of racial hygiene, including concerning Gypsies. As an important argument on the issue of the Gypsies, he first pointed to the example of Atanas Dimitrov, his professor and colleague at Sofia University who, with his life and academic career, has shown that in the presence of appropriate social and cultural conditions Gypsies can be equipollent and equal citizens of Bulgaria (Ibid., p. 213). Prof Mihalchev, in his article, categorically rejected the racist approach to the Gypsies and, after that, this topic was no longer discussed by Bulgarian society. Bulgarian public opinion turned out to be one of the important factors that predetermined the state policy towards the Gypsies during the Second World War, and despite a number of restrictive and discriminatory measures against them, the question of their racial inequality and annihilation was not raised at all (Marushiakova & Попов, 1997, pp. 31–33). In this way, Atanas Dimitrov, even after his death, gave his additional contribution to the salvation of his community, which, together with what he had achieved throughout his life, provided him with a lasting place in the general history of Roma civic emancipation.

The life and work of Atanas Dimitrov did not disappear from the memory of his native community, it was re-discovered by the family of Roma intellectuals – Todorka (Dora) Decheva and Yordan Savov from Sliven (Дечева, 1983; Савов, 2000; 2002) and even his dissertation was translated in Bulgarian and appeared in a Roma journal, published by their son Savcho Savchev (Димитров, 2003–2005). Dimitrov became an affirmed role model for young Roma generation in the public space (Нунев, 2008; Чапразов, 2014).

Shakir Pashov

Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Попов

The history of the Roma movement for civic emancipation in Bulgaria is inextricably linked with the name of Shakir Pashov (1898–1981). To present his personality and his overall public and political activity over the years, in addition to the usual historical sources stored in archives, we have also used his rich personal archive preserved by his successors (ASR, f. Шакир Пашов), as well as memories about him, preserved in the oral history of the community. Among the variety of historical sources, the place of the manuscript entitled *History of the Gypsies in Bulgaria and Europe: “Roma”* (Пашов, 1957), should be especially noted. Much of this manuscript is based on the author’s memories of events in which he was a major participant. Although not credible in some specific details and its interpretations, in many other respects the memoirs of Shakir Pashov are an indispensable and even a unique source. They offer a perspective on the historical processes ‘from within’, which may be somewhat distorted by the vicissitudes of the time.

In this case, there is a historical narrative, reflecting the spirit of the era and presenting the vicissitudes of the historical destiny of the author and of the Roma community as a whole, of which he is the leading representative.

Shakir Mahmudov Pashov was born on October 20, 1898 (ASR, f. Шакир Пашов) in the village of Gorna Banya (today a district of Sofia). Often in various documents from the 1920s and 1930s, his surname is written also as Pashev, including by himself. This is not a mistake, but two different forms (Pashev and Pashov) of the formation of a family name from the personal name Pashi, a common name at that time among the Gypsies in Sofia (in Bulgaria among Gypsies and ethnic Bulgarians as well, the family name if often formed from the forename of the grandfather, following patronymic principals). He belongs to the Roma group of Erlii, who have lived for centuries in Sofia and the surrounding villages (their first documented presence there is from the 15th century – see Marushiakova & Popov, 2001, p. 21). Probably, he came from a family of hereditary blacksmiths and ironsmiths, and throughout his life, he subsisted mainly on ironwork, and these skills have helped him many times in difficult times of his life.

Shakir Pashov received a relatively good education, especially considering that at that time the majority of Gypsies were illiterate or with very basic education. In the last decades of the 19th century, there was a Turkish school in Sofia with more than 100 Gypsy children, five of whom were even sent by the Islamic religious community to Istanbul to continue their education (Пашов, 1957, p. 80). In 1905 the Turkish school ceased to exist, and Gypsy children began to enter Bulgarian schools. After completing his primary education, Shakir Pashov graduated from a vocational school for railway workers. His father worked for many years on the construction of railways in the new Bulgarian state (Ibid., p. 30), i.e. it can be said that Shakir Pashov was a hereditary proletarian.

In 1915, Bulgaria entered the First World War on the side of the Central Powers, and Shakir Pashov was mobilised and sent to the front in Macedonia. His participation in the war should be especially noted because this turned out to be a factor of crucial importance for his further public activity in the field of Roma civic emancipation. Shakir Pashov himself was well aware of this, so in the Preface to his manuscript, he included a poetic account of the time when he fought at the front with his comrades – eight other Gypsies from Sofia. After a heavy battle, they had a long conversation about the need to “organise our Gypsy minority”. In the course of this conversation, he promised that “if I return home alive and well [sic! – authors note; cf. the widespread stereotype that Gypsies/Roma do not have a homeland], I would write the history of the Gypsies in such a way it will be retold by the generations”; and the Foreword ends with the words “I have fulfilled my duty” (Ibid., pp. 5–6).

The essence of the changes in the civic consciousness of the Gypsies in Bulgaria as a result of the participation in the First World War was captured quite precisely by Bernard Gilliat-Smith (writing also under the pseudonym Petulengro) who, before the war, was in diplomatic service in Sofia. His words, although addressing especially the language of

the Gypsies in Sofia, reflect the entire essence of the changes that occurred in their lives after the War:

This [...] was due, I think, to the effects of the First Great War. Pashi Suljoff's [the main respondent of B. Gilliat-Smith, from whom he recorded language and folklore materials – authors note], generation represented a different "culture", a culture which had been stabilised for a long time. The Sofia Gypsy "hammal" [porter] was – a Sofia Gypsy "hammal". He did not aspire to be anything else. He was therefore psychologically, spiritually, at peace with himself. [...] Not so the post-war generation [...] who could be reckoned as belonging to the proletarians of the Bulgarian metropolis. The younger members of the colony were therefore already inoculated with a class hatred which was quite foreign to Pashi Suljoff's generation. [...] To feel "a class apart", despised by the Bulgars who were, de facto, their "Herrenvolk", was pain and grief to them. (Gilliat-Smith, 1945, pp. 18–19).

After Bulgaria's withdrawal from the First World War in 1918, Shakir Pashov returned home from the front. He was the leading initiator of the creation of *Sofia Common Muslim Educational-Cultural Mutual Aid Organisation 'Istikbal – Future'*, which was officially registered on August 2, 1919 (SCA, f. 1 B, op. 8, a.e. 596, l. 69; Marushiakova & Popov, 2021b, pp. 79–83). According to the founding statute of the organisation, Shakir Pashov was its secretary, and the chairman was Yusuf Mehmedov. This is understandable given the traditional norms in the community, where the elderly were the most respected, and Shakir Pashov was 21 years old (i.e. he had just reached the age of majority according to the legal norms of the time). In this way a specific dualism was established in the organisation – the honorary chairman speaks mainly among his community and works on its internal problems, while the young and educated secretary takes over the contacts and works with the society, in particular with the state and municipal institutions.

The appearance of *Sofia Common Muslim Educational-Cultural Mutual Aid Organisation 'Istikbal – Future'* reveal a transition to a new, extremely important stage in the development of Roma civic emancipation. During this stage, the main aspiration of the community was to win and establish its equal position in society. While the previous forms of the realisation of Roma emancipation had been built on the basis of existing institutions, inherited from the previous historical epochs and preserved and developed in the new conditions, these forms were now changed according to the rules and the requirements of the new historical realities and were therefore filled with new contents. The main reason for this development is contextual; namely, the overall and significant changes in the socio-political realities after the end of the First World War, which inevitably affected the Gypsies, who have been an ethnically defined segment of the society. The involvement of the Gypsies in the wars, along with all other Bulgarian citizens, developed and strengthened their sense of belonging to the Bulgarian civic nation. The new realities after the war, when they again became "second class citizens", pushed them towards an organised struggle to change the position of their community in the society, which Shakir Pashov repeatedly underlined. Thus, it turned out that the involvement of the Gypsies

in the Bulgarian army (for more detail see Иванова & Кръстев, 2014) not only led to the strengthening of their national civic identity but also towards the development of the processes of the Roma civic emancipation.

When studying this new, extremely important stage in the development of Roma civic emancipation, one must consider a characteristic feature of the source base. The memoirs of Shakir Pashov, which are one of the main sources for this period, need constant further verification through comparison with other sources dealing with the described events. These memoirs were written in the 1950s (dated 1957) under conditions of communist rule. Logically, he strived for his memoirs to be in tune with the new, ideological reading of history. Without doing so, he would not have hoped that his manuscript could be published. For these reasons in his memoirs, he edited part of his activities, for example he does not mention anywhere the foundation of the Organisation *'Istikbal – Future'* which was created at his initiative and in which he was the leading figure years-long.

As one can learn from the archival documents (SCA, f. 1 B, op. 8, a.e. 596, l. 69), the *Sofia Common Muslim Educational-Cultural Mutual Aid Organisation 'Istikbal – Future'* was defined as 'Muslim' and although the membership was open to all Bulgarian citizens (Art. 4) its primary purpose was "to organise the Muslims in one common organisation which helps the poor in times of illnesses, accidents, death and others" (Art. 2). At first glance organisation *Istikbal* could be characterised, at least according to its Statute, as a typical Muslim charitable organisation. At the same time, from this Statute became clear that the organisation originated from already existing professional organisations and charitable associations (Art. 8), including in addition to the old forms of community life also new elements of civic activities, such as "To fight for their moral, material and educational-cultural upbringing" (Art. 2). And something more, despite the Statute does not mention the word 'Gypsies' even once and it explicitly emphasises that it is "strictly non-partisan" (Art. 6), at the same time it envisaged facilitating the contacts of the members of the organisation with the official administration (чл. 26). This means that the new organisation had ambitions not only to solve the problems within the community (Art. 27), but also to function as its representative within the Bulgarian society, i.e. to develop (among other things) also as a modern civic organisation.

The most important goal of the Organisation *Istikbal* even noted in its Statute, and especially evident by its subsequent actions, was for Gypsies to get involved with the Muslim Religious Community in Sofia in the management of Islamic properties. At that time there were only a small number of ethnic Turks, but they did not allow the inclusion of Gypsies in it. This struggle for Gypsy participation in Muslim faith communities (and accordingly to take part in the disposal of these properties) has its historical roots. As early as 1895, in the new Bulgarian state, Provisional Rules for the Election of the Boards of Trustees of Muslim Municipalities were adopted, in which it was explicitly stated that "Gypsies cannot be voters, nor can they be elected because, according to the rules of

Sheriat they do not take any participation in the management of Muslim religious affairs” (Вълков, 2020, p. 349).

The circumstances that led to the creation of the *Istikbal* become clear if the processes are viewed in this Muslim religious (and property) context. In the same 1919, immediately before its establishment, the Bulgarian state adopted a new *Statute for the Spiritual Organisation and Governing of Muslims in the Kingdom of Bulgaria*. This Statute gives the management of the Waqfs (Muslim religious properties) to the elected boards of Muslim religious communities, and at the same time gives voting rights to those Gypsies “who have permanent residence and are literate in Bulgarian and Turkish” (Вълков, 2020, p. 349). The direct consequence of these legal changes is clearly stated in the Statute of the *Istikbal* Organisation itself, which asserts as a particularly important goal the desire “to give new life to the Muslim religious community” (Article 25).

Although, according to its goals and objectives stated in its Statute, *Istikbal* was formally a Muslim charitable organisation without clearly expressed ethnic dimensions, in practice in its activities over the years (it existed until the Second World War) were directed at Roma civic emancipation and the struggle for participation in the governance of Muslim religious communities and their property can be interpreted precisely in this discourse.

According to the memoirs of Shakir Pashov, the first public appearance of the new Gypsy civic movement was the 1921 meeting of the ‘progressive youth’ (it means to say it was attached to the communist ideas) which elected a delegation and managed to meet with Prime Minister Aleksandar Stamboliyski from Bulgarian Agrarian People’s Union (BZNS). In addition to Shakir Pashov himself, this delegation includes the Chairman of *Istikbal*, Yusuf Mehmedov, as well as Yusein Bilalov (in some documents and publications, the name is also spelt as Bilyalov), Rashid Mehmedov, Redzheb Yuseinov, Muto Bilalov and Bilal Osmanov (Пашов, 1957, p. 101). At this meeting, the delegation raised the issue of the stripping of voting rights for the Gypsies in 1901, which remained in force despite the adopted amendments to the 1919 Election Law, according to which voting was mandatory for all Bulgarian citizens (Държавен вестник, 1919, p. 1). Prime Minister Stamboliyski promised to restore their voting rights and, according to the words of Shakir Pashov, at the next session of the National Assembly, he tabled a “proposal for the restoration of the voting rights of the Gypsies and supported by the Communist MPs, the law was passed” (Пашов, 1957, pp. 101–102). In the debates in the Bulgarian Parliament regarding this correction of the Electoral Law Prime Minister Stamboliyski in response to a remark made by the opposition justified the voting rights of Gypsies with their participation in the Bulgarian army during the wars (Дневник, 1923). Finally, the Electoral law was changed, and the electoral right of Muslim Gypsies was restored. What remained was only the ban on voting for those Gypsies who did not have a permanent residence, i.e. nomads.

The reasons why Shakir Pashov apparently “omits” to mention the early stages of the existence and activities of Organisation *Istikbal* are clear. As already said above, Shakir Pashov did not want to relate his past with this organisation in the first years after its existence, during which its religious characteristics dominated. On the other hand, the struggles for “civil and political rights of the Gypsy minority” (Пашов, 1957, p. 101) in the 1920s he assigns to the Society *Egipet* (‘Egypt’), which was linked with the Communist Party.

According to Shakir Pashov’s memoirs, the Society *Egypt* was founded in 1919, after he returned from the front. Its members were “a major part of the Gypsy intelligentsia and all progressive youth” (it means to say it was attached to the communist ideas). The aim of the society was “to culturally and educationally raise its members, and also the Gypsy minority itself, and, most of all – to work for the political-civic awakening of the Gypsy minority” (Пашов, 1957, p. 99). It is difficult to answer unequivocally the question of whether this Gypsy organisation really existed. On the one hand, no other historical evidence has been found to confirm its legal registration, but on the other hand, society could indeed have existed without taking any steps for such registration. In any case, the popularity of communist ideas among part of the Gypsies in Sofia at that time was unquestionable, and many Gypsy youths were actively involved in political struggles.

Shakir Pashov himself at this time was actively involved in the communist movement. He was a member of the Communist Party (at that time named the Bulgarian Workers’ Social-Democratic Party – narrow socialists) since 1918 (ASR, f. Шакир Пашов). A few months after the establishment of the Society *Egypt*, its members decided to join the newly transformed Bulgarian Communist Party (BKP). The merging of the Society *Egypt* into the Party was carried out in a most celebrated setting in the Club of the Society at 51 Tatarli Street. At the merger, the management of the Society consisted of the following nine members: Asen Totev, Shakir Pashov, Yusein Bilalov, Mancho Shakirov, Mustafa Saydiev, Demir Yasharov, Mancho Arifov, Ali Yasharov and Ramcho Shakirov. Very soon after its creation, the Society already includes more than 50 members (Пашов, 1957, pp. 99–100). In 1920 the Society made its own flag, which was kept in the home of Yusein Bilalov, and with which it participated in the festive demonstrations on May 1. The Society organised in 1924 the mass participation of Gypsies (including Gypsy women dressed in their traditional suit, the shalwars) in the mourning procession at the funeral of Dimitar Blagoev, the founder of the socialist (later communist) movement in Bulgaria, and laid wreaths at his grave (Ibid., p. 100).

The available historical data do not allow a definite answer to the question of whether the Society *Egypt* really existed. Such an association was not officially registered anywhere (which does not mean that it really did not exist), but there is also no other historical evidence of its existence than the memories of Shakir Pashov (Пашов, 1957, p. 99–100). However, Shakir Pashov himself, in another autobiographical document written in 1946, claimed that the young communists in the Gypsy neighbourhood had their

own flag – “red, under the name Napredak (Forward)”, without mentioning the Society Egypt (CSA, f. 1 Б, оп. 6, а.е. 235, л. 6).

At the end of 1919, Shakir Pashov, who at that time was working as a railway worker in the Bulgarian State Railways, became actively involved in the Transport Strike organised by the BKP, for which he was fired (НОВ ПЪТ, 1974, pp. 1–2). In 1922 Shakir Pashov was elected a delegate to the Fourth Congress of the BKP, which was held in Sofia at the Theatre *Renaissance* and was attended by many guests from abroad, including Clara Zetkin as a representative of the International Communist movement (ASR, f. Шакир Пашов, а.е. Автобиография).

On June 9, 1923, a military coup was carried out, as a result of which the BZNS government was overthrown, and its leader and Prime Minister Aleksandar Stamboliyski was assassinated. In the autumn of the same year, on the instructions of the Comintern, the so-called September Uprising broke out, organised by the BKP and the left of the BZNS. Shakir Pashov was wanted by the police and fled to the city of Kyustendil, where he worked as a plumber on the construction of public buildings, leaving his wife and three young children in Sofia without a livelihood, and returned to Sofia only after the brutal suppression of the uprising (ASR, f. Шакир Пашов, а.е. Автобиография).

It should be noted, however, that in some cases Shakir Pashov deliberately “decorated” this Autobiography (written in the late 1960s or 1970s) with additional details that highlighted his leading position in the communist movement. Such is for example his claim that in the parliamentary elections held in 1924 he was elected a Member of Parliament from the United Front (a political coalition between the BKP and the left-wing of the BZNS) (Ibid.), which cannot be true because in 1924 no parliamentary elections were held.

On April 16, 1925, the Military Organisation of the BKP organised an assassination attempt in which the Cathedral of Sveta Nedelya and there were many casualties among the ruling elite. Authorities responded with massive brutal repressions against their political opponents and hundreds of BKP and BZNS activists were killed, as well as some prominent left-wing intellectual. Shakir Pashov was arrested immediately after the attack and spent several months in various police stations and military barracks. After his release, he continued to be monitored by the police, his house was repeatedly searched, and he decided to emigrate from the country. He crossed the border illegally with Turkey, where he made his living various types of unskilled labour in Istanbul and Izmir and did not return to Bulgaria until 1929 (Ibid.).

However, the Organisation *Istikbal* did not cease its activities after the emigration of Shakir Pashov. By participating in the elections for the leadership of Sofia’s Muslim religious community, and in particular of the Waqf Board of Trustees, the Gypsies from Sofia hoped that they would be able to “take it over” from within and in this way, Gypsies were hoping to get the chance to control and use Muslims’ real estate (waqf estates) in order to solve the problems of their own community. As early as 1923–24, the Chief Mufti (the

religious leader of the Muslims in Bulgaria) Suleiman Faik repeatedly pleaded with the Bulgarian authorities not to allow Gypsies in the elections into the boards of trustees of Muslim municipalities, using various arguments. According to him, the Gypsy population is “far behind culturally”, professes Islam only ostensibly, but in fact “continues to live with the beliefs of primitive man. He claimed that Gypsies are “deprived of any culture” and “unfit for any creative work”, so “with their negligence and disregard for religious canons and dogmas they lose the right to be guardians of other Muslims and the handing over of waqfs and Lord-pleasing establishments is clearly inadmissible”. He stressed that Gypsies were numerically smaller than Turks, but were concentrated in important Muslim centres such as the cities of Sofia, Plovdiv, Vidin, and Stara Zagora, where they constituted a majority, and if they are eligible to run in the board elections, they “would win the most important Muslim [religious] communities ... and thus would ruin these properties in the shortest possible time” (Вълков, 2020, p. 349).

In 1925 (before Shakir Pashov’s emigrated from Bulgaria) elections were held for a board of trustees of the school, maintained by the Muslim religious community in Sofia, at which a school board consisting of Muslim Gypsies was elected; chairman became Rashid Mehmedov, vice president Redzheb Yuseinov, secretary Shakir Pashev, and members Mustafa Enkekov, Malik Omerov. This board of trustees has been approved by the Sofia Municipality, but the Muslim religious community, which must provide guarantees for it, refuses to do it (Пашов, 1957, pp. 102–103). In an effort to take control of the school (and other Islamic properties), the Gypsies from Sofia overcame various obstacles, even some of them were able to show official documents issued by Sofia municipality that they are Muslims and ethnic Turks (i.e. they were ready to publicly declare another ethnic identity), but encounter opposition from the leadership of the Sofia’s Muslim community (Ibid.).

These struggles resulted in a file created by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations in 1926, and a lawsuit against the Ministry of Justice for refusal to hold elections for a mosque board of trustees in 1927 (Романо еси, 1946a, p. 2). In response to these aspirations of Muslim Gypsies to participate in Muslim religious boards, after a discussion at the first national congress of the Turks in Bulgaria, held from October 31 to November 3, 1929, in Sofia, it was decided that “Muslim Gypsies cannot participate in elections” for trustees of religious communities because these “purely Turkish national possessions” are inherited from the ancestors of the Turks (Şimşir, 1988, pp. 89–90), i.e. the religious communities themselves manifested themselves as a religious institution, uniting the Turkish minority in Bulgaria and excluding other Muslims (in this case, the Gypsies in particular).

In this situation, after his return to Bulgaria, Shakir Pashov resumed the active work of the Organisation *Istikbal*. According to his memoirs, this happened on the 7th of May 1929, when “the first organisation of the Gypsy minority in Sofia was founded, which unites all former societies (*londzhi*) in the Organisation *Istikbal*, which had the significant, for that time figure of 1,500 members, with President Yusuf Mehmedov and Secretary Shakir

Pashev, and Member – Yusein Bilalov” (Пашов, 1957, p. 103). In fact, however, it was not the creation of a new organisation, but a renewal of the old one, preserving not only the name and the governing body but also its seal, which (as will be discussed later) was used until the end of 1930.

As seen, the new generation in the civic movement relied on the already existing, older forms of community organisation in the Gypsy neighbourhoods, namely on the so-called *londzhi*. The *londzhi* have originated on the basis of the Gypsy guild's (*esnaf*) associations (and preserved their terminology); they have lost their former professional bases but retained the functions of mutual aid. Organisation *Istikbal* tried to take on some of their functions, in particular, the charitable work and the support of members in emergency situations (especially in funerals which involved many expenses) but this was not enough for the community. That is why some of the *londzhi* began to function as charitable civic associations and sought formal registration (how many of them managed to do so is difficult to say). Overall, the institutions of the *londzhi* have proved to be extremely sustainable over the years, although their activities have been restricted by the Communist regime. In Sofia, they continue to exist to this day while their activity is already entirely controlled by women.

In the same year, another Gypsy organisation was founded, the Society *Vzaimopomosht* (Mutual Aid), chaired by Rashid Mehmedov, which also included some of the *londzhi*. In addition to these two large organisations, the Gypsies in Sofia had professional guilds of blacksmiths, tinsmiths, small traders (junk-dealers), which (at least according to Shakir Pashov) were also members of *Istikbal*, as well as the youth cultural and educational association *Naangle* (Forward) and the sports association *Egypt*. In 1930, the two major Gypsy organisations, along with all others, merged under a common name, *Istikbal* (Future). The new (actually old, but with a new format) organisation was headed by Shakir Pashev, two vice-chairmen (Redzheb Yuseinov and Rashid Mehmedov), two secretaries (Ahmed Sotirov and Ramcho Shakirov), and members Yusein Bilalov, Emin Eminov, Raycho Kochev, and others (Ibid.).

In the 1930s, the *Istikbal* Organisation, already headed by Shakir Pashov, developed its activities in the two main directions set at its inception, which, although quite conditional, can be defined as religious and civic, as these two lines of development were constantly intertwined and complement each other over the years.

Religious activities were not very successful. The struggle for the admission of the Gypsies into the management of the Muslim community and, respectively, of its religious properties, continued. On behalf of the Muslim Gypsies in Sofia, a lawsuit was filed against the prosecutor of the Sofia District Court in 1930 for non-compliance with legal provisions, which finally failed after the case reached the Supreme Administrative Court. It is indicative, that in the whole article of Hyusein Bilalov, in which these struggles are described (Романо еси, 1946a, p. 2), the word 'Gypsies' is not mentioned even once, i.e. in the strifes for inclusion into Islamic boards (and property), the noting of ethnic identity is omitted.

However, the activities of the Organisation *Istikbal* were by no means limited only to the struggle for a place for the Gypsies in the Islamic religious community. A poster printed in 1930 on behalf of the *Sofia Common Muslim Educational-Cultural Mutual Aid Organisation 'Istikbal – Future'* that was titled *Moods and Truths. To the attention of our State, the Sofia Municipal Administration, and the Society* illustrates this change (DA Sofia, f. 1 K, op. 2, a.e. 831, l. 625–62506). The poster is dated March 6, 1930, and was prepared on the occasion of numerous publications in the press, about the upcoming displacement of the inhabitants of the Gypsy neighbourhood in Sofia (80–100 families). In response to this 'lawlessness', the organisation states that the Gypsy neighbourhood could not be considered a "nest of infectious diseases" (as it is called by the press) because "no one resident of the neighbourhood is registered in Sofia hospitals"; that "morally ... we are the strictness" and in the "Morality" department of the Police Directorate among the registered prostitutes "there is not a single Gypsy woman"; that maintaining street cleanliness is an obligation of the city authorities, which they do not fulfil due to "criminal negligence". The poster also notes that the people from the neighbourhood (i.e. Gypsies) make their living from "skilled labour" of "blacksmiths, basket makers, livestock dealers, musicians, porters, shoemakers, etc.", which is of use for all inhabitants of Sofia. Furthermore, it underlines especially that "we, as equal citizens of our equally dear for everybody homeland Bulgaria, took a valiant and proven courageous part in the wars [the two Balkan Wars and the First World War – authors' note.], in which Bulgaria fought and, on an equal footing, we all made dear sacrifices". The organisation quotes the paragraph from the Constitution: "all Bulgarian citizens are equal before the laws of our country", and "property rights are inviolable". A request is made to form a joint commission with representatives of the residents of the neighbourhood to determine the illegally settled communities coming there from the countryside of "comb-makers, sieve makers, beggars, and others" (Ibid.). The text of the poster uses both terms, 'Muslims' and 'Gypsies' (with the predominance of the former), but without opposing them, i.e. in this way, for the first time, the Organisation *Istikbal* de facto declared itself a representative of the Roma community in the public space, and thus became a political subject in their struggles for civic emancipation.

In his Autobiography, Shakir Pashov described how, after returning from Turkey, he became a member of the Workers' Party (a legal political structure established in 1927 of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BKP), banned in 1924) and formed a "Gypsy Party group". In 1931 he became "chairman of the Gypsy Cultural and Educational organisation in Bulgaria", founded the "first Gypsy newspaper in Bulgaria" *Terbie* (Upbringing), which "fought for the cultural and educational uprising of political consciousness of our tobacco workers in Bulgaria" (ASR, f. Шакир Пашов, а.е. Автобиография). However, the real course of events, which is reflected in other historical sources, shows a more or less different picture. The newspaper *Terbie*, which would be an invaluable source in that direction, regrettably, has not been preserved in the Bulgarian libraries and it is not known whether there are somewhere any stored copies of it. According to known

data, the newspaper was published between 1932 (or 1933) and 1934 (last is No. 7 from May 6, 1934) with a total of 7 issues, with print-run 1,500. In No. 2 from February 27, it is noted that the editor-in-chief is Sh[akir] M. Pashev, and the newspaper is a publication of the *Mohammedan National Educational and Cultural Organisation*; from issue No. 6 the newspaper became a publication of the *Common Mohammedan National Cultural and Educational Union in Bulgaria*, and the editorial committee included Shakir Mahmudov Pashev (editor-in-chief), Asen Gotov and Demir Yasharov (Иванчев, 1966, Vol. 2, p. 398; see also Marinov, 2021, pp. 51–56). In his Autobiography, Shakir Pashov writes neutrally “the Gypsy Cultural and Educational Organisation” without giving the exact names of the organisations he really has in mind – *Sofia Common Muslim Educational-Cultural Mutual Aid Organisation ‘Istikbal – Future’, Mohammedan National Educational and Cultural Organisation*, and *Common Mohammedan-Gypsy National Cultural-Educational and Mutual Aid Union in Bulgaria*. This “omission” of the exact names was obviously made deliberately – in order not to mention their definition as ‘Muslim’ (*Mohammedan*) and all activities in religious direction. However, when he writes about the 1930s, he nevertheless marks his ties with *Istikbal* as in the name of *Istikbal* the ties with Islam are not so visible.

To put it in brackets, the newspaper *Terbie* was not the first Gypsy newspaper in Bulgaria. In the 1920s and 1930s the following newspapers were published: *Светилник* (Candlestick), *Bulletin of the Gypsies Mission in Bulgaria: Народът, който се нуждае от просвета чрез Евангелието* (Bulletin of the Gypsies Mission in Bulgaria. A Nation that needs Enlightenment through the Gospel), and *Известия на Циганската евангелска мисия* (Bulletin of the Gypsy Evangelical Mission). The first of them was published in the town of Lom in 1927, and the other two in Sofia in 1932–1933, and their editor-in-chief was Pastor Petar Minkov (Иванчев, Vol. 1, 1962, p. 363; Vol. 2, 1966, p. 264; Vol. 3, 1969, p. 6; see also Marinov, 2021, pp. 37–51). All of them are related to the entry and spread of the so-called new (Evangelical) churches among the Gypsies in Bulgaria at that time (for more detail see Славкова, 2007), which had a relatively limited scope and themes.

About the contents of the newspaper *Terbie*, we can judge, apart from Shakir Pashov’s memoirs, from only two other independent historical sources. One of them is the already quoted article by (H)Yusein Bilalov “From the life of the Sofia Muslim confessional municipality – Sofia” (Романо еси, 1946a, p. 2), which is actually a reprint of the article first published in the newspaper *Terbie* and in which the emphasis is on the struggle for participation in the management of the Islamic religious community (and its properties). The second source is the article *Gypsies and the Gypsy Question* by Nayden Sheytanov, an amateur researcher of Gypsies, published in the central press (Мир, 1934, p. 3). As pointed by Sheytanov, the newspaper *Terbie* devotes a great deal of space to the struggles of Muslim Gypsies for access to the government of Islamic religious communities and property, and in this field, their ethnic identity is left behind. At the same time, however, the newspaper publicly presented the new ‘national’ concept about the Gypsy community. It constantly used the terms “our nation”, “our national movement”,

“our national consciousness”, i.e. Gypsies recognise themselves as a nationality, “descendants of the great King Pharaoh”, and it appeals to its fellow men: “Do not neglect your family, your faith, your traditions”, “You must proudly call yourself a Gypsy!” (Ibid.). As can be seen, the Roma historical narrative at that time continued to be dominated by the “Egyptian version” about their origin, which began to give way to the “Indian version” only in the 1950s, after the knowledge about it reached them and under the influence of the first wave of Indian films shown in Bulgaria, and which is already dominant in the manuscript of Shakir Pashov himself. The newspaper *Terbie* covers the strategic plans and concrete actions aimed at moving the Roma civic emancipation movement to a new, national level. Indicative in this respect is the call to the Sofia Gypsies “to self-organise as soon as possible in order to give pace to the whole of Bulgaria, so that [...] we have representatives of our interests” (Ibid.), which can be interpreted as a desire for political representation of the Gypsy community. The newspaper reflects the specific attempts in this direction, such as the organisation of a “чѳбор (fair)” in the village of Dolna Kremena, Vratsa region, as well as the effect of these activities, reflected in letters from cities of Sliven, Vratsa, the village of Galiche, etc. (Ibid.).

New moments in the development of the civic consciousness of the Gypsies were also the calls to the Bulgarian State to start an active policy for the social integration of the Gypsies. The main argument in that direction were the realities in other countries around the world: “Why Gypsies in Turkey are not in such a low stage as we in Bulgaria? [...] In Europe, especially in Austria, Hungary, Romania, Poland [...] and in Soviet Russia, there were legislators there, and they created a series of laws to assist [the Gypsies], both materially and cultural-educational.” (Ibid.).

According to Nayden Sheytanov, the newspaper *Terbie* cooperated with the “Romanian and Hungarian Gypsies” (Ibid.). In fact, from today’s point of view, we cannot be sure whether such cooperation took place or whether this was a mere propaganda ploy. Nevertheless, it shows that there was a clear consciousness of a cross-border unity of the Gypsy community.

In his memoirs, Shakir Pashov devoted much space to the newspaper *Terbie* and to the important role it played for “upbringing and cultural-educational uplifting of the Gypsy population in Bulgaria” (Пашов, 1957, p. 104), and also, viewed more generally, to raise the civic consciousness and civic national identity of the Gypsies. In his words, “the newspaper *Terbie* raised truly the national and patriotic feeling of the Gypsy minority, but it did not fight convincingly against its chauvinistic feelings [...] [and] was working towards an enlightening patriotism but it did stand against uneducated fanaticism and chauvinism” (Ibid., pp. 109–110). The newspaper was distributed throughout the country, as for that purpose, many people were organised in Vratsa, Lom, Oryahovo, Plevna, Plovdiv, Kyustendil, Stara Zagora, Ruse, Shumen, Burgas, Pernik, Sliven and in many villages (Ibid., p. 104).

The first step for the organisation of the Gypsies in the country and for the actual creation of a national Gypsy civil organisation was the Conference, which took place

near the Mezdra Station, on May 7, 1932. The Conference was held thanks to the initiative of the Gypsy organisation in Vratsa. The organisers of the Conference were Nikola Palashev and Sando Ibrov. Delegates from the whole Vratsa region, including from the villages, Montana, Oryahovo and the villages around it, Byala Slatina, Pleven, Lom, and Cherven Bryag were presented here. The Sofia delegation was headed by Shakir Pashov, and also included Emin Eminov, Naydo Yasharov and Ali Yasharov. According to Shakir Pashov at the conference it was decided that all Gypsies in Bulgaria should be led by the common Organisation *Istikbal*, and its newspaper *Terbie* “would penetrate as an enlightening beam to the last hut of the entire Gypsy minority in Bulgaria” (Ibid.).

In his memoirs, Shakir Pashov consciously linked all activities in the field of Roma emancipation in the early 1930s with the Organisation *Istikbal*, including the publication of the newspaper *Terbie*. In fact, however, the leading organisation in these processes was the new organisation already established in 1931 and led by him, which in various sources is called *Mohammedan National Educational and Cultural Organisation* (Иванчев, 1966, Vol. 2, p. 398) or *Common Mohammedan National Cultural and Educational Union* (Мир, 1934, p. 3). No documents about its registration have thus far been discovered, but in 1933 this organisation was reformatted and attempted to be registered, but in 1933 this organisation was reformatted and tried to register, which is something he also “failed” to mention in his memoirs. The Minutes from the meeting for the establishment of the organisation bearing the name *Common Mohammedan-Gypsy National Cultural-Educational and Mutual Aid Union in Bulgaria* has been preserved. From the Minutes it became clear that on December 25, 1933, in Sofia a Constituent Assembly was held with Chair Ramcho Shakirov, Vice-Chair Demir Yasharov, and Secretary Slavi Iliev, at which the Board of Directors of the new organisation was elected with members Shakir M. Pashev (living at that time on 80 Konstantin Velichkov Street), Rashid Mehmedov, Bilyal Osmanov, Slavi Iliev and Mehmed Skenderov, and as Substitute Members – Ramcho Shakirov and Mladen Spasov. The management board elected the President of the Union – Shakir M. Pashev, Secretary of the Union – Slave Iliev, and Treasurer of the Union – Mehmed Skenderov. Control Commission, Enlightenment Council, and Religious Council were also elected (CSA, f. 264, op. 2, a.e. 8413, l. 27–28; Marushiakova & Popov, 2021b, pp. 86–93).

At this Constituent Assembly, the Statute of the *Common Mohammedan-Gypsy National Cultural-Educational and Mutual Aid Union in Bulgaria* was discussed and adopted. In the Statute of the new organisation, there are a number of new and important elements as compared with the Statute of the Organisation *Istikbal*. It is the name itself that explicitly emphasised that it was a union of the Gypsies in Bulgaria, i.e. it already had the ambition to work on a national scale along with separate sub-divisions in the country and to be representative of the whole community. This was explicitly stated at the beginning of the Statute, in the chapter about the purpose of the Union: “to organise all Gypsies (Mohammedans and others) in their national belonging in Bulgaria”, and “to create an organisation for the preservation of the material and spiritual interests of this nation in the country, but also a mutual aid institute through self-help” (Art. 1), as well as

to work “for the cultivation of civil virtues in the motherland – Bulgaria” (Art. 2). The new Union had ambitions to unite all existing forms of Gypsy organisations (civic, mutual aid, sport, etc. including the professional associations), without infringing on their independence (Art. 3). Moreover, the Union even left its door open to take on an international dimension, allowing it to be joined by “our co-nationals” from other countries (Art. 3). Of course, this possibility remained at an abstract level, but it still refers to the beginning of the establishment of a Gypsy trans-border identity (or at least the presence of such a desire is indicated). The tasks that the Union set for itself go far beyond those of *Istikbal*, and by its very design, it was, to a much greater extent, a modern Gypsy civic organisation which should work in three main directions – cultural-educational, religious, and urban development – in which they intended to use a full range of diverse activities.

An interesting point in the Statute of the Union is the possibility, “if the laws permit, the opening of the private schools” (Art. 2). It can be assumed that this article envisaged a successful completion of the long struggle for the Gypsies to gain control over the Islamic religious community in Sofia and its properties because according to the then legal norms only religious communities have the right to open their own private schools, i.e. such an outcome would make it possible to establish its private Gypsy school.

It is worth noting that the new Union declared as its patron saint's day the day of St. Gheorghe (although almost all of its founders were Muslims), which continued the tendency set in the organisation in the city of Vidin (see above) to create its own ethno-national symbols, which (given the dichotomy ‘community – society’) was not in contradiction with the civic national identity clearly expressed in the Statute itself. In April 1934, *the Common Mohammedan-Gypsy National Cultural-Educational and Mutual Aid Union in Bulgaria* submitted the necessary documents for official registration in the Ministry of Internal Affairs and National Health, which was then a legal requirement (CSA, f. 264, op. 2, a.e. 8413, l. 1). Following a military coup on May 19, 1934, a new government headed by Kimon Georgiev came to power. It banned the existence of all political parties and organisations, and therefore stopped their newspapers. Because of that, Shakir Pashov wrote a new letter to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and National Health, emphasising that the *Common Mohammedan-Gypsy National Cultural-Educational and Mutual Aid Union in Bulgaria* unites legally registered organisations such as *Blacksmiths' Society*, *Tinsmiths' Society*, *Society Egypt*, *Organisation Istikbal*, *Mutual Aid Society*, and it is an organisation without any party allegiance, therefore he asks the Statute of the new organisation to be approved and it to be officially legalised (Ibid., l. 14). The Ministry sent the Union's documents to the Department of Religions with the request for an opinion. The Department returned a resolution: “this Statute NOT TO BE AFFIRMED because the Gypsy Muslims in our country are organised through foreign influence” (Ibid., l. 14), thus finally the registration of the *Common Mohammedan-Gypsy National Cultural-Educational and Mutual Aid Union in Bulgaria* was rejected (Ibid., l. 2).

As can be seen from these materials, the reason for the refusal to register the Union was not because it is ‘Gypsy’ one, but because it is ‘Muslim’, and that is why it can be

used as a channel of “foreign influence” (foreign in this case means Turkish – authors note). It is maybe paradoxically, but the same argument was used by Nayden Sheytanov in his aforementioned article, in which he explicitly warned the “competent and responsible” (i.e. the authorities) that the *Common Mohammedan National Cultural-Educational Union in Bulgaria* was intended as a centre to which the Gypsies should be attracted in order to create a “common front” of the Muslims in Bulgaria (Мир, 1934, p. 3). Nayden Sheytanov’s interpretation is in fact used as a reason for the rejecting the application for registration of the Union by the authorities, although the statute of the new Union introduced the term ‘Gypsy’ and its goals have been extended compared to the Statute of the First Union, going now far beyond the religious dimensions of the organisation. The historical irony is that Sheytanov used this insinuation to call the authorities to pay more serious attention to the Gypsies and their problems while the result turned out to be the opposite. The inclusion of the Gypsies in the general anti-Muslim (actually anti-Turkish) discourse of the state policy was not something new for Bulgaria. In fact, this approach is characteristic of the entire history of the new Bulgarian state, and its most striking manifestation is the so-called “Process of Revival” in the 1980s, when the Communist regime forced all Muslims, including the Gypsies to change their Muslim (Turko-Arabic) to Christian (Bulgarian) names not because they were Gypsies but because they were Muslims (in fact, the name change for Gypsies began as soon as the 1960s).

In his memoirs, Shakir Pashov wrote that after the coup of May 19, 1934, the organisation *Istikbal* was banned by the authorities and ceased its activities (Пашов, 1957, p. 118; Небе помá, 1957f, p. 4). In this case, he was referring to the refusal to register the *Common Mohammedan-Gypsy National Cultural-Educational and Mutual Aid Union in Bulgaria* (about which, as already stated, he does not mention a single word in his memoirs). In any case, there are a number of documentary pieces of evidence suggesting that the organisation not only continued to exist after 1934 but even wrote formal letters to the local and national authorities on the organisation’s letterhead and used its stamp, even one of them (published above) was addressed to the Police Department itself. Probably because of these contacts, which could be interpreted by his detractors as cooperation with the authorities, he preferred to present his activities in the second half of the 1930s without mentioning the allegedly “closed” organisation. Despite this, in his memoirs he praised the activities of the organisation, explicitly noting that “The *Istikbal* organisation played the role of an official institution the only one representing the Gypsy minority before the legitimate authorities in Sofia” (Пашов, 1957, p. 105), and he described precisely the time for which he claims that it was forbidden.

In 1934 Shakir Pashov worked as a machine mechanic in the municipal technical workshop but because he participated in the strike organised by the Workers’ Party, he was fired on January 1, 1935 (ASR, f. Шакир Пашов, а.е. Автобиография). After his dismissal, he made a living from his small ironwork workshop, which was located in the area of Positano Street. At that time, he lived with his family in the largest Gypsy mahala in Sofia at that time, known as *Konyovitsa* and *Tatarli*, located on one side of Klementina

Boulevard (today's Alexander Stamboliyski Boulevard), on the other side of which was the Jewish mahala; in 1943 (or 1944) the family moved to the so-called *Boyana* mahala (or *Brick Factory* mahala), located around today's Gotse Delchev Boulevard. During this period (1934–1944) Shakir Pashov actively worked among his community. In his memoirs, he paid special attention to the struggles of Organisation *Istikbal* against some traditional customs of the Gypsies in Sofia, even one chapter of his manuscript is entitled *Habits, Customs and the Fight against the Harmful Ones* (Пашов, 1957, pp. 111–115). In this chapter, he was referring especially to the customs and rituals connected to the paying of the bride price, the circumcision of boys, wearing shalwars by the women, all which Shakir Pashov describes as harmful to the Gypsies. It is hard not to notice, however, that these customs are linked (including in the eyes of the surrounding population) with Muslim traditions and clearly the emphasis and efforts of the organisation in this regard were influenced by the spirit of the time in which the memoirs were written. However, this was not the main approach of the author because not a single concern has been raised regarding opposing, for instance, the Muslim cultural elements during funerals, which (at least at that time) followed strongly Muslim traditions (including the obligatory presence of an Islamic cleric). The apparent need for support the community in organising funerals is reflected in the Statutes of the Gypsy organisations *Istikbal*, *Common Mohammedan-Gypsy National Cultural-Educational and Mutual Aid Union in Bulgaria*, and it also was one of the reasons for the establishment of other organisations, as for example the *Gypsy Cultural-Educational and Posthumously-Charitable Association 'Butlaches'* (Virtue) in 1939 (CSA, f. 264, op. 5, a.e. 1109, l. 3–5). Moreover, Shakir Pashov himself mentioned in his memoirs as an important moment in the activities of the Organisation *Istikbal* the ownership of a funeral car, as well as that it helped poor Gypsy families in need to cover the funeral expenses (Пашов, 1957, p. 105). So, it is logical to assume that Shakir Pashov actually assessed the customs and rituals mentioned by him as “harmful”, i.e. appearing as an obstacle to the development of the community, as well as to its successful social integration and civic emancipation, and therefore fought against them.

As could be clearly seen here, the whole development of the Organisation *Istikbal* during the interwar period oscillated constantly between ethnic and religious, with the latter in Bulgaria being directly linked and often replaced by another (Turkish) ethnic identity. In any case, regardless of the specific variant, these ethnic and religious identities were superimposed on the Bulgarian civic national identity. This multidimensionality of identities is reflected in the names of the organisations – most of them in Bulgarian, and much less include Turkish words (*Istikbal*, newspaper *Terbie*) as well as in Romani language (*Naangle*, *Butlaches*). The identity negotiation is especially clear in the Gypsy activists' struggle against the shalwars described above. On the one hand, this was a struggle for the establishment of the Bulgarian civic national identity in the public space, by denying these Gypsy traditions, which were interpreted as Turkish; on the other hand, as Shakir Pashov himself wrote that the shalwars remained as a ‘museum value’ (Пашов,

1957, p. 115) and as a Gypsy national symbolism, which was demonstrated publicly only on certain special occasions: for example, at the festive demonstrations until circa the 1960s, the Gypsies from Sofia would pass in front of the officials' tribune dressed in festive shalwars (ASR, f. Фотографии), a fact which can be seen in the many preserved photos from that time.

Another important event in the second half of the 1930s, to which Shakir Pashov paid special attention in his memoirs, was the organisation of a Gypsy Ball, held at the City Casino, located in the centre of Sofia. It featured art scenes from *The Thousand and One Nights*, authored by himself, the director was Emin Eminov, and ballet master Hyusein A. Bilalov. The Gypsy ball was widely attended, was very well received by the audience, and was widely covered by the press in Bulgaria (Пашов, 1957, p. 120), and abroad. From the descriptions in it, it is clear that the Gypsy Ball was opened by a mixed choir, which performed the Bulgarian national anthem, followed by traditional Gypsy songs; the dancer Anushka and the famous Gypsy singer Keva also took part in the Ball (Observer, 1937). The singer Keva, who sung in the popular cabaret *At Keva's*, located in the then Gypsy neighbourhood, which at that time was frequently visited by capital's bohemians, and according to rumours, also even by members of the royal family (Тенев, 1997, pp. 225–227, 233–235). She also recorded several gramophone records in the 1930s, including songs in Bulgarian and Romani language (Димов, 2005).

At the Gypsy Ball, the Bulgarian Tsar Boris III was also invited, but while he did not personally attend it, he had sent an envelope containing money for the poor Gypsies (ASR, f. Шакир Пашов). For obvious reasons, Shakir Pashov himself does not mention anything about this in his manuscript. In the memoirs, he also made a small factual error. According to him, the Gypsy Ball happened on March 3 (national holiday of Bulgaria) in 1938 (Пашов, 1957, p. 120; Неве ромá, 1957f, p. 4), but in fact, the ball was in 1937, as evidenced by the many materials, published by the Bulgarian and foreign press.

In his memoirs, Shakir Pashov described how on March 6, 1938, the Gypsy neighbourhood was locked by the authorities due to press publications about the spreading of typhus among the Gypsies. On his initiative, a committee was elected, which demanded that the authorities end the blockade and even insisted on receiving compensations from the state for the lost wages of those who were prevented from going to work (Пашов, 1957, pp. 118–119). However, he “failed” to write that on this occasion the Organisation Istikbal issued a public declaration, *A Clarification in Relation to the Appearance in the Newspaper Dnevnik (Diary) of False and Inaccurate Information about the Occurrence of the Disease Typhus among the Gypsies* on 16 March 1938 (DA Sofia, f. 1 K, op. 4, a.e. 531, l. 5). It is clear from this declaration that these manipulations through the press in the public space were not accidental, but were part of an organised campaign that has been going on for years (Ibid.), and it included also a series of complaints from the surrounding Bulgarian population from 1937–1938 to various institutions against allegedly illegal settlement of Gypsies, violation of public order, poor sanitation, etc. (DA Sofia, f. 1 K, op. 4, a.e. 531). The purpose of this campaign is very transparent – to evict the Gypsies

from the Gypsy neighbourhoods Konyovitsa, Tatarli and Batalova vodenitsa, into then-emerging new Gypsy neighbourhood Fakulteta (at that time in the outskirts of the city), and to buy their plots for little money. That is why Istikbal's declaration ends with an appeal to the Bulgarian authorities:

This, in our view, is unworthy and unjust because it inflames the passions and creates resentment which is necessary for no one. Instead of us being supported, instead of us being taught something good so that we are good Bulgarian citizens, we are treated like this. We are Bulgarian citizens, with Bulgarian spirit, we have left the bones of our fathers and brothers on the battlefields in the two wars and today we are ready to sacrifice for the benefit of our homeland Bulgaria in which we were born, we live and enjoy all freedoms. (Ibid., l. 5).

In 1937, the Gypsy theme also attracted public attention on another occasion. In the yellow press appears an article entitled *Gypsies Will Organise* which reports that two young Gypsies, Ahmed Seizov and Petar Ivanov, were touring the country and trying (without much success) to organise Gypsies into a union to be a member of the International Gypsy Union based in Hungary (Празднични вести, 1937, p. 2). The Bulgarian police investigated the case but failed to find persons with such names; also the leadership of the Organisation *Istikbal* confirmed that such persons were unknown in the Gypsy community (CSA, f. 370, op. 6, a.e. 745, l. 1, 3). Nor was there anything known about the existence at this time of any International Gypsy Union (neither in Hungary nor anywhere in the world), so it is likely this may have been a journalistic hoax.

The last written statement of the Organisation *Istikbal*, for which historical evidence is preserved, is an official letter to the Police Directorate dated July 18, 1939, signed by Shakir Pashov and stamped with the seal of the organisation. It is significant that in this letter, the Gypsy organisation discerned clearly between their obligations towards their community and the expectations of the state for active policy towards them as part of the society, and explicitly emphasised that state intervention was crucial for the future of their people. This letter calls on the police to “take the most stringent measures against all Gypsy men and Gypsy women who roam in the night without any reason in the neighbourhood, especially those who are in an intoxicated state”, and “do what you need to do to close down the Gypsy cabarets – the nests of immorality, that demoralise the Gypsy population and act very poorly for the upbringing, especially of the youth and of the children in the neighbourhood” (DA Sofia, f. 1 K, op. 4, a.e. 683, l. 93).

There is no reliable historical evidence of Shakir Pashov's political and civic activities during the Second World War when Bulgaria was an ally of Nazi Germany (although Bulgaria did not send its army to the Eastern Front), but partisan units were formed in the country and an armed struggle led by the Communist Party developed. According to Shakir Pashov himself, during this period he was actively involved in the anti-fascist resistance, and his iron workshop, located at that time at 28 Serdika Street (in the centre of Sofia), was used as a place of communication through which they transmitted illegal materials and weapons (ASR, f. Шакир Пашов, а.е. Автобиография). However, there is

no other historical evidence for these allegations, nor for the plan for a conference of the Gypsy minority prepared by him (with the approval of the illegal communist activists with whom he is in constant contact) to be held on September 5–6, 1944 (Ibid.).

At the beginning of September 1944, the political situation in Bulgaria changed radically. At that time, the Soviet army had already reached the Bulgarian border, and on September 5 the USSR declared war to Bulgaria; and on September 9 a new government led by the Fatherland Front (a political coalition dominated by the Communist Party) came to power. According to Shakir Pashov, the very next day he, together with several other Gypsy activists, appeared before the new authorities, from whom they received an order to establish a Gypsy organisation at the Fatherland Front; such an organisation was created, and it was headed by Shakir Pashov himself (Ibid.). There is also no other historical evidence for these events, and it seems highly unlikely that only a few hours after taking power, the creation of a Gypsy organisation was a matter of importance for the communist leadership. What is certain however is that Shakir Pashov in the first days after September 9 started to serve the new government and organised mass public events with the participation of Gypsies. Two photographs have been preserved, in all probability from September 1944 (ASR, f. Фотографии), which reflects these events. The first of them shows a rally of Sofia citizens in support of the new government, as in the first line are festively dressed Gypsy women who put up a poster with the inscription “Long live the Fatherland Front. Death to fascism. Gypsy mahala Sofia” (Ibid.). Another photo shows the manifestation of Gypsies in Sofia, in front of the Bulgarian Parliament where women are dressed in festive “traditional” costumes (wearing shalwars) and wear posters with the words “Down with Racial Differences”, and the same poster as described above (Ibid.). This Gypsy manifestation is also reflected in a painting by the famous Bulgarian artist Vasil Evtimov (1900–1986), dated 1944, i.e. it was painted immediately after the manifestation (Галерия “Лоранъ”, 2014).

The end of the Second World War marked the beginning of a new historical era in which, under the influence of new social and political realities, the basic ideas and ways of realisation of Roma civic emancipation began to radically change. On March 6, 1945, i.e. even before the end of the war, in Sofia, at 18 Tatarli Street, a *United Common-Cultural and Educational Organisation of the Gypsy Minorities ‘Ekipe’* (‘Unity’ in Romani language) was established. The creation of the new organisation was announced as the restoration of the old, “disbanded organisation Istikbal” (Пашов, 1957, p. 121), i.e. the continuity of the two organisations is emphasised.

At this constituent assembly, the Statute of the old/new Gypsy organisation was presented and its leadership was elected, which includes: chairman – Shakir Pashev, vice-chairmen – Raycho Kochev and Bilal Osmanov, secretary – Tair Selimov, cashier – Demir Rustemov, and members – Emin Eminov, Hyusein A. Bilalov, Sulyo Metkov, Resho Demirov, Ramcho Totev, Demcho Blagoev, Naido Yasharov, Asan Osmanov (Palyacho), Asan Somanov, Ismail Shakirov, Shakir Meshchanov, Ali Mehmedov, Izet Salchov and Tseko Nikolov (Ibid., p. 121–122).

According to the Statute (CSA, f. 1 B, op. 8, a.e. 596, l. 50–52; Marushiakova & Popov, 2021b, pp. 103–110), the organisation set itself the following tasks: a) To fight against fascism, the anti-Gypsyism and racial prejudices; b) To raise the Gypsy nationality feeling and consciousness among the Bulgarian Gypsies; c) To introduce the Gypsy language among the Gypsy masses as oral and written language; d) To introduce the Bulgarian Gypsy minority to the Gypsy culture; e) To introduce to the Bulgarian Gypsies their spiritual, social and economic culture; f) To uplift economically the all Gypsy stratum in Bulgaria; g) To make physically fit the Gypsy youth in Bulgaria; h) To make the Gypsy masses productive; i) To consolidate and set up Gypsy institutes in Bulgaria; j) To enlighten the general Bulgarian opinion regarding the needs of the Gypsy population; k) To create a longing feeling among the Gypsies for the creation of a national hearth in their own land. The organisation has a national scope and a complex hierarchical structure and includes local organisations. It is explicitly emphasised that “eligible members could be any Gypsy at the age of 18 and above, regardless of sex and social status” and “all Gypsies with Mohammedan and Christian Orthodox religions without any differentiation being made” (Art. 2), it means it should unite the whole Gypsy community and be its public representative.

An intriguing point in the Statute of the Organisation *Ekiye* was the emergence of ideas about the future development of the Gypsies as an ethno-nation, i.e. a transformation into a nation-state (even if this was vaguely worded and presented as a matter of the uncertain future).

The Statute repeatedly emphasised the commitment of its activities to the “World Gypsy Movement”, the “World Gypsy Organisation” and the “World Gypsy Congresses” (Art. 1, 2, 22, 23), and, ultimately, as a distant perspective, the creation of an independent Gypsy state – “To create an aspiration in the Gypsies to build a national hearth in their own land” (Art. 3). At that time, nowhere in the world has there been a ‘World Gypsy Organisation’ so, it remains unclear how Shakir Pashov and the Gypsy activists came up with these ideas, which occupied leading positions in the ideological platform of the new organisation. One possibility here is to have a representation of what is desired as a reality, in the hope of activating the mechanism of ‘fulfilling prophecy’, and it is quite likely that we have an analogy here with the ideas from the world of Zionism which were especially popular at the time. Another possibility is that they were informed about the ideas for creating a Gypsy state, launched publicly by the so-called “Gypsy Kings” from the “Kwiek dynasty” in Poland, which were widely covered in the world media in the 1930s (see Marushiakova & Popov, 2021b, pp. 599–650).

In any case, one of the main national symbols of the future Gypsy state, the national flag, was already present in the Statute of the organisation (Art. 59). Its description, however, is not very clear (“The flag of the organisation is red with two white fields and with a triangle in the middle”), as its symbolism is not clear. May 7 was declared a holiday of the organisation. In his memoirs, Shakir Pashov explained that the celebration of this date began in 1934 when Gypsies laid a wreath at the grave of Redzheb Yuseinov, longtime

vice-president of the Organisation *Istikbal*, and since then it has become a tradition for Gypsies in Sofia to celebrate this date (Пашов, 1957, p. 105). However, he failed to announce that May 7 was the first day after the day of St Gheorghe, to whom all Gypsies in Sofia (mostly Muslims) visit the cemetery to honour their deceased relatives. The fact that the day of St Gheorghe was not explicitly mentioned in the Statute, but only the date of May 7 was declared a holiday of the organisation, reflects the unwillingness to publicly demonstrate religious connections in the new conditions of a communist rule.

The creation of the Gypsy organisation took place with the blessing of the new government. In 1945, the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Workers' Party (Communists) discussed and adopted a series of reports on individual national minorities. The report on the Gypsy minority considers it necessary to establish an organisation of Gypsies that will "facilitate educational, cultural ... and political struggle" among them (CSA, f. 1 Б, op. 25, a.e. 71, p. 5; Стоянова, 2017, p. 40). However, this does not mean that the organisation was a communist party creation because the same report explicitly states that "the initiative to organise the Gypsies comes from themselves" and emphasises that "our comrades communists believe that through such an organisation they will be able to keep the Gypsies under their influence" (Ibid.). The documents of the organisation were probably not checked by the authorities (or were not paid attention to), which explains the presence in the Statute of the idea of a Gypsy nation-state. The Statute of the *Ekipe* itself was to be adopted at the Second National Conference, the date of which has not been set (Art. 61). However, no such conference was held, and "at a meeting" in 1946 it was decided to extend the mandate of the organisation's leadership, "to emphasise the trust that this committee enjoyed in the Gypsy environment" (Пашов, 1957, p. 123). At this meeting, it was also decided to start publishing the newspaper *Романо еси* (Gypsy Voice), as Shakir Pashov was elected editor-in-chief of the newspaper, and Sulyo Metkov, Tair Selimov, Mustafa Aliev (later known as Manush Romanov), Hyusein Bilyalov and others were elected members of the editorial board (Ibid.).

The Statutes of the Organisation *Ekipe*, at least formally, present it as non-political, and not tied to any political forces. However, Shakir Pashov himself, who re-established his membership in the hitherto illegal Communist Party, after September 9, 1944, repeatedly emphasised in his memoirs that under his leadership *Ekipe* actively supported the state policy pursued by the government of the Fatherland Front. With state support, the newspaper *Romano esi* began to be published, as the first issue was published on February 25, 1946. The newspaper was announced as a body of the *United Cultural and Educational Organisation of the Gypsy Minority in Bulgaria*, and its editor-in-chief was Shakir Pashov. In the newspaper is noted that the Statute of the organisation has been approved by the Minister of Interior Anton Yugov, and the permission for its publishing has been given by the Minister of Propaganda Dimo Kazasov (Романо еси, 1946c, p. 2). The introductory article is the speech of Yusein Bilyalov, presented on Radio Sofia on January 14 on the occasion of *Vasili* (the day of St Basil), "a national holiday of the Gypsies", which is, in fact, a political proclamation on behalf of the organisation. It describes the hard life of

Gypsies in the past, the struggles of their organisation (referring to *Istikbal*, whose name is not mentioned) for their civil rights and welcomes the civil liberties and social equality brought to them by the government of the Fatherland Front. Indicative of the spirit of the time is the end of the article:

Long live the Fatherland Front! Long live the founder of the Fatherland Front Georgi Dimitrov! Long live the allied peoples of the USSR, the United States and England! Long live the brave patriotic Fatherland's Front Army! Long live the People's Republic of Yugoslavia and Marshal Tito! Long live the Leader of the Soviet people, Generalissimo Stalin! *Baxtalo tumaro Vasili!* – Congratulations to St. Basil! (Романо еси, 1946b, p. 1).

Active agitation in support of the Fatherland Front government continued to be a leading line in all subsequent issues of the *Romano esi* newspaper. Meanwhile, the Communist Party continued to strengthen its power in the country, and parliamentary elections were scheduled for October 1946, at which a Grand National Assembly was to be prepared and a new constitution of Bulgaria was to be adopted. On August 4, 1946, an extended conference of the Gypsy organisation was held, which included “all chairmen representing various professional associations” (CSA, f. 1 B, op. 6, a.e. 235, l. 5). In the minutes the organisation was designated as the *United Organisation of the Gypsy Minority for the Fight against Fascism and Racism*. There is no information whether such a renaming took place (most probably not), and the newspaper *Romano esi* continued to be published until 1948 as a body of the *United Cultural and Educational Organisation of the Gypsy Minority in Bulgaria*, as both the new and old name in different combinations were used. The document with the decision of the conference was stamped with a seal with the inscription ‘All-Gypsy Cultural Organisation – Sofia’ and depicts a five-pointed star, under which is written ‘1945’ (Ibid., l. 4) as its founding year.

At this conference, a decision was made emphasising that the Fatherland Front was “the only defender of national minorities” and that the conference, therefore, proposed a representative of the Roma community in the Grand National Assembly from the lists of the Fatherland Front. For the appointment of such a representative, a choice was made by secret ballot between three proposals, as Shakir Pashev received 7 votes from 14 delegates, Tair Selimov and Hussein Bilyalov received 3 votes each, and one ballot was declared invalid (Ibid.). It is noteworthy that the minutes of the conference was signed by 15 people, and in addition to the participants in the conference, all of whom have Muslim names (Gypsies' names in Sofia at the time were also of this form), and only one signature is with a Christian name (B. Naydenov). This gives reason to assume that a representative of the Fatherland Front was present, and its conduct (most likely on the initiative of the Gypsies themselves) was agreed in advance. The proposal of the conference was discussed at the District Committee of the Communist Party. According to the materials from this discussion, Shakir Pashov's Party past is not as flawless and heroic as he himself presents it, e.g. it is said that after his two arrests (in 1923 and 1925) “he became somewhat frightened”, or in 1931, when he was offered to join the list of the Workers' Party

as the Gypsy minority representative in the 1931 municipal elections, “he promised to cooperate, but subsequently became frightened” (Ibid., l. 9). However, the conclusion of the District Committee was: “if it comes to electing a candidate from among the Gypsy minority, there is no one more suitable than him”, and “from his inclusion in the Grand National Assembly as an MP, the Party will only benefit because this will raise the Party in the eyes of the Gypsy minority and ... will take root firmly [there]” (Ibid., l. 9–10).

In the elections for the Grand National Assembly, Shakir Pashov was placed at the bottom of the electoral lists and failed to become an MP. The mistake was quickly rectified, and three months after the elections, on February 28, 1947, this issue was discussed at a meeting of the highest collective Party body, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Workers' Party (Communists) as a second point on the agenda (usually the items are ranked in order of importance). The decision of the Politburo on this issue reads:

2. Comrade Dimitar Ganev [who has been appointed ambassador to Romania – authors note] to resign as an MP. To propose to the comrades Grigor Vrabchenski and Hristina Bradinska who follow in the list after him to give up, so that comrade Shakir Pashev (a Gypsy) can enter the Grand National Assembly. (CSA, f. 1Б, op. 6, a.e. 235, l. 1).

The comrades in question palpably accepted the proposal (a possible refusal would mean the end of their Party career), and Shakir Pashov became a regular member of the Grand National Assembly, which, at the end of the same year, adopted the new Constitution of the People's Republic of Bulgaria (the so-called Dimitrov Constitution). As an MP he developed a vigorous activity for the development of the Gypsy movement. In this regard, he used the support (and administrative resources) of the ruling political coalition of the Fatherland Front (de facto of the Communist Party). In 1947 the National Committee of the Fatherland Front (NS OF) issued Circular No. 18, which ordered: “cultural and educational societies of the Gypsy minority to be formed in all district and city centres with the full assistance of the district and city committees of the Fatherland Front” (Романо еси, 1947d, p. 2). Shakir Pashov himself has great merit for the establishment of these societies, which are structural subdivisions of the *United Cultural and Educational Organisation of the Gypsy Minority in Bulgaria*, “he constantly travels around the most remote parts of the country, to lift the spirits of the Gypsy minority and on the spot to get acquainted with the needs of our compatriots, who feel great joy from his presence among them” (Романо еси, 1948c, p. 1). For about a year, more than 90 Gypsy organisations had been established in the country (SCA, f. 1 Б, op. 8, a.e. 596, l. 61); even in some places, e.g. in Shumen, two Gypsy organisations were established, one of which was named *Gypsy Cultural and Educational Organisation* ‘[Shakir] Pashov’ (Демирова, 2017, pp. 70–72).

Along with the work on establishing and strengthening local Gypsy organisations in the country, Shakir Pashov was sent as an MP to help solve problems among the Gypsy population. Such was the case in Ruse, where tensions arose over the non-admission of Gypsies to the management of the properties of the religious Muslim community

by local Turks (ASR, f. Шакир Пашов, а.е. Автобиография) – a problem well known to Shakir Pashov since the 1920s and 1930s. Another problematic case, for the solution of which his trip together with another local MP was necessary, was to the village of Golintsi (today the Mladenovo neighbourhood in the town of Lom) (Ibid.). The details of this case are not known, but in all probability, the problems were related to the local Gypsies, who established their own Gypsy Baptist Church in the 1920s (Славкова, 2007, pp. 78–81; Marushiakova & Popov, 2021b, pp. 152–153).

The leading line in the activity of Shakir Pashov and the leadership of the organisation at that time was strengthening the unity of the Gypsy community, regardless of its internal heterogeneity. Already in the first issue of the newspaper *Romano esi*, the festive speech on the occasion of the Gypsy holiday on the day of St Basil notes:

There are still bad manifestations and irregularities in our organisational life in the relations between Christian Gypsies and Muslim Gypsies, but we hope that the power of the Fatherland Front will help us to overcome some old understandings, to remove the obstacles created by reactionaries in our circles, and to work for the cultural uplift of the Gypsies and the success of Fatherland Front Bulgaria. (Романо еси, 1946b, p. 1).

At the same time, the newspaper calls on “those our compatriots who hide under the name of Bulgarians or Turks to take off their masks and join our organisation to raise it to a higher level, because they are Gypsies by blood, they should not hide but respond to the invitation of our organisation, because they are responsible to their conscience” (Романо еси, 1947a, p. 1).

The only exception to this leading discourse is the attitude towards the Gypsy nomads:

There are Gypsies among us who we despise and who are to be despised, and those are the nomadic Gypsies (wanderers) who have no settled permanent residence [and] who lie exclusively on the backs of their wives, who in turn are engaged in divination, divination, theft. That is why it is time for our country to deal with this issue as soon as possible and to take timely measures to limit the vagrancy (wanderings) and those [of them] wishing to settle to be allocated with land and be involved in useful community service. (Романо еси, 1946d, p. 2).

This attitude towards Gypsy nomads should not come as a surprise. In the process of Roma civic emancipation in the period between the two world wars, throughout the region of Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe, the new Roma civic elite has a similar attitude to the problem of Gypsy nomadism; and even more, for several decades the Gypsy activists in the USSR called on the Soviet state to sedentarise the Gypsy nomads (Marushiakova & Popov, 2020c, pp. 265–276). Ultimately, this idea found its realisation through the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR from 1956, which was followed over the years by more or less similar measures in all countries in the region of the so-called socialist camp (Marushiakova & Popov, 2008b).

As an MP, Shakir Pashov also put a lot of effort into the development of education, social and cultural life in the Gypsy neighbourhoods. In 1947 he managed to get special funding of over 3 million leva for the construction of a school in the mahala 'Fakulteta', and he personally took the first steps for the construction of the new building (ASR, f. Шакир Пашов, а.е. Автобиография), in which in the same year was opened the First Gypsy School, named after the famous Soviet pedagogue Anton Makarenko (AK, f. 13, op. 1, a.e. 759, l. 145; Стоянова, 2017, pp. 157–158). The adjective 'Gypsy' indicates that it educates Gypsy children but according to its program it offered mainstream education and common curricula. In the following years such 'Gypsy schools' began to open in different places in the country – Varna, Berkovitsa, Sliven, Kyustendil, Lom, etc. (AK, f. 13, op. 1, a.e. 759, l. 145). In the same way, Gypsy *chitalishta* (Cultural Reading Clubs, kind of community houses) began to be established in the neighbourhoods, where various forms of social and cultural life developed – clubs for political education, literacy courses for adults, music and dance theatre groups, etc. (Стоянова, 2017, pp. 204–205). In Sofia, in 1946 the Sports Association *Naangle* (Forward) was established with its own football team. A photo of Shakir Pashov with the team has been preserved (ASR, f. Фотографии).

At that time, there was a serious debate among Gypsy activists, for which there is almost no historical evidence. An undated photograph has been preserved showing six Gypsy young men holding a large poster with the inscription *Gypsy Alphabet*. The images of the letters in this alphabet are obviously original works of its creators, the names of five of which are written on the photo itself: Tseko, Kune, Sulio, Yashko and Yashar (ASR, f. Фотографии). We were able to identify with certainty only two of them, namely Sulyo Metkov and Yashar Malikov, and the rest remained unknown.

In 1947, a short announcement was made in the pages of the *Romano esi* newspaper that the "draft of the Gypsy alphabet" would be published in the next issue of the newspaper and that grammar and dictionary of the Gypsy language are currently being developed (Романо еси, 1947c, p. 2). In the same issue of the newspaper was published the polemical article by Nikola Terzobaliev from Sliven, entitled *Is it Necessary to Have a Minority Organisation of Gypsies* (Романо еси, 1947b, pp. 1–2), according to which "some of our compatriots claim that if we do not have a Gypsy alphabet, for what use is this [Gypsy] organisation for us" (and for Terzobaliev himself "script is not our goal").

In the next issue of the newspaper, however, there is not a word on the subject of the Gypsy alphabet. It can be assumed with a high degree of probability that the idea of creating a written language for the Gypsies did not find support from the authorities supervising the organisation.

Shakir Pashov was especially proud of his role in the creation of the Gypsy Theatre, to which he devoted a lot of space in his memories. The theatre was created by uniting several music-, dance- and theatre-groups existed at different neighbourhood *chitalishta* in Sofia in 1947 (ASR, f. Шакир Пашов, а.е. Автобиография). The creation of the theatre took place after the direct intervention of the party and state leader Georgi Dimitrov, with whom they have an old friendship:

In 1923, during the elections for members of parliament, a candidate was also Comrade Georgi Dimitrov who visited the ballot boxes of the 3rd District Polling Station [...], and in a moment, the opposition group attacked him with fists, but our party group, which was there as agitators, immediately attacked and we took Comrade Dimitrov out of their hands as other comrades also came. We accompanied them to the tram and he said to me, "Shakir, one day, when we come to power, you will be the greatest man, and for me, from the train station to the Palace they will lay a carpet" and here, the glorious date came September 9, 1944, and this came true, I became a Member of the Grand National Assembly, nourished by the ideas of the Party because my whole life was spent fighting for the victory of Marxist ideas and in anti-fascist activities since 1919, and it is so today. (Ibid.).

Shakir Pashov visited Georgi Dimitrov in his office and proposed to him to create a Gypsy theatre on the model of the famous Gypsy Theatre *Romen* in Moscow, about which the newspaper *Romano esi* published a large article (Романо еси, 1946е, p. 1). Georgi Dimitrov was immediately ignited by this idea and ordered an additional 2 million leva to be included in the budget, with which the *Central Gypsy Theatre 'Roma'* was established with director Shakir Pashov (Ibid.). Under his direction, the theatre presented in Sofia in the spring of 1948 its first production, the play *Gypsy Rhapsody* by the Bulgarian writer Alexander Gerginov.

The premiere play *Gypsy Rhapsody* was a free dramatic interpretation of Alexander Pushkin's famous poem *Gypsies*, combined with many Gypsy songs and dances (from today's point of view, the play would probably be accused of exoticising the Gypsies). As a side note, its screenwriter Alexander Gerginov is known for being the first Bulgarian writer to turn his work into a successful business (Бенбасат, 2016, pp. 18–26), and his novel *The Girl from the Gypsy Cabaret* (a typical boulevard reading) has undergone several editions and is perhaps a book with the highest print-run in Bulgarian literature until 1944 (Ibid.).

After its establishment, the *Central Gypsy Theatre 'Roma'* performed with great success for two months in the capital, and then, in the summer of the same year, it went on tour around the country and visited various cities (Plovdiv, Stara Zagora, Yambol, Sliven, Burgas, Shumen, Tolbuhin (now Dobrich) and Varna, and everywhere was greeted enthusiastically by the local audience (Пашов, 1957, pp. 127–128). Despite the successful tour, due to unresolved financial issues, Shakir Pashov had to give his watch and a golden ring in a pawnshop in the city of Varna to be able to buy train tickets so that the artists and musicians can go home (SCA, f. 1 Б, оп. 8, а.е. 596, л. 37; Дром дромандар, 1998, p. 3). According to some testimonies (Дром дромандар, 1998, p. 3), at that time Shakir Pashov wrote the theatre-play *The White Gypsy Woman*, but it has not been discovered so far. Also, according to the memoirs of his contemporaries and his heirs he wrote poems, which are also not discovered yet.

The successes achieved by Shakir Pashov in the field of Roma civic emancipation, however, are accompanied by a side effect that can be understood in the spirit of the times, given the specific historical context. In the second half of the 1940s in the USSR already

dominated the so-called cult of personality of Stalin, and similar cults of the respective party leaders were created in the countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe, where the local communist parties came to power. It is natural, that these processes continue to develop at a lower level, and accordingly in the circles of Gypsy activism appeared a cult of personality of Shakir Pashov. This is most clearly seen in the pages of the newspaper *Romano esi*, of which he is the editor-in-chief, texts (usually solemn words and congratulations on various festive occasions) written by Shakir Pashov himself (Романо еси, 1948b), or materials dedicated to his personality such as “Leader and Teacher” of the Gypsies, who will “outline the path of our Nation” (Романо еси, 1948a, p. 2). There were even created poems in his honour, one of which ends with words:

Long live Stalin, Tito, Dimitrov,
And the Comrade [Shakir] M[ahmudov] Pashov! (Романо еси, 1948d, p. 4).

This poem became a basis for a widely known literary (and historical) mystification. In one of his books, the famous Bulgarian poet, satirist and dissident Radoy Ralin (pseudonym of Dimitar Stoyanov, 1922–2004) published a poem written by him, the authorship of which he attributed to Shakir Pashov (Ралин, 1987, pp. 125–126). The text of Radoy Ralin’s poem is interwoven with separate fragments of two naive poetic texts dedicated to Shakir Pashov with authors Sadak Ismailov and Aliya Ismailov (passage from which is quoted above) from the village of Popitsa, district of Byala Slatina (Ibid.) What were Radoy Ralin’s motives for this blatant falsification can only be guessed at, but it caused a serious blow to Shakir Pashov’s public image. Moreover, nowadays this text continues to be actively used for mocking not only Shakir Pashov but also Gypsies in general (see, for example, 168 часа, 2016), i.e. its public effect remains the same.

In 1948 there was an acute crisis in the Gypsy movement. The first signs of its maturation appeared in the previous year when the article of Nikola Terzobaliev from Sliven was published in the newspaper *Romano esi* with the indicative title *Is It Necessary to Have a Minority Organisation of Gypsies*, from which it is clear that among Gypsy activists there are serious controversies, not so much over whether there should be such an organisation, but rather what kind it should be (Романо еси, 1947b, pp. 1–2).

The existing contradictions among the Gypsy activists were reflected in the results of the National Conference of the *Common Cultural and Educational Organisation of the Gypsy Minority in Bulgaria*, held on May 2, 1948. This conference confirmed the organisation’s commitment to the policy of the Fatherland Front, which at that time had already turned from a political coalition into a mass public organisation led by the Communist Party. However, the close connection with the Fatherland Front had unexpected consequences both for the Gypsy organisation and for Shakir Pashov himself. An Initiative Committee headed by Mustafa Aliyev was elected at the National Conference, which should lead the activities of the Gypsy minority until the First Congress of the organisation (Пашов, 1957, p. 124). This change was obviously planned in advance, as can be

guessed from the fact that in the issue of the newspaper *Romano esi*, published on the eve of the conference (Романо еси, an. 3, No. 10, 30.04. 1948), to the editor Shakir Pashov was added the editorial board of Mustafa Aliyev, Tair Selimov and Sulyo Metkov. At the conference, it was also decided that the Theatre *Roma* will be placed under the direct control of the Minority Committee of the National Council of Fatherland Front (SCA, f. 1 B, op. 8, a.e. 596, l. 63). In this way, a specific dual power was formed in the Gypsy movement, as the two sides (Shakir Pashov and the Initiative Committee) engaged in a fierce struggle against each other. This struggle included sending statements to various institutions with accusations against opponents and the corresponding rebuttals, which led to a financial audit of the Theatre *Roma*, where the management was repeatedly changed and eventually taken over by Shakir Pashov's opponents), as well as a comprehensive financial audit, and in some cases, even led to physical blows (Ibid., l. 40; AK, f. 13, op. 1, a.e. 774, l. 26–27).

The specific reason for most of the mutual accusations is related to the financial and artistic problems of the Theatre *Roma*, but this is only the specific inducement behind the much more serious differences in visions for the present and future of the Gypsy movement. According to the inspection by the National Council of Fatherland Front, there were two currents in the Gypsy organisation, one of which was headed by Shakir Pashov, and “the other current was led by young communists who ruthlessly and unsystematically criticised his actions” (SCA, f. 1 B, op. 8, a.e. 596, l. 62). These “young communists”, coming out on behalf of the Primary Party Organisation ‘Saliko’ of the Bulgarian Communist Party, III district – Gypsy Minority – Sofia, in a statement to the Regional Committee of the Party, with a copy to the Central Committee of the Party, accused Shakir Pashov that he spreads among the Gypsies the “chauvinistic dirty slander”, that the new management of the theatre had “handed it over to the Bulgarians” (ibid.). The statement against Shakir Pashov was in fact signed by the Secretary of the Party Organisation ‘Saliko’, uniting the Gypsy Communists in Sofia, Tair Selimov, as well as by the members of its leadership Lyubomir Aliyev (former Mustafa Aliyev, future Manush Romanov), Sulyo Metkov, Angel Blagoev and A. Osmanov (Ibid., l. 41). The Gypsy Primary Party Organisation was named after Saliko Yasharov, a member of the Workers’ Youth Union (a Communist Party youth organisation), who died at the front during the Second World War (when Bulgaria fought as an ally of the USSR against the German army in Yugoslavia and Hungary).

The accusations against Shakir Pashov were an integral part of the materials related to the two “warring groups” in the Gypsy organisation, and on its basis, the State Security began an active investigation of Shakir Pashov giving him for this purpose the pseudonym ‘Durak’ (Fool in Russian) (AK, f. 13, op. 1, a.e. 774, l. 27–28). In the course of this investigation, other allegations were added to his file. The most serious of these was that an inspection of the materials at the former police directorate revealed that in 1930, after his return from Turkey, he had signed a declaration of cooperation with the police, and during the Second World War he had assisted the authorities in the forced labour mobilisation of Gypsies from Sofia, indicating to them which Gypsies to be mobilised (CSA, f. 2124 K, op.1, a.e. 108107, l. 2). At the same time, he was accused of leading the

Muslim organisation *Istikbal*, which was declared to serve the interests of Turkey, as well as organising the Gypsies to giving homage at the coffin of Tsar Boris III at his death in 1943 (AK, f. 13, op. 1, a.e. 774, l. 27). A special place among the accusations against Shakir Pashov was given to his actions as leader of the Gypsy organisation after 1945 and a Member of Parliament when he actively pursued a “nationalist policy among the Gypsy minority” (CSA, f. 2124 K, op.1, a.e. 108107, l. 2). In addition to the accusations against Shakir Pashov, it was added that as an MP he issued state secrets and handed them over to Nikola Petkov’s supporters (leader of the opposition against the government of the Fatherland Front, hanged in 1947), for which claim no specific supporting materials were given (CSA, f. 2124 K, op.1, a.e. 108107, l. 2).

Shakir Pashov’s attempts to defend himself and change the course of events were unsuccessful. He sent statements to various institutions (SCA, f. 1 Б, op. 8, a.e. 596), while at the same time trying to secure the support of the Roma community – according to the State Security data, he sent over 160 letters to the Gypsy organisations in the country (AK, f. 13, op. 1, a.e. 774, l. 30). However, these efforts proved futile. In the autumn of 1949, the City Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party excluded Shakir Pashov from the party (CSA, f. 1 Б, op. 8, a.e. 596, l. 1; Стоянова, 2017, p. 400). In the parliamentary elections held on December 18, 1949, Shakir Pashov was not included in the candidate lists, and Petko Kostov Yankov from Sliven entered the National Assembly as a representative of the Gypsies (Personal communication with Gospodin Kolev, March 14, 2004). The subsequent changes in the leadership of the Gypsy organisation Shakir Pashov describes as follows:

Dissatisfied members of the minority were found, and unfortunately, young ones, claiming to have a larger culture, who undermined the general enthusiasm and planted a bomb under the feet of this activity to destroy everything that has been created with so much effort so far. In year 1950, July month, at the insistence of these dissatisfied young people, to avoid a split in our circles, the Sofia organisation and the Central Committee of all [local] organisations were ceded to the dissatisfied young people. The same, of course, happened with the Theatre *Roma*. (Пашов, 1957, p. 131).

The historical sources interpreted the course of events very differently. On April 7, 1950, the Central Directorate of the *Cultural and Educational Organisation of the Gypsy Minority in Bulgaria* decided:

The leadership of the Gypsy minority punishes Shakir Pashov by removing him from the post of chairman of the Cultural and Educational Organisation of the Gypsy Minority in Bulgaria for his anti-people activity before September 9, 1944, as a police officer, and for destructive activity after that date and excludes him from the rank of the organisation forever. (AK, f. 13, op. 1, a.e. 774, l. 30).

This decision was publicly announced on the front page of the newspaper *Nevo drom* (New Way) with editor-in-chief Lyubomir Aliyev, that succeeded the newspaper *Romano esi* as the organisation’s publication; together with this announcement, it was also

declared that comrade Nikola Petrov Terzobaliev from the town of Sliven has been elected as the new chairman of the Gypsy organisation (Нево дром, 1950, p. 1). On April 15, 1950, was held a general assembly of the Gypsy National Chitalishte named after September 9, chaired by Lyubomir Aliyev, at which Shakir Pashov's activity was exposed as "harmful" for the Gypsy minority (Ibid.).

The future of the *Common Cultural and Educational Organisation of the Gypsy Minority in Bulgaria* after the removal of Shakir Pashov is an unhappy one. The end of the organisation was embodied in the recommendations given by the representative of the National Council of Fatherland Front of the Republic of Bulgaria in results of the inspection of the Theatre *Roma* in 1948. These recommendations proposed a complete structural change in the organisation – to transform the Central Initiative Committee into a Minority Commission of the National Council of the Fatherland Front, "to be instructed and led directly by the National Council of the Fatherland Front"; to proceed in the same way with the district and city structures of the organisation; Theatre *Roma* to also come under the direct authority of the Minority Commission and the National Council of Fatherland Front (CSA, f. 1 Б, op. 8, a.e. 596, l. 62–63). The "young communists" also contributed to the reformatting (and de facto liquidation) of the Gypsy organisation according to these lines, which is most clearly seen in an extensive report written by Tair Selimov from 1950, at that time already an instructor at the National Council of Fatherland Front, which almost literally repeats these recommendations (AK, f. 13, op. 1, a.e. 759, l. 147–148). The natural result was there – the local Gypsy organisations merged as sections into the Fatherland Front, which ceased to be differentiated as "Gypsy", but only as territorial.

This ultimately led to the cessation of the existence of the Gypsy organisation itself. The latest issue of her newspaper *Nevo drom* is the one in which the announcement of the removal of Shakir Pashov as head of the Gypsy organisation was published. The fate of the Gypsy theatre was similar. By Decision № 389 of November 25, 1949, the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party proposed that the Central Gypsy Theatre *Roma* remain in existence (there was also a proposal to disband it), but now with the status of a "semi-professional" theatre included in the system of the neighbourhood chitalishta (at that time separated by ethnicity) (CSA, f. 1 Б, op. 8, a.e. 596, l. 1–2). Thus, the theatre was transferred to the Gypsy National Chitalishte "September 9" (the date of the so-called Socialist Revolution in Bulgaria) in Sofia, and in the early 1950s it gradually ceased to exist, and its director Lyubomir Aliyev returned to his old name (Mustafa) and began working as a director in the Turkish theatres in Haskovo and Kardzhali.

Shakir Pashov was put under constant surveillance by the State Security (AK, f. 13, op. 1, a.e. 759), and on September 10, 1951, he was interned into the concentration camp (officially 'Labour-Educational Camp') on Belene island in Danube river (CSA, f. 2124 K, op. 1, a.e. 108107, l. 2). Despite the difficult conditions, he managed to survive thanks to his ironwork skills – according to the memories of his family, he was assigned to take care of the maintenance of the work tools used by the prisoners. According to Shakir Pashov's

file at the Ministry of the Interior, the investigation of his case on co-operation with the police was terminated, and on August 10, 1953, he was released but not rehabilitated (CSA, f. 2124 K, op. 1, a.e. 108107, l. 1–4).

After his return to Sofia, Shakir Pashov focused his main efforts on the preparation of his book *История на циганите в България и Европа: “Рома”* (History of the Gypsies in Bulgaria and Europe: “Roma”) (Пашов, 1957). The manuscript of this book dates from 1957. It is interesting to note that in the title of the manuscript for the first time in Bulgaria the self-appellation of the community, ‘Roma’ is brought to the fore, although the text itself adheres to the use of the common at that time term ‘цигани’ (Gypsies). He pinned great hopes on this book as an opportunity to receive political rehabilitation for his overall activities in the field of the Gypsy movement. Hence his attempts to give such an interpretation of the history of this movement (even at the cost of withholding some facts) that it would be positively assessed by the ruling communist regime, which has been mentioned more than once above.

Shakir Pashov sent his book for evaluation and approval to the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, but the manuscript was not published and sank into the party archives. However, Shakir Pashov still received partial rehabilitation. He started working at the Gypsy National Chitalishte ‘The September 9’, chaired by Tair Selimov at the time (Неве ромá, 1957a, pp. 1–2). There he, in 1956, organised the amateur art and music group “Roma”, led by Yashar Malikov (Pashov, 1957, p. 133), i.e. restored in some form the Gypsy theatre. In the same year, he was included in the editorial board of the new newspaper, *Неве ромá* (New Gypsies), which started publishing the following year, as a body of the Gypsy National Chitalishte ‘The September 9’ (Ibid., p. 137). Separate parts of his book have been published in the newspaper (Неве ромá, 1957c, p. 4; 1957f, p. 4). In the Brick Factory neighbourhood (or Boyana mahala), where he lived, Shakir Pashov organised the Sports Sector “Roma” (Неве ромá, 1957d, p. 4). He organised also Gypsy musical artistic evening in cinema Petar Beron and a large meeting of young Gypsy activists was held in the Gypsy Chitalishte, at which Shakir Pashov recounted memories of the early stages of the Gypsy movement, and then all participants laid a wreath at the Mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov (Неве ромá, 1957e, p. 1).

Soon, however, serious problems arose again for Shakir Pashov. An article by Demir Shankov from Lom, a medical student in Sofia, was published in the newspaper *Неве ромá*, with the title “Do we need an organisation now?”. The newspaper’s editorial board proposed to discuss it by the Gypsies on the ground and that to comment the raised issue (Неве ромá, 1957b, p. 1–2). After several issues, at the end of 1957, the newspaper published the report delivered by Demir Shankov at the meeting “in connection with the resumption of the Gypsy cultural and educational organisation” (Неве ромá, 1957g, p. 1). Apparently, this event was not coordinated with the institutions and approved by them, because the relevant sanctions followed. The newspaper *Неве ромá* stopped to be published, and from then on there was no mention of a Gypsy organisation anywhere.

In connection with this case, after receiving a letter from the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, the Ministry of Interior started again an investigating of Shakir Pashov. In 1959 the work on the case was terminated and his file was finally closed (CSA, f. 2124 K, op. 1, a.e. 108107). However, he and his wife were expelled from Sofia and sent to live in the village of Rogozina, in Dobrudzha without right to move to another place.

Shakir Pashov and his wife lived in the village of Rogozina for three years (1959–1962). A photograph of their stay there has been preserved, showing that they live in a small, poor house, apparently in difficult conditions. According to the memories of Shakir Pashov's heirs, during this stay, he was greatly helped by his good command of the Turkish language and his iron skills. He began making beds with iron springs, which he sold to local ethnic Turks, who paid him with gold coins, and the family returned to Sofia with significant savings.

After Shakir Pashov returned to Sofia, he retired. In the late 1960s, the Gypsy mahala Boyana (neighbourhood Brick Factory) was liquidated due to the expansion of Sofia and the construction of new residential complexes, its inhabitants were compensated with new apartments, and Shakir Pashov moved to live in the new built residential area "Druzhba".

At his new residence Shakir Pashov continued to be socially active and for many years was chairman of a local Fatherland Front organisation (ASR, f. Шакир Пашов, a.e. Автобиография). At the same time, he fought for his party's rehabilitation. In 1967 Shakir Pashov's membership in the Bulgarian Communist Party was restored (ASR, f. Шакир Пашов). However, in the book *The Gypsy Population in Bulgaria on the Path of Socialism* (one of the authors of which is Tair Selimov Tairov), published in 1968, his name is not mentioned at all (Генюв et al., 1968). For the first time in the public space again, his name appears in an article dedicated to him, published in 1974 in the newspaper *Nov pat* (Gypsy newspaper, published by the National Council of Fatherland Front) (Нов път, 1974). In 1976, Shakir Pashov received the title of *Active Fighter against Fascism and Capitalism*, which gave him the right to so-called 'personal people's pension' and many other social privileges.

Shakir Pashov died on October 5, 1981, shortly before his 83rd birthday. There were no media reports about his death, and according to the memories of his relatives, only his relatives and a small number of close friends were present at his funeral; in front of his grave, Manush Romanov (Mustafa/Lyubomir Aliyev) publicly asked for forgiveness from the dead man. However, the report of Gospodin Kolev, an instructor in the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, reveals another picture of Shakir Pashov's funeral. About 130–150 Gypsies from all neighbourhoods of Sofia were present. In the ritual hall, a representative of the BKP neighbourhood organisation, where the deceased was a member, delivered a speech emphasising his merits in the fight against fascism and capitalism and for the happiness and prosperity of all his proletarian brothers, without mentioning his ethnic origin. In his speech, Mustafa Aliyev called the deceased "Our

Father” and stressed that his life as a communist – a fighter for the happiness of the people – would be an example for the living and that his work would live. Before the body was laid in the grave, a ritual was performed according to the dogmas of Islam – washing the corpse of the deceased, and at the grave, a *hodja* (imam) performed the appropriate prayer. Tair (already re-named to Tihomir) Tairov also spoke at the grave, outlining the activities of Shakir Pashov as the founder of the progressive movement of the Gypsies in Bulgaria and emphasising that throughout his life he was faithful to the work of the Bulgarian Communist Party and worked actively for the happiness and prosperity of all Bulgarian people (CSA, f. 16, op. 89, a.e. 139, l. 44–45).

One year after Shakir Pashov’s death, a memorial obituary was published (according to the customs in South-Eastern Europe, such obituaries are displayed in public places). The obituary depicts a drawing of Shakir Pashov with clear symbolism – he is depicted sitting behind a desk, with a pipe in mouth, behind him a bookshelf, on the desk in front of him a telephone, the manuscripts of four newspapers (Тербие, Романо еси, Неве дром и Неве ромá), and the inscription “History of the Gypsies”. The obituary does not indicate on whose behalf it was issued, which is something very unusual, and this mystery remains unsolved to this day. The text on it is as follows:

November 5, 1982, marks one year since the death of SHAKIR MAHMUDOV PASHOV. Let everyone remember the organiser of the Gypsy cultural and educational organisation in Bulgaria, the creator of the newspaper Romano esi. For the founder of the Central Gypsy Theatre *Roma*. For the communist-anti-fascist and fighter against capitalism and fascism. For the first Gypsy MP in the Grand National Assembly. For the man with the big heart. A bow! (ASR, f. Шакир Пашов).

Shakir Pashov lived a long and eventful life, going through many vicissitudes and even oscillating in different directions. Invariably remains only the leading pillar in his social and political activity – the work for his community, the striving to direct it and lead it to a comprehensive and all-encompassing civic emancipation.

Sliven’s Communists

Plamena Stoyanova

In Bulgaria, the Socialist Movement, which would eventually become the Communist Movement, emerged in 1891 at the time of the founding of the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party (BSDP). In 1894, after the union of the two different wings of the movement, the party was renamed to Bulgarian Workers’ Social-Democratic Party (BRSDP). In 1930, the party split in two, thus forming the ‘Narrow Socialists’ (the future communists) and the ‘Broad Socialists’. In 1919, the BRSDP (narrow socialists) was re-named as the Bulgarian Communist Party (BKP) and it became closely connected to the International

Communist Movement (Comintern) dominated by the USSR. In 1924, the party was once again re-named as Bulgarian Working Party (communists), and, finally, in 1954, it went back to its old name of BKP.

One of the centres of the socialist/communist movement in Bulgaria was the city of Sliven. This was the city where, in 1836, the Bulgarian Dobri Zhelyazkov founded the first textile factory in the Ottoman Empire. The factory marked the beginning of the textile industry in the Balkans and gave sustenance to generations of Sliven families. From the very beginning, the majority of the hired workers were Gypsies who had neither land nor sustainable crafts, and who, unlike the majority of Bulgarians, were used to working as hired labourers. In 1890, in the already independent Bulgarian state, the number of textile factories grew to 12 (CSA, f. 1 Б, No. 2005, l. 19), and many Gypsy workers continued to work there. That working environment proved to be fertile soil for the penetration of socialist (and later communist) ideas.

In 1900, the 7th congress of the BRSDP took place in Sliven, with the participation of prominent socialists, like Dimitar Blagoev (leader of the Party), Yanko Sakazov, Georgi Kirkov, and others. After the opening rally, the party supporters organised a march that crossed the town, including the Gypsy mahala, which was not accidental, and was a sign of the influence the BRSDP had among the Gypsy proletariat. At the parliamentary election in 1901, the first and only deputy seat that went to the BRSDP was that of Georgi Kirkov, who was elected in Sliven with the support of the Gypsy voters (Ibid., l. 38). In the next elections, in 1902, the BRSDP received two deputy seats in Sliven, one of which again went to Georgi Kirkov (Ibid., l. 56). During the socialist period in Bulgaria, the Gypsy neighbourhood, through which he had solemnly passed in 1900 with the 7th BRSDP congress march, was named after him.

The importance of the Gypsy votes for the parliamentary election results in Sliven was underlined by Dimitar Blagoev in his correspondence with Georgi Kirkov:

I am very pleased with the fact that the party had won over the majority of the proletariat in Sliven, who are ready to support the party candidates. I was particularly impressed with that part in your letter, in which you recount the attitude towards our party of the working-class voters from the Gypsy area of Sliven (which attitude, I understand, is not accidental). This is especially interesting given the fact that almost everywhere else the Gypsy population is considered an indisputable and constant 'dowry' of the government party (Дечева, 2000, p. 44).

Nikola Kochev

Nikola Kochev (1873–1923) was one of the first supporters of socialist ideas among the Gypsies in Sliven. He was born in the village of Ichera, nearby Sliven, in the family of ironmongers. His mother died while giving birth to him and, for the first 2–3 years of his life, he was raised by his aunt. Later, his family moved to Sliven, to the so-called Mangâr mahala. He grew up very studious and graduated from 4th grade with good marks. At the age of 13, he started working in the *Kalovs' Brothers* Factory, where he worked as a weaver

for the next 25 years. He impressed both his co-workers and his neighbours with his energetic personality, and he quickly gained the respect of leading union activists working in the same factory. Nikola Kochev became a member of the first local Social Democratic group from its very inception (DA Sliven, f. 241 Б, l. 1). In the fall of 1894, he participated in the founding of the first working-class club in Sliven, which contributed significantly to the spreading of the socialist ideas there (Дечева, 2000, p. 43). Four years later, in 1898, he helped the foundation and led the working-class club *Consciousness*, whose goal was to fight for the “immediate concerns of the workers in the Sliven factories” (DA Sliven, f. 241 Б, l. 1).

In 1903, the Sliven textile workers went on a big strike. In the socialist club, the workers discussed and formulated their demands that included: raising the wages, abolishing all fines and salary cuts, no work during holidays, timely payments, etc. The working-class club helped with the gathering of aid for the families of the striking workers, as well as with the tracking of the strike-breakers, and one of the most active in this was Nikola Kochev. As his contemporaries noted:

I would like to emphasise the fact that Nikola Kochev was most conscientious in his work. He would always bring the most accurate evidence. He would place himself in the bushes above the Jewish mill way before sunrise – further than the current mill Hadzhi Dimitar, where he would track who of the workers went to work, and if anybody tried to do so, he would take immediate measures and would convince him not to go to work (CSA, f. 1 Б, No. 2005, l. 71).

According to his contemporaries, Nikola Kochev was charismatic and consistent in his convictions. He created his own circle of supporters in the Gypsy neighbourhood and tried relentlessly to spread the ideas of socialism among his fellow citizens. At that time, another Gypsy man, Dimitar Champarov, was his friend and close comrade-in-arms. However, after the splitting of the BRSDP in 1903, Nikola Kochev took the side of Dimitar Blagoev (Narrow Socialists), and Dimitar Champarov joined Yanko Sakazov (Broad Socialists). This ideological discrepancy between the two men, determined the end of their friendship, as according to Nikola Kochev: “A worker who is not on the side of our party is an enemy of our fight and a supporter of the *chorbadzhis* (bosses, the rich ones, i.e. bourgeois)” (DA Sliven, f. 241 Б, l. 1).

Nikola Kochev was one of the initiators of the founding of the textile workers’ union in 1904, which was joined from the very beginning by a significant number of Gypsies. Among those were Dimitar Tsandev, Dimitar Kratsov, Georgi Palev, Dimitar Rukov, Petko Terzobaliev, Vasil Stambolov, and others (Дечева, 2000, p. 43). In those days, the Gypsies accounted for about 80% of the workers in the Sliven factories, which prompted Georgi Kirkov and other party functionaries to pay special attention to their work with them. In 1904, for example, Nikola Kochev oversaw 17 active members of the BRSDP (Narrow Socialists) in the Gypsy neighbourhood of Sliven (Ibid.). When a professional textile workers’ union with headquarters in Sliven was organised under the aegis of BRSDP

(Narrow Socialists), he became a permanent and active member alongside other Gypsy workers, like Todor Keleshev, Petar Keleshev, and others (DA Sliven, f. 879, op. 2, a.e. 2, l. 3). As a union member he was elected multiple times to act as a delegate of the textile workers union in Sliven at the general union congresses held in Gabrovo, Sofia, Plovdiv, Shumen, Varna, and other places around the country (DA Sliven, f. 241 B, l. 2).

However, Nikola Kochev did not limit his activities to the textile workers union and the strike committees only. In 1911, the BRSDP (narrow socialists) won 8 mandates in the local elections and gained an important role in the local municipal self-government, thus marking the beginning of the so-called Sliven commune (1912–1923), which (following those in Dryanovo and Samokov) was one of the first city municipalities governed by socialists/communists (Лазарова, 2008, p. 279). In the 1915 elections the party won 13 mandates and a majority in the municipal council (consisting of 20 members.)

The Sliven commune participated in the governing of the municipality for a total of 11 consecutive years – a period that encompassed the two Balkan Wars (1912–1913) and the First World War (1914–1918). During all that time Nikola Kochev held the position of a city councillor and thus became the first representative of the Gypsy minority to participate in the governing of the city (DA Sliven, f. 241 B, l. 2). The Sliven commune became a unifying centre for the workers' movement and party activities and initiatives. It prepared and implemented a municipal management program, which included socially-oriented activities like the opening of free canteens, daycare centers and summer camps for socially disadvantaged kids, as well as evening schools for the workers, medical care, improvement and sanitisation of the working neighbourhoods, etc. (Лазарова, 2008, p. 279), which were also aimed at the Gypsy population of Sliven.

At the end of the First World War the social and economic situation in Bulgaria was tense. Food was scarce despite the introduction of food coupons while, at the same time, some factories stopped working, which increased unemployment. This all led to the so-called 'women's riots' in various cities around the country, organised (or at least supported) by the socialist movement. On May 17, 1918, the demands for bread and the return of the men from the war front escalated in Sliven. Active participants were members of the workers' union, and the only victims killed were two young Gypsies – Peyu Dimitrov Yonkov (who became known in history under the name of Peyo Dachev), and Tyana Malakova (known also as Tyana Neva). According to preserved records, this happened when Peyo Dachev, at that time 18-year-old textile worker, led the protesters from the northern Gypsy neighbourhood (the so-called Upper mahala). They started their march at 9 in the morning and joined the general workers' protest in the centre of Sliven. The female workers from the Gypsy neighbourhood were among the active participants in the unrest. Among them were Nevyana Georgieva, Slava Petkova, Ivanka Kurteva, and others (Дечева, 2000, p. 47). The demonstrators, armed with stones and wooden sticks, smashed the windows of storefronts and wealthy houses. In meantime, the army and gendarmerie gathered downtown received an order to fire at the protestors, and as a result, Peyo Dachev was shot. Tyana Neva, who tried to administer first aid to him was

also killed. The tensions escalated, but eventually, the uprising was put down (Дечева, 2000, p. 46). After the bloody suppression of the protests, the building of the first textile factory (the one founded by Dobri Zhelyazkov), which had been turned into a prison in 1904, housed for the first time, female political prisoners, and thus men and women, as well as criminal and political prisoners were mixed together.

Nikola Kochev was not arrested during those events. The following year (1919), he participated in the big transportation strike of the railway workers, which spread across the entire country, and which was organised by the General Trade Union, that was under the aegis of the newly named Bulgarian Communist Party. Nikola Kochev was remembered as one of the first Gypsies in Sliven who became dedicated to the socialist idea. This is how he was described by some of his contemporaries:

Gifted with natural intelligence, modest, incredibly honest and conscientious, he won admiration and respect. His stooping figure and dark-skinned, rough face did not conceal the radiance of his soul and his truly kind heart. His dedication to the fight for workers' liberation was remarkable. He worked impeccably both in the party organisation and in the textile union. He worked tirelessly among his people – the Gypsy minority – for their cultural uplift. He suffered a lot because they – his compatriots – found it difficult to succumb to true culture (according to his words). His speeches at the party and union meetings were well thought out, and his suggestions well-argued (CSA, f. 1 B, No. 2005, l. 88).

Those memoirs were written in the typical declamatory style of heroic chronicles characteristic of the so-called socialist epoch, but it seems that Nikola Kochev was really respected and valued by his comrades-in-arms as well as by the Gypsies. When he died in 1923, his vigil was held not in his home, but in the Communist Party's club, and his sending off was a numerous mourning procession led by the party flag. As a sign of respect to him, during the time of socialism, the city of Sliven named after him a street in the Gypsy neighbourhood *Georgi Kirkov*, the neighbourhood's chitalishte, a neighbourhood kindergarten, as well as the Sliven's Gypsy song and dance ensemble (Ibid., l. 89). His name was given also to the other Gypsy neighbourhood, popularly known as the Lower mahala. Following the end of the communist regime in Bulgaria, the names were removed, nevertheless, the Roma from Sliven still refer to the neighbourhood as Nikola Kochev

Nikola Terzobaliev

Nikola Terzobaliev (1903–1981) was a prominent representative of the second generation of the Sliven socialists/communists. He was the son of one of the first Gypsy socialists – Petar Terzobaliev, a close associate of Nikola Kochev, and grew up in the atmosphere of strikes and socialist ideas. Like many other children from poor families, he started working in the Iliya G. Kalov's Factory from the age of 12 (or 13 according to other accounts) in order to help financially support his family while his father was mobilised at the front during the First World War (DA Sliven, f. 879, op. 1, a.e. 9, l. 1), and because of that, he managed to graduate only from third grade (Романо еси, 1946f, p. 1). His childhood was

cut short, his self-education, familiarity with socialist ideas and the influence of Nikola Kochev and Nikola Kokalov, who worked in the same factory as him, turned him into one of the prominent Gypsy activists in Sliven.

His youth coincided with the time of the October Revolution in Russia and the rapid growth of the communist movement in the city of Sliven. The workers' club *Hristo Botev* quickly became too small for all the followers of those socialist ideas, which necessitated the setting up of party organisations in the various city neighbourhoods. In 1919 his father, Petar Terzobaliev, was elected secretary of the BKP in the Gypsy neighbourhood, and his son Nikola became secretary of the youth Party organisation (Дечева, 2000, p. 47). In 1921 Nikola Terzobaliev was sent to study for three months at the political school in Sofia, which, according to him, had a great influence on his political development.

Nikola Terzobaliev was extremely active in the workers' political struggles led by the BKP, and he created his own circle of young like-minded Gypsies. Some of them can be seen in a group photo with him taken in 1921 – G. Nedev, Mikhail Christov, At. Vasilev, M. Golemanov, Petar Todorov, Dimitar Vasilev, Veliko Nikolov, Kostadin Marinov, Vasko Glavchev (DA Sliven, f. 879, op. 1, a.e 27, l. 4). Most of them actively joined him in the big textile workers' strike of 1922 – one of the many strikes in his life.

At the beginning of 1920, the world had already passed through a lot of radical changes. The communist movement in Bulgaria was already well developed and it had a good number of followers. Contact was established between the Comintern and the Bulgarian communists fighting for a proletarian revolution and a radical change in society. In the autumn of 1923, the so-called September uprising, organised by BKP and the left-wing of BZNS, was brutally suppressed and followed by numerous arrests. The repressions did not bypass Sliven either, although the city failed to revolt. However, there had been preliminary preparations for armed actions, and the city's Gypsies had taken an active part in them. Fifty-six rifles, six boxes of ammunition and eleven bombs were distributed to those in charge in the Gypsy Upper mahala, and five, armed battle groups were organised. At that time, Nikola Terzobaliev, who was a member of the party's regional leadership, was already the party secretary in the Gypsy neighbourhood, and his father Petar Terzobaliev, Nedyu Chakarov and Vasil Matsarov were also members of the BKP Regional Committee. A plan was prepared for the uprising, and it was expected to begin on the night of 22 September, but the arranged password for the beginning of the uprising was not given, and so it did not start (Дечева, 2000, p. 47). According to Terzobaliev this was due to the inaction of the city committee and the earlier arrests of party leaders (DA Sliven, f. 879, op. 1, a.e. 9, l. 2). After the start of the uprising in a few other cities around the country, around 150 people were arrested in Sliven. Among them, there were a lot of Gypsies, some of whom were convicted under military law (Дечева, 2000, p. 47).

Among those arrested were father and son Terzobaliev, who were taken to different places of interrogation. This is what Nikola Terzobaliev remembered about those events:

My dad was [taken] – to the 6th artillery regiment, and I was taken to the First Police station. Thanks to general [Vladimir] Zaimov, those taken to the artillery regiment were not subjected to harassment, torture, or killings. In the police station where the young people were, the police inspector [...], using a piece of wood and a wheel spoke, was hitting us at random. And so he hit me like that in my left knee, as a result of which I was sent to be treated at a hospital. Because of the powerful strike, the bone was cracked, my knee swelled, and I was left with a damaged knee for life. (DA Sliven, f. 879, op.1, a.e. 9, l. 2–3).

This was one of the many arrests in the life of Nikola Terzobaliev, whose health as a consequence would suffer seriously from the beatings incurred during police detentions. After his release in 1924, he was made secretary of the Local Committee of the BKP and was appointed head of a combat unit (Ibid., l. 3). The goal was for the BKP to be rebuilt illegally since it had been outlawed after the September events of 1923. The combat group of the Gypsy neighbourhood included 4 Gypsies – Georgi Zhelyazkov, Dimitar Kochev, Todor Bukhurov, and Peyo Khudov, as well as two Bulgarians living in the area. Nikola Terzobaliev was in charge of them as well as of the entire party organisation in the Gypsy neighbourhood (Дечева, 2000, p. 49).

The radicalisation of the BKP led to the assault in the church of the Holy Nedelya on April 16, 1925. In response, the government introduced new and increasingly more cruel repressions against the communists around the country. Nikola Terzobaliev was arrested on May 6, 1925, and kept in interrogation for 20 days, during which time he was subjected to cruel torture (DA Sliven, f. 879, op. 1, a.e. 9, l. 3). There are preserved accounts of his contemporaries that describe his serious physical condition as a result of those beatings (DA Sliven, f. 879, op. 1, a.e. 2, l. 2–4). Nikola Terzobaliev was sentenced to 12 years and a half in prison and a fine of 250,000 Bulgarian leva. Two years later he was released following a general amnesty, but he continued to be monitored by the authorities (DA Sliven, f. 879, op. 1, a.e. 9, l. 3–13).

After his release from prison at the beginning of 1927 Nikola Terzobaliev became a trustee of the newspaper *Единство* (Unity), a publication of the Independent Workers' Professional Unions (NRPS), because of which he was arrested again and interrogated. That same year he was hired at the *Merino* Factory and became actively engaged in the trade union activities of the textile workers. He participated in the leadership of the new organisation NRPS, which had been created in place of the old General Workers' Union, banned alongside the BKP in 1924 under the newly adopted Law for the Protection of the State. In order to have a legal form of political representation, the Workers' Party (RP) and the Workers' Youth Union (RMS) were created on the initiative of the illegal BKP. At that time, the communist ideas already had a wider influence among the Gypsies, as evidenced by a preserved photograph from that time of young Gypsies, members of the RMS, among whom we could identify several Gypsy women, namely Todorka Doncheva, Stefaniya Panayotova, Sotira Doncheva, Ruzha Kurteva, Sotira Pencheva, and Siyka Petrova, as well as Gypsy men – Kurti Dechev, Todor Russhev (RIM Sliven, No. 1437).

As it becomes clear from this photo, quite a few women were members of the Gypsy organisation of the RMS. That is, in that environment, the Gypsy women (at least in Sliven) confidently embarked on the path of their civic (and at the same time community) emancipation. This development was completely natural since women's equality was one of the fundamental principles of the proletarian socialist/communist movement, and in Sliven, the Gypsy women (at least the ones in the Upper mahala) were predominantly textile workers; many of them for generations. The strong female presence in the (pro-)communist movement is confirmed in another similar photo from 1928, also of young Gypsies, members of the RMS, in which can be seen Zakhariya Vachev, Kurteza Ruscheva, Mikhail Golemanov, Yordan Stambolov, Zhechka Chaknakova, Radi Salimanov, Nedka Stambolova, Vessa Raycheva, Decho Kurtev, Ivanka Decheva, and Shtilyana Zakharieva (RIM Sliven, No. 1440).

It has to be pointed out that the active participation in the political struggles did not exhaust all the dimensions of the movement for civic emancipation of the Roma in Sliven. In this case, there was a rather harmonious combination of those different dimensions, the participation in political struggles being only one of them, i.e. they were important, and in many cases may be the leading, but far from the only one, forms of expression of the Roma civic emancipation movement (see the Foreword for more details). Therefore, it was not accidental, but rather natural, that the same people (including Nikola Terzobaliev himself) found themselves involved in socio-political struggles, as well as in a number of other public initiatives aimed at the development of the Gypsy community and the establishment of its equal civil position. Typical examples in this regard were the establishment of the Gypsy Theater and the Gypsy Chitalishte in Sliven in the 1920s. A photograph with the inscription "Founders of the 1st Gypsy Theater Troupe, Sliven" has been preserved, dated March 2, 1927 (ASR, f. Господин Колев). Thus, the Gypsy Theater in Sliven was one of the first in the world, along with the Gypsy theatre groups in Uzhgorod, Košice and Strážnice in Czechoslovakia and the State Gypsy Theater *Romen* in Moscow (see Marushiakova & Popov, 2021b). There are 25 people in that photo, of which 15 are men and 10 women, and on its back-side are listed some of their names – "Petar Vasilev, Kolinata (Nikola), [Dimitar] Kratsov, Ivan Kratsov (director), Yordan Chorapchiyata (director), Armanzov" (ASR, f. Господин Колев). It has obviously been an amateur troupe working closely with the Gypsy Chitalishte, which was very active over the years – it used to organise literary and musical social events (Сливенска поща, 1930, p. 2) and it occasionally held theatrical performances, e.g. the plays *Prodigal Son* (Сливенска поща, 1932, p. 2), *Ruined Life* (Изток, 1941, p. 4), *Golgotha* (Циганите, 1992, p. 7), *The Nail in the Lock*, and others (DA Sliven, f. 157, op. 1, a.e. 11, l. 11).

The exact date of the establishment of the Gypsy Chitalishte in the Upper mahala is not entirely clear. In any case, a photo of its leaders from 1928 (perhaps it was created that year) is preserved, in which can be seen Petar Tanev (Takyoolu), Dimitar Budakov (Baraka), Decho Kurtev (Papazolu), Kuzman Mikhalev, Krastyo Vachev, Vasil Stambolov, Vasil Gachev, Yordan Kolev (Koloolu), Dimitar Zanzalov (Zanzala) (Отвътре / Andral /

Inside, 2000, p. 11). On another photo, made one year later, in 1929, the management of the Gypsy Chitalishte had already been completely changed and it now included Nikola Terzobaliev, Todor Keleshev, Georgi Armanzov, Tasho Chakmakov, Mihail Kumanov, Mihail Zanzalov, Vasil Chakmakov, Atanas Vasilev, Dimitar Kochev, Gancho Vasilev and Todor Ruskiev (Отвътре / Andral / Inside, 2001, p. 96). It becomes clear that the leadership of the Gypsy Chitalishte had been taken over by the (pro)communist Gypsies, thus becoming not only the centre of public life in the neighbourhood, but also of the communist movement.

In the late 1920s, all through the 1930s, and at the beginning of the 1940s, Nikola Terzobaliev remained actively involved in the communist movement in various forms. In 1929, he was a member of the strike committee for the great textile workers' strike, along with other Gypsies, like Mikhail Golemanov, Dimitar Milenkov, Zafir Ivanov, and others (Дечева, 2000, p. 51).

After the strike, members of the strike committee were banned from working in Sliven, and Nikola Terzobaliev, at that time a father of three, was sent by the party to work for the Central Committee of the NRPS in Sofia. There he was arrested several times and was given the warning to leave the capital city until the authorities finally deported him back to Sliven (DA Sliven, f. 879, op. 1, a.e. 9, l. 8).

After returning to his home city, Nikola Terzobaliev took an active part in the Workers' Party's election campaign for the 1931 parliamentary elections, in which, with the help of Gypsy votes, its candidate, Sabi Dimitrov, was elected MP. Terzobaliev himself was arrested several times on various charges, and it was not until 1934 that he finally managed to find a job at the *Merino* Factory, in a position that was too demanding for his compromised health. Only two months later, workers at the *Andonov and Mikhailov* Factory, where most workers were Gypsies, went on strike demanding increased wages. The protesters were supported by workers from other factories in the city, who also stopped working. Just the Gypsies participating in that strike numbered 850 people (Дечева, 2000, p. 51). For them, the strike committee raised aid and funds to open a strike kitchen, which provided hot meals for the families of the strikers in the Upper mahala (DA Sliven, f. 879, op.1, a.e. 27, l. 7).

In 1934, a new military coup d' état was carried out, organised by the Political circle *Zveno* (Link) headed by Kimon Georgiev. All political parties and related public organisations were banned, and as a result, the Workers' Party and the NRPS were outlawed. This forced the communist movement to look for new ways of conducting mass work.

According to local press publications, in February 1939, through the efforts of the previously established consumer cooperative in the Gypsy Quarter, chaired by Yanko Dimitrov and having as secretary Todor Keleshev (a longtime activist of the communist movement), a Gypsy Chitalishte, called *Knyaz Simeon Tarnovski*, was established (Изток, 1939, p. 4). That was not a new chitalishte, but a revival of the old one, which, we can assume, had been closed down by the authorities after the military coup d' état in 1934. The new old chitalishte adopted the name of the heir to the throne, Prince Simeon

Tarnovski (born in 1937), Tsar Simeon II from 1943 to 1946, and as a historical curiosity, the Prime Minister of Bulgaria from 2001 to 2005. However, this naming was done simply to deceive the authorities, while the chitalishte continued to be the centre of the communist movement in the Gypsy mahala.

The political situation in Bulgaria at that time had already changed radically. In 1938, the illegal BKP merged with the RP under the name Bulgarian Workers' Party (Communists). In March 1941, Bulgaria joined the Tripartite Pact, and in December of the same year declared war on the United States and Great Britain, thus joining the Second World War on the side of Nazi Germany. After the German attack on the USSR on June 22, 1941, the illegal BRP (Communists) adopted a course of armed combat, and in 1942, on its initiative, a political coalition the Fatherland Front (OF), dominated by the Communist Party, was formed.

In this situation, the names of the most active workers' organisers and strikers, including Nikola Terzobaliev, were well known to all the factory managers in Sliven, and it was becoming increasingly difficult for them to find work because the owners did not want problematic workers. At the end of 1941, Nikola Terzobaliev gave a speech to the workers in the factory where he worked, prompted by the refusal of the management of the factory to give the workers the three meters' free-of-charge fabric due to them. The situation got tense and he was arrested, but the workers surrounded the police station and demanded his release. Nikola Terzobaliev was released but was soon interned for 10 months in Sveti Vrach (now Sandanski). During the period between 1941 and 1943, he was interned in three different places around the country: in Sveti Vrach in 1941; in the village of Gigen, Nikopol region, in 1943; and in the village of Atiya, Burgas region, in 1944 (DA Sliven, f. 879, op.1, a.e. 9, l. 12–13).

During his short stay in Sliven in 1942, Nikola Terzobaliev joined the Gypsy proletariat in the city in a campaign that deserves a mention. In January 1941, Bulgaria, which was already closely associated with Nazi Germany, adopted a Law for the Protection of the Nation. According to this new law, written under the strong influence of racial laws in Germany, all the discriminatory measures, prohibitions, and restrictions provided were directed solely against Jews, while the Gypsies were not mentioned at all. However, other similar legal and administrative provisions were adopted with regard to the Gypsies in various spheres of their lives.

The discriminatory attitude towards the Gypsies working in industrial enterprises was expressed in the ordinance, according to which they, as not "Bulgarian-born", (i.e. non-ethnic Bulgarians), were deprived of the right to receive child allowances (*Държавен вестник*, 1942, p. 4). On this occasion, a group of Gypsies working in the textile factories in Sliven submitted a petition to the local Municipal Council, "asking them to edit the family books [of the municipality] and their ID cards by changing their nationality from Gypsy to Bulgarian, so as not to be deprived of their child allowances, commissioned food rations, and others" (DA Sliven, f. 46 K, op. 1, a.e. 41, l. 33). The municipality considered the case and concluded that "it could not take a decision on the application in

question and could not fulfil their requests" (Ibid., l. 51). Following that response, factory workers in Sliven sent several collective petitions to the Minister of Interior and Public Health (DA Sliven, f. 925, op. 7, a.e. 120, l. 1), to the Directorate of Labour through the Labour Inspectorate (Ibid, l. 5), to the Mayor of Sliven (Ibid, p. 4), to the Minister of War, and to the Commander of the Third Balkan Division (Ibid, l. 8–10) (Ibid, l. 8–10), where many of the signatories were army reserve soldiers. Those appeals to various institutions were sent continuously, but to no avail, until the end of 1943. They included requests for a fair solution to the Gypsy situation and the removal of the information about the Gypsy origin from the ID cards of Gypsies, thus helping them avoid the restrictions to which they were subjected (Ibid., l. 2). As Nikola Terzobaliev was interned most of the time during those campaigns, he managed to join only one of them (the petition to the Minister of War); but it is significant to note that he was the first one to sign it (Ibid., p. 8).

On August 16, 1944 Nikola Terzobaliev was released from his internment and returned to Sliven. On August 26, 1944, under the influence of the Soviet Army's offensive in the Balkans, the BRP (Communists) called for an armed uprising to "overthrow the monarcho-fascist dictatorship". After the USSR declared war on Bulgaria on September 5, in fulfilment of its allied obligations, the occupation of settlements across the country by partisan detachments and combat groups began, as well as the attacks on prisons in various cities and the release of political prisoners. Early in the morning of September 9, 1944, military units in Sofia overthrew the government and a new government of the OF was announced, which marked the beginning of the establishment of the communist regime in Bulgaria.

On the eve of these events, Nikola Terzobaliev was given the task of organising the Sliven communists and freeing the political prisoners in the city (DA Sliven, f. 879, op.1, a.e. 9, l. 14), which was accomplished in September 1944, without any resistance from the guards, who retreated from the shouts of the assembled crowd of people addressed by Terzobaliev. He also organised the transportation of former prisoners to their native places with the order "to act boldly, resolutely fending off any enemy attempts to prevent the course of the revolution". The driver of the special train transporting those prisoners was his son Petar (Ibid., l. 16).

After the establishment of the new government, Nikola Terzobaliev became a member of the District Committee of the OF in Sliven and one of its plenipotentiaries, who were to head the old administrative services. He was also entrusted with the management of the District Committee of the Textile Workers' Union, whose activities during this period were concentrated in "strengthening the discipline" in more than 20 enterprises in Sliven, still privately owned but operating under the control of the OF. In 1947, all those enterprises were nationalised with Nikola Terzobaliev taking an active part in the preparation and implementation of that nationalisation.

At that time Nikola Terzobaliev was involved, in addition to his other public and political duties, in the activities of the *United Common-Cultural and Educational Organisation of the Gypsy Minorities 'Ekiye'* (Unity), established in 1945 and headed by Shakir Pashov

(see above). In 1946, his name appeared for the first time in the organisation's newspaper, *Romano esi* (Gypsy Voice), where an essay was published about him with the title *From the Life of a Bulgarian Gypsy in Sliven*, presenting his work over the years as a prominent workers' leader and a communist activist (Романо еси, 1946f, p. 1). In addition, a short article by Terzobaliev himself was published in the same issue of the newspaper, emphasising the importance of the September 9, 1944 coup, which he described as a "people's social revolution" that "destroyed forever [...] the economic chains that had bound all our people". After noting that "our Gypsy minority had taken an equal part in that revolutionary struggle", Terzobaliev drew attention to the fact that the Gypsies in Bulgaria had been "on the verge of total physical extermination, as had happened with our compatriots in Romania, Germany and Yugoslavia". On the basis of that, he came to the conclusion that "we [the Gypsies – author's note] received double liberation" (in other words, both as an integral part of the Bulgarian society and as a separate minority community within the Bulgarian nation), and that is why the Gypsies must work for the strengthening of the new OF government, with which "we will guarantee our full freedom" (Романо еси, 1946h, p. 1).

In 1947, a new article by Nikola Terzobaliev was published with the provocative title *Is It Necessary for the Gypsies to Have Their Own Minority Organisation?* (Романо еси, 1947b, pp. 1–2). It becomes clear from this article that, although he was not directly involved in the activities of the Gypsy organisation, Terzobaliev was well acquainted with the ongoing debates among Gypsy activists about the need for it and its future. As stated in the article, some of the activists believed that under the Fatherland Front government, the new Constitution (which was then being discussed and later adopted in December 1947) would guarantee the equality of all Bulgarian citizens, regardless of their nationality, race or religion, and therefore such an organisation would no longer be needed. Others agreed that since the Gypsies did not have a written alphabet, such an organisation was not needed. According to yet others, however, there should be more separate minority organisations and "Bulgarian Gypsies [the term denoting Orthodox Christian Gypsies – author's note] should not mix with Turkish and *Golite* [the Naked] Gypsies" (Ibid., p. 1). The latter opinion was apparently popular among the Gypsy activists in Sliven, who generally lived in the Upper Quarter, whose residents distanced themselves from the 'Turkish' and 'naked' (in the sense of highly marginalised) Gypsies living in the Lower mahala (now Nadezhda district).

It should be noted that, according to Terzobaliev, the existence of a Gypsy organisation was necessary before September 9, 1944, "when we grouped our forces around the newspaper *Terbie* (Education)" (Ibid.). It turns out that at the time (in the early 1930s) when he was heavily involved in the political struggles in Sliven, he was also well informed about Shakir Pashov's attempts in Sofia to create a national Gypsy organisation, i.e. for him, the movement for Roma civic emancipation had two dimensions (ethnic and societal). In this sense is his main conclusion in an article about the need for the existence of a Gypsy organisation in the new political reality, which on the one hand would work

for the social and cultural uplifting of all Gypsies, and on the other would support the government of the OF and would work for the uplifting of “our republic” (Ibid., p. 2).

By an ominous irony of fate, despite those views, due to his communist convictions, forcing him to strictly observe party discipline and to fulfil the tasks set by the Party, Nikola Terzobaliev became the man through whom the ruling Bulgarian Communist Party liquidated the Gypsy organisation. As a result of internal struggles and constant complaints to the highest party and state institutions (see above), following a decision by the government authorities on April 7, 1950, the Central Directorate of the *Cultural and Educational Organisation of the Gypsy Minority in Bulgaria* decided to remove Shakir Pashov from the post of chairman of the organisation and to elect on his place Nikola Terzobaliev (Нево дром, 1950, p. 1), who, up until then had never taken a public stand on what was happening in the Gypsy organisation. This was, in fact, the end of that organisation, and following the Instructions of the National Council of the OF (AK, f. 13, op. 1, a.e. 759, l. 147–148), the local sections of the Gypsy organisation were transformed to territorial sections of the OF, which was no longer a leading political organisation, but a mass public organisation under the supervision of the BKP, thus in this way the organisation ceased to exist.

Until his death in 1981, Nikola Terzobaliev remained associated with the trade union movement, although during that period he also held a number of other senior positions at the district and national levels of the Party and in the state administration, for which he received numerous awards and distinctions. In 1975, he wrote his memoirs, in which the Gypsy theme was left in the background and included in the leading discourse – the struggles of the Sliven proletariat under the leadership of the Communist Party (DA Sliven, f. 879, op. 1, a.e. 9, l. 1–18). Whether this was the result of deliberate self-censorship or it had been imposed by the authorities is a question that will probably never be answered.

Gospodin Kolev

Gospodin Kolev (1923–2011) was born on January 20, 1921, in Sliven, in a family of peers of textile workers. He was a representative of the third generation of Gypsy communists in Sliven and, unlike the activists of the previous rank, he managed to get a good education, graduating from the local high school in 1942. This was no longer a notable exception for the Gypsies from the Upper mahala, where the textile workers lived. A photograph of young Gypsies, members of the RMS from 1941, is preserved (DA Sliven, f. 879, op. 1, a.e. 27, l. 7), in which, in addition to Gospodin Kolev, 15 young people can be seen, 6 of whom are in school uniforms, which shows that they were students at the local high school.

As a high school student, Gospodin Kolev was fascinated with communist ideas and became a member of the RMS, a youth organisation of the Bulgarian Workers' Party (Communists), which at that time had embarked on a path of armed struggle. Here is what Gospodin Kolev himself remembers about that time:

I was then a member of the RMS. I was a student in high school, and we created an RMS organisation consisting of 15–20 people. And we held illegal meetings. We used the chitalishte [in the Gypsy mahala]. However, in 1942 I was arrested as a communist. There was a campaign [of the RMS] and 12 of us from my high school got arrested – including me and three people from our neighbourhood, from the community house – activists. The next year, one or two more people from the neighbourhood, members of the chitalishte, were arrested, and in 1942 the chitalishte was closed. They [the authorities – authors' note] realised that it had become a nest – a centre where party politics was made and reproduced [...] This is how I participated in this chitalishte: we read books, listened to lectures, invited lecturers; we did as much as we could; we ourselves needed education and in turn gave education to the less enlightened. Difficult years ... (Personal communication with Gospodin Kolev, February 20, 2010).

As can be seen, there is again a combination of the work of the Gypsies, chitalishte's activists (including Gospodin Kolev himself) for the development of their ethnic community with simultaneous active participation in the socio-political struggles of the Bulgarian communists

The participation of Gospodin Kolev in the so-called Anti-fascist resistance, organised by the Communist Party during the Second World War, in which Bulgaria was an ally of Nazi Germany, included being a member of an illegal youth group of the RMS with a mixed composition, in which Bulgarian and Gypsy youth worked together and supported the activities of the Party. In 1942, the core of the group consisted of five Gypsies and two Bulgarians. Gospodin Kolev and Gospodin Stefanov had just graduated from high school when, together with their fellow workers – Petko Kostov, Kiril Savov, Kiril Kratsov, Lozan Prodanov and Shtilyan Skubarev – were arrested by the police and sentenced to eight and a half years in prison under the Law for the Protection of the State (Дечева, 2000, p. 52). The arrested were brought before the court and their sentences for illegal political activity were pronounced on June 10, 1942. There is a police photo of the convicts (RIM Sliven, No. 3398), who were first sent to the prison in Sliven, and then to the prison in Varna, from which they were eventually released on September 8, 1944, after the capture of the prison by a mass demonstration organised by the Communists, shortly before the entry of Soviet troops into the city.

Those were not the only Gypsies from Sliven convicted of participating in the illegal communist struggle. During the Second World War, there were more than twenty Gypsies those who were political prisoners in the city (Геюв et al., 1968, p. 19).

After September 9, 1944, with the coming to power of the government of the OF, dominated by the Communist Party, Gospodin Kolev became a member of the County Committee of the RMS, then of the District Committee of the RMS and, from 1946 until the end of 1947, he was secretary of the City Committee of the RMS in Sliven. This marked the beginning of his long political career. He was one of the first Gypsies in Bulgaria to receive higher education. In his words, this is what he said about his life during those years:

After September 9, [1944], I was a member of the RMS District Committee. I was a full-time worker. There I was in charge of the working youth. Later, in 1946, I became secretary of the City Committee of the RMS. Sliven [is] a city [...] [with] many textile workers and I was in charge of the textile factories. [...] And I worked there until 1947. And one day they called me to the District Committee of the Party – me and 4–5 other people – and told us that we should become officers. I told them that I had no intention of becoming an officer and that I wanted to become a teacher one day. No! The party needs new people and you need to learn! (Personal communication with Gospodin Kolev, February 20, 2010; Стоянова, 2017, p. 405).

From the end of 1947 to March 1958, Gospodin Kolev was a political officer in the Bulgarian People's Army, while simultaneously graduating extramural from the Military-Political Academy, and then from the Faculty of Law at Sofia University *Kliment Ohridski*. During his service in the army, he reached the rank of lieutenant colonel and held a number of responsible positions – head of the Personnel Department at the Ministry of National Defense, head of the Propaganda and Agitation Department in the Army Air Forces, and others (Колев, 2003). From March 1958 to March 1990 Gospodin Kolev was an instructor in the TsK BKP, where he was responsible for the work of the BKP with the Gypsy population. He describes the beginning of this important stage of his life as follows:

And [in] 1958 I was summoned to the Central Committee [of the BKP]. They called me and told me: “Comrade Kolev, we want to appoint you at the Central Committee of the Party, to be responsible for the work with the Gypsies. We have such a department – *Minorities* – for Turks, Armenians, Jews and Gypsies”. I told them that I did not know the Gypsy community well: “I am a Gypsy, but there are several categories and layers, I know very little”. But they told me, “But we too know very little”. And from 1958 to 1990 I was there ... (Personal communication with Gospodin Kolev, February 20, 2010; Стоянова, 2017, pp. 405–406).

The work of Gospodin Kolev in the TsK BKP and his participation in the policies towards the Gypsy population in Bulgaria could be the subject of an independent study, but it goes beyond the chronological framework of this edition. Throughout his life, including after the collapse of the communist regime in Bulgaria in 1989, Gospodin Kolev remained a staunch supporter of communist ideas. In the last years of his life, he wrote two memoirs – *A Gypsy in the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party: Experiences, Ordeal, Reflections* (Колев, 2003) and the *Bulgarian Communist Party and the Gypsies in the Period 1944–1989* (Колев, 2010).

Gospodin Kolev died in 2011 in Sofia.

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The history of the Gypsy socialists/communists in Sliven reflects in its focus a long path passed by generations of the Gypsy textile workers in the city. This story would not have been possible without the specific, historically determined socio-economic situation in

Sliven, which led to the creation of a Gypsy toiling community in the city. The Gypsy proletariat in Sliven at the end of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century felt an urgent need to protect not only its social and economic rights but also the civil equality of its community.

The Gypsy workers recognised in the Bulgarian Socialist / Communist Party and its satellite trade unions a suitable platform for them, through which they hoped to determine their own destiny. The ideas of civic equality and a better life offered by that ideological platform not only directly corresponded to their own desires, but also offered an innovative progressive approach to solving the social problems of their community, and ultimately to their civic emancipation through a radical reorganisation of society, of which they were an integral part.

The three main activists presented here in this chapter – Nikola Kochev, Nikola Terzobaliev and Gospodin Kolev – were representatives of three generations of Gypsy textile workers, who sincerely believed in their causes and were (at least to some extent) idealists, and every one of them paid a price for the life choices they made. They followed the example of their Party colleagues, learned from everyone, built on the experience gained and, each of them in his time, further expanded the ideas for the development of their community, oriented to essentially similar goals. They were not alone in their socio-political activities and were surrounded by numerous supporters (both Gypsies and Bulgarians). And although only a few names stand out among them, they all together created the history of the Gypsy communists from the city of Sliven.

Conclusion

Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov

The portraits presented here illuminate important aspects of the overall movement for Roma civic emancipation in Bulgaria during the studied period but do not exhaust all its dimensions. As it became clear, this movement underwent a long and complex path of development and here we will say a few additional words about some other aspects and forms of manifestation in its development (and, at the very least, mention a few more names of Roma, who were active in the process, about whom there are not sufficient data available to draft their individual portraits).

Starting from local professional associations and incorporating various other forms of civic organisations – religious (Muslim), mutual aid, charitable, etc. – the Roma movement for civic emancipation gradually reached their merger into one common organisation already in the interwar period. This merger, however, led not only to the mechanical unification of the goals and functions of the former types of organisations but to the promoting of a new type of organisation which had already a national dimension (at

least by design) and a new, ideological standing, i.e., it was transformed into a completely different type of civic organisation.

During this ideological evolution, not only the religious division of the Gypsies in Bulgaria had to be overcome, but a process had also begun in order to surmount their intrinsic heterogeneity as a community. More generally, the main divide of Roma communities in Bulgaria for centuries went along the lines of religion. Bulgaria's population Census conducted in 1934 registered 80,532 people with 'Gypsy-speaking language' whose differentiation according to their religion is as follows: Muslims were 67,103 persons, Eastern Orthodox – 13,323 people, Protestants – 69 people, and other religious – 37 people (Преброяване на населението, 1939, pp. 22–29). Provided that in Bulgaria at that time a large portion of Gypsies were Turkish-speaking (Marushiakova & Popov, 2015a, pp. 27–33), the percentage of Muslim Gypsies was even higher (in all cases more than three-quarters). Another important divide – among settled and nomadic Roma – is present neither in the Portraits nor in documents, as the latter were at that time excluded from the processes of civic emancipation.

The Roma civic emancipation movement began its civic (and, at the same time, de facto political) activity as a struggle for the voting rights of Gypsy Muslims (the Gypsy Congress in Sofia) and included the attempts to legalise the partial internal self-government and the representativeness to the authorities (e.g. Coptic Muhtarship in Vidin), the aspirations of Muslims to be involved in the management of Islamic municipalities and properties (e.g., the *Sofia Common Muslim Educational-Cultural Mutual Aid Organisation 'Istikbal – Future'*) and the solving of issues which were related to their everyday lives and their employment (professional, mutual aid/cooperative, charitable, cultural and educational associations).

Ultimately, all this development, whereby the ethnic unity of the community prevailed over its religious division, led to the creation of a national organisation that was inclusive of all Gypsies in the country regardless of their religion and place of residence. Especially revealing in this respect is the case with the day of St George (*Gergyovden* or *Hederlezi* in its Christian or Muslim version respectively). The image of St George attends the seal of the Coptic Muhtarship in the town Vidin; at the Mutual Aid Union, he is the union's 'patron saint' (a legacy of professional associations); and at the United Common-Cultural and Educational Organisation of the Gypsy Minorities in Bulgaria 'Ekipe' (Unity) his day is already an 'organisation holiday'. The choice of the 'Gypsy feast day' was particularly appropriate because de facto (despite its various names) it is common to both Gypsy Muslims (the majority) and Gypsy Christians. The holiday was named after the Christian religious calendar because Orthodoxy became the official religion in Bulgaria at that time, i.e., the embeddedness of the Gypsies within the Bulgarian civic nation is emphasised. The fact that the same holiday is solemnly celebrated by all other Balkan peoples is not an issue at all, because each of these peoples (including the Gypsies) perceived it as their 'own' ethnic holiday (Marushiakova & Popov, 2007, pp. 33–50).

The place of traditional holidays for all peoples living in the Central, South-Eastern and Eastern European region in the era of modern nationalism is of particular importance. One of the main pillars of this nationalism in the spirit of Herder is the folk traditions, including the holidays, which are perceived in this sense. The question here is not whether and to what extent a tradition is unique and ethnically specific, but much more important is how it is perceived by its bearers. In this sense, Roma are no exception, and 'traditions' (whatever that may involve), and in particular holidays, are especially important as an expression of the 'National Spirit' (Herder's 'Volksgeist'). It is for this reason that, in the course of historical development, Roma, whose ethnic culture very much incorporated, adapted and perceived as their 'owns' forms and elements of the culture of their surrounding population in the region, in many cases, preserved those forms and elements that have already disappeared among majority population (Marushiakova & Popov, 2016c, pp. 35–64).

Domination of ethnicity over religiosity can be noted, however curious it may seem, even with religious institutions, as in the described cases of Gypsies' struggles to take over in Muslim communities. The situation is very similar also with those Roma who became members of the so-called 'new' (in a sense different from traditional Eastern Orthodoxy) evangelical churches.

The exact date of the arrival of the Evangelical denominations among the Gypsies in Bulgaria is difficult to indicate but in all likelihood, this has been in the first decade of the 20th century, in the period between 1905 and 1910 (Славкова, 2007, pp. 78–79). In any case, it is certain that the first Gypsy preacher was Petar Punchev (1882–1924) from the village of Golintsi, who preached and performed services in the Romani language in a rented room used as a prayer home. At that time, besides Petar Punchev, there were other Gypsy preachers who worked in other places in the country – the towns of Ferdinand (today Montana), Pernik as well as other places (Ibid.). Since 1921, the religious community in Golintsi received the status of a branch of the Baptist Church in Lom, and on November 11, 1923, during a ceremony in Lom, Petar Punchev was officially ordained as Pastor which legitimised the first Gypsy Baptist Church (Ibid., p. 81). After his death, however, ferment and conflict broke out in the Gypsy church (Циганска, 1926). These controversies came to an end with the election of the Bulgarian Petar Minkov as Pastor of the church on June 13, 1926 (Евангелист, 1926, pp. 48–49). He was received well by the Gypsies; he delivered sermons in the Romani language and preserved the ethnic character of the Church in Golintsi. Pastor Minkov had been active in various areas and has carried out several Evangelistic missions in the region (Славкова, 2007, p. 82). Under his editorship, the newspaper *Svetilnik* (Candlestick) was published in 1927, with a separate page in Romani, entitled *Романо алав* (Gypsy word), and two Gospel songs in Romani language were compiled and published – *Романе Свято гили* (Roma Holy Song) (1929) and *Романе Свети гиля* (Roma Holy Songs) (1933). The Gypsy Woman Christian Association *Romni* and the Christian Youth Association, which was headed by Todor Marinov, were also established: the former most likely in 1926, and the latter in

1929. With the collective effort of all Roma believers, a new church building was built and officially opened in 1930 (Славкова, 2007, p. 84). In the early 1930s, Pastor Petar Minkov left for the capital Sofia. At that point, the Rom Georgi Stefanov, who received training in Austria, and his successor Aleksandar Toshev, who received his training in Germany, were ordained consecutively as pastors of the church in Golintsi (Ibid., p. 88).

By the initiative of Petar Minkov, the Committee *Gypsy Evangelical Mission* was established in Sofia, on October 17, 1932, but the leadership of this group did not include any Gypsies (CSA, f. 264, op. 2, a.e. 9385, l. 7–8). According to the Statute of this Mission, its primary purpose was “to spread the Christian morality and to promote the spiritual, cultural and moral uplifting of the Gypsy people” (Ibid., l. 11). The Mission carried out various activities which included the publication of the *Bulletin of the Gypsies Mission in Bulgaria* (1932), the newspaper *Известия на Циганската Евангелска Мисия* (Bulletin of the *Gypsy Evangelical Mission*) (1933), the translations in Romani language of the Gospels of John and Matthew (Сомнал Евангелие, 1932; 1937) and two collections of Gospel Songs – *Романе гиля е Девлеске* (Romani Songs for Lord) (1936) and *Романе Сомнал Гиля* (Romani Holy Song) (1936). Only the second publication has been preserved, from which it is clear that these are translations into Romani language of well-known Protestant hymns.

The Committee *Gypsy Evangelical Mission* also prepared a series of Christian-themed propaganda brochures in the Romani language *Барре придобивке* (Large Gains), *Дуваре бианине* (Born Twice), *О Дел вакярда* (The Lord Said), *О дром ухтавдо* (The High Road), *Саво пересарла Библия* (What the Bible Tells), *Спасител ащал безаханен* (The Saviour Remained Unharmed), *Спаситело светоско* (The Saviour of the World), *Щар безспорне факте* (Four Indisputable Facts), which were issued by the Scripture Gift Mission in London. However, so far, we have not succeeded in discovering them. In 1937, the Common Charitable Association for the Building of a Community House and the help of Poor Families of the Baptised Gypsies was founded, named “Father Paisiy”, in the village Vasilovtsi, Lom District (CSA, f. 264, op. 6, a.e. 1461).

The activities of the Gypsy Mission were not limited to Bulgaria. A mission of evangelisation was carried out in Romania in 1934, which also included Gypsies (see Marushiakova & Попов, 2021b, p. 429).

All this development towards the ethnicisation of religious institutions is not some unique specificity, which is found only among Roma in Bulgaria. For Eastern Orthodox peoples, religion is subjected to modern nationalism, it is one of the pivots of the nation-state, and the church must necessarily be ‘national’ (cf. recent events in today’s Ukraine).

The new type of national civic organisations, which took shape in the 1930s (the Mutual Aid Union and the *Istikbal*), emerged (at least as a pursuit goal) as a representative of the entire community, and, as a result, it desired to be a partner of state and local institutions to solve community problems. In general, the main objective of the new type of national civic organisation was the overall civic emancipation of the community which would involve the achievement of an equal social standing and social integration

of the Gypsy community, which would thus be an integral part of the Bulgarian civic nation. However, this does not mean that their purpose was to obliterate the Gypsies as a separate ethnic community or their ethnic assimilation. Even in a religious system such as Christianity, which places in its creed the lack of differentiation of peoples before God, Gypsies wanted, in the spirit of Balkan Eastern Orthodox nationalism, to have their own, Gypsy Evangelical Church. Not only that but there were also indications (e.g., in the Statute of the *Ekipe*) that, at least as a vision in the distant future, there were ideas for the further development in that direction, including the creation of their nation-state (to what extent these perspectives were realistic would be a completely different question).

However, the vision of one's own Gypsy state was present only abstractly, as a desirable opportunity in the indefinitely distant future, while all efforts were focused on the problems of the present and the foreseeable future. Nowhere in the development of the ideas of the Roma civic emancipation during the historical period in question, however, could be discerned ideas that propose a separation of the Gypsies from the macro-society or the opposition between the two. On the contrary, the desire seems to be for the Roma community to integrate into society and to find the right (and most of all, fair) balance between their community and the macro-society, within which they are perceived as an ethnically different but inseparable part of the Bulgarian civil nation. This is true even when, at first glance, it seems that the ethnic dimensions are not taken into account at all while the leading ideas revolve around the struggle of the social classes and political parties.

Such is the case of the involvement of Roma in the communist movement. This is not a process that is typical only for Bulgaria, similar processes take place in other countries in the region of Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe (see Marushiakova & Popov, 2021b). The participation of Roma in the communist movement is not a historical paradox, but rather a regularity, because it is another alternative in the processes of Roma civic emancipation and in the struggle to achieve societal equality. The case presented here concerning the Roma textile workers in Sliven, as well as the connection (although not fully clarified and consistent over the years) of Shakir Pashov with the communist movement are not the only manifestations in this direction.

The political situation in the first half of the 1920s in Bulgaria was characterised by intensification and even fierceness of political struggles, and this reflected on the Gypsies too. The left-wing BZNS, led by Aleksandar Stamboliyski, implemented an agrarian reform thanks to which many Gypsies who were living in the countryside received their own land. After the military coup, which took place on June 9, 1923, Gypsies became involved in the armed resistance of the Bulgarian peasants in defence of the legitimate government. As a result of the suppression of the resistance, the Gypsies Asan Lalchov from the village of Dragor, Ali Durakov and Muto Asanov from the village of Karabunar, Pazardzhik District, were killed (Генов et al., 1968, pp. 22–24). Gypsies from North-Western Bulgaria joined also the September Uprising in the fall of 1923 which was organised by the BKP and by the left-wing of the BZNS. Seven Gypsies were killed in the

attack on army barracks in Lom (Романо еси, 1946g, p. 2). During the suppression of the uprising, the Gypsies Shinko Kalishev, and Biryam Aliyev from the village of Milin Bryag, Yusein Abdulov from Berkovitsa, Mecho Demov Gyulov from the village of Yalovo, Nano Banov Munov from the village of Doktor Yosifovo, Dervish Bayramov from the village of Archar, Veli and Kurto Mangovi Seferovi from the village of Gradishnitsa were killed (Генов et al., 1968, p. 20).

Roma from different regions of the country were also participants in the partisan movement organised by the Communist Party during the Second World War, in which Bulgaria was an ally of Nazi Germany. Such were, for example, Osman Bilalov and Sashko Germanov from Shumen (DA Shumen, f. 119, op. 1, a.e. 11, l. 1; Демирова, 2017, p. 40), Trayko Dzhevelev from Lom, Petko Kanchev from Plevan region, etc. Some Roma were also involved in the partisan units in other countries, such as Dimitar Nemtsov from Sliven who, as a soldier in the Occupation Corps in Yugoslavia, deserted and joined the local partisans (Генов et al., 1968, pp. 24–25) and Ivan M. Stoyanov in occupied Macedonia. In this armed resistance, Roma also gave victims, such as the partisan Yusein Kamenov from the village of Gorna Kremena, Vratsa District, who was killed in 1944; the yataks (partisan's helper) – Velichka Drumcheva from the village of Radetski, Gabrovo region, Mustafa Yovchev from the village of Ledenika, Vratsa region, and Yusein Mutov Musov from the village of Varbitsa, Vratsa region, were also killed in that movement. When Bulgaria declared war on Germany after 1944, dozens of Gypsies also joined as volunteers. From Sliven alone, eight young people left for the front, three of whom died (Ibid, p. 20). The exact numbers of Roma, participants in this resistance during the Second World War are difficult to ascertain, some of them were partisans, others were yataks, and a third group were political prisoners. In any case, during the so-called Era of Socialism, at least a few dozens of them received the title called Active Fighter Against Fascism and Capitalism which offered them a number of social privileges; only from the town of Sliven holders of this title are 22 persons (20 men и 2 women).

In general, the number of Gypsies who have actively participated in the anti-fascist resistance in Bulgaria is relatively small. They represent only a small proportion of the entire Gypsy community, but they are nevertheless an important phenomenon that deserves special mention. No less curious is the question of the contemporary reading of their involvement which shows how difficult it is to achieve a consensus between the different historical discourses which try to assess the past. During the so-called Era of Socialism, a commemorative plaque was put in honour of Ibra[h]im Kerimov, who was shot dead on the street in Sofia by police during a demonstration organised by the Communist Party in 1919 (Пашов, 1957, p. 39; Нева рома, 1957e, p. 2). Following the changes in 1989, during “a time of democracy”, this plaque was removed because it was considered as a legacy of Communism.

Viewed from the perspective of the Roma civic emancipation movement, the involvement of Roma in social and political struggles appears to be one of the main directions that this movement takes. There is a search for a new way to solve the problems of the

Roma community through the participation of the community's representatives in mainstream political activities based on Roma' class consciousness and their self-perception as a unit of the general social structure of the civic nation which they are an integral part of. This is not a historical curiosity but a legitimate development that is a result of the achieved level of social integration of Roma in this historical period.

A separate option in the development of the processes of Roma civic emancipation is the case of Atanas Dimitrov. This case should not be considered as a special exception. Chronologically, his portrait is the earliest one among those presented here, but similar cases of Roma who have managed to reach some public positions (although not as high) have undoubtedly been quite a lot in later periods too, and not only in Bulgaria, but and in other countries in the region of Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe (see Marushiakova & Popov, 2021b). In this way, the beginning of a tendency was set, the emergence of the stratum of, we may call them, crypto-Roma, with more or less high social positions, who preserved their community identity in a family-related environment without demonstrating it publicly. This tendency continued to develop over time, and is especially relevant today, in the context of growing anti-Gypsy public attitudes throughout the region, although, for understandable reasons, it remains outside of academic research.