

USSR

Introduction

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To properly understand the overall dimensions of the processes of Roma civic emancipation in the early USSR (the 1920s and 1930s), and in particular to assess the place and importance of leading Gypsy activists in this regard, the analysis of these processes must be placed in the general socio-political context of the era. The October Revolution and the creation of the USSR (formally in 1922, and the first Constitution of the new state was adopted in 1924) marked the beginning of a new historical era in which the ultimate goal of the communist policy was to lead to the creation of a whole new type of society where all previous problems of humanity (social, cultural, national, etc.) will be finally and forever solved (Slezkine, 2017).

The national policy of the new Soviet state was subordinated to the fulfilment of this grand task. One of the first state acts of the new government, issued on November 2 (15th in the old style), 1917, was the Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia, signed by Vladimir Ulyanov (Lenin) as chairman of the Council of People's Commissars (SNK) and Joseph Jughashvili (Stalin) as the People's Commissar for Nationalities, which proclaimed the equality of the peoples of Russia and their right to free self-determination ("up to the separation and formation of an independent state") and to free development (RGASPI, f. 2, op. 1, d. 24219. pp. 1–2). On this basis, the new national policy of the Soviet state began to be built, an integral part of which was the state policy towards the Gypsies, which was inextricably linked to the general basic principles and leading tendencies.

When talking about the Soviet national policy towards the Roma (known at that time as Gypsies), the following important circumstance must be considered, which is usually not taken into account by researchers. The Gypsies in the early USSR were its equal citizens, and this also applied to the so-called foreign Gypsies (i.e. the holders of old passports for foreign citizenship), and who, in practice, were treated like other 'local' Gypsies. Thus, all Gypsies living in the USSR, in fact, enjoyed the same civil rights as other Soviet citizens and, as such, were subject to common state policies relating to all Soviet citizens. Only in addition to that, as representatives of a separate nationality, the Gypsies were subject to a special nationalities policy, which was also built on the same common Soviet basis. In other words, in the early USSR, the special state policy towards the Gypsies was an inseparable part of the general nationalities policy during this historical period, which, according to the precise definition of Terry Martin (2001), can be collectively called the policy of affirmative action. We prefer to use precisely this term,

'affirmative action policy', because to us it is more general and more relevant to the substance of the process than the term 'korenisatsiya' used in recent years. The term 'korenisatsiya' is a creation of the Soviet bureaucratic language and reflects only part of the process (the appointment of indigenous representatives at the Soviet authorities on the ground). And, more importantly, in the case of the Gypsies, the notion 'affirmative action policy' most accurately expresses the attitude of the Soviet state towards them, while the terms 'korenisatsiya' and 'nativization' if used regarding Gypsies (e.g. Dunajeva, 2021a,b), are meaningless because they did not have an administrative apparatus to be 'korenised'. The use of this term concerning the Gypsies is ridiculous, as they can in no way be defined as 'indigenous' or 'native people' because they are historically relative new migrants in the Russian Empire.

A fundamental principle of USSR national policy at the time was to support the development of all nationalities inhabiting the former Empire. All nationalities were initially accepted as equal and were given (at least in theory) the opportunity to create their own national structures at different territorial and/or administrative levels (soviet and autonomous republics, oblasts, okrugs, rayons, village councils), and also public organisations, schools, etc., even individual labour production units. There were no specific criteria for which nationalities are entitled to which national structures.

Each case was decided individually, but in general, the leading line in national politics in the early USSR was its ideology of affirmative action with respect to individual ethnicities/nationalities (Martin, 2001; Hirsch, 2005), including Gypsies.

It is extremely important here to emphasise explicitly that Roma (or Gypsies, as was their common public name in the USSR) throughout the existence of the USSR were in no way differentiated into a separate category that distinguished them from all other nationalities in the huge multinational state. In this regard, some authors make arbitrary interpretations, according to which the Gypsies in the early USSR had a position that distinguished them from other nationalities. The complete ignorance (or misunderstanding) of historical realities leads to such interpretations that are in the spirit of contemporary concepts and legal categories and this is what makes them inadequate and misleading in understanding historical realities. A typical example there is the statement: "In 1925 the State classified Roma as a 'national minority', devoting special departments to Romani affairs within the National Minorities Sector of the Ministry of Culture" (Lemon, 2000, p. 132–133; 2001, p. 228). Analysing this text, we can tolerate such a 'minor' mistake, as the one that disregards the fact that, in 1925, there were no ministries. They only appeared in 1946. Before that, the People's Commissariats (Narkomats) had similar functions. In 1925, the Ministry of Culture did not exist at all, being established for the first time in the history of the USSR only in 1953. More importantly, in Narkompros (which included in its portfolio also cultural institutions and activities) there were no "special departments to Romani affairs" either in 1925 or throughout its whole existence. Another issue is the terminological one: even if such departments were created, they would be defined as *Gypsy* and not *Romani*. Otherwise, in principle (at least as it is accepted in historical science),

such claims should be supported by a quotation of the relevant historical sources (which, for comprehensible reasons, is lacking in the statement above). In this case, however, we even have historical evidence for exactly the contrary – all historical sources clearly and unequivocally show that Gypsy activism in the early USSR throughout the period of its official existence was invariably supervised (and in fact led) by the Department of Nationalities of VTsIK (ON VTsIK) and the Council of Nationalities at the TsIK SSSR (SN TsIK SSSR), and not by Narkompros.

The mistake here is due to the ignorance of historical realities, which leads to confusion and replacement of two different Soviet institutions – ON VTsIK and SNK (Sovnarkom). With a Decree of SNK RSFSR from March 22, 1921, at Narkompros was established Council for the Enlightenment of the Peoples of the Non-Russian Language. With the liquidation of the People's Commissariat of Nationalities of the RSFSR, led by Stalin, by Decree of the SNK RSFSR of October 5, 1925, the Council was transformed into the Central Council for the Education of National Minorities of the RSFSR, which was often abbreviated as Sovnatsmen (from 1929 to 1934 – the Committee for the Education of National Minorities of the RSFSR). Thus, the term 'national minority' began to be used in education (and often also in the public sphere), but the official term that continued to exist (including in the numerous forms and questionnaires that Soviet citizens were required to complete) remained 'nationality'. The claim that in Narkompros there was a special department responsible for Gypsy issues is also not correct (Ibid.). And, moreover, in 1926 the Central Council for the Education of National Minorities of the RSFSR in response to the intercession of the ON VTsIK to provide a permanent position for the responsible person for the education of Gypsies to a representative of VSTs, answered, that "even larger nationalities" (i.e. Gypsies were considered one of all nationalities in USSR – authors note) do not have their representatives in the Council, so the VSTs' request cannot be accepted and the Council will delegate the respective activity to someone from its staff (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 120, d. 27).

The problem, in this case, is in the inaccurate translation of the term 'национальность' as 'national minority' and not as 'nationality', as would be the correct form. However, the issue of translation is not only linguistic but also concerns the field of legal and political history. The early USSR was not built on the principles of the Versailles system. Just on the contrary, it was a multinational state, as stated in both the 1924 and the 1936 USSR Constitutions. Thus, there was no one leading nation and, accordingly, there was no 'national minority' category. For this reason, the official names of the Soviet institutions were as follows: the Department of Nationalities at the VTsIK, the Council of Nationalities at the TsIK of the USSR, etc. Even the euphemism "senior brother", which was widely used after 1937 referring to the Russian people, was not present anywhere in the official jurisdiction of the Soviet state (Вдовин, 1992; 2002). The fact that the term (but not the legal category) 'national minority' can be found in official records and public discourse (including as an acronym for the Council of Narkompros, mentioned above) does not attach any legal and political value to it, because its use does not mean

the repealing of the basic legislative acts. In this sense, defining Gypsies in the USSR as a national minority is completely unjustified and leads to further mistakes, such as the statement: “In reality, the status of national minority had been withdrawn from the Gypsies in the Soviet Union in 1936 along with the associated schools, newspapers and even independent collective farms and workshop co-operatives” (Stewart, 2001, p. 74). It is not possible to withdraw something which was not attributed. What is astonishing in this case is that this obvious absurdity continues to be repeated in academic publications to this day (e.g. Dunajeva, 2019, p. 107; 2021b, pp. 66–68).

In this context, the used definition of ‘backward’ concerning the Gypsies deserves special attention, which is also the subject of many modern interpretations. A ‘backward’ (or ‘culturally backward’) was a widely used stencil expression in the national politics of the early USSR, and it is a key concept in national policy towards Gypsies too (O’Keeffe, 2010; 2013). In this context, the term does not include offensive connotations and, on the contrary, it defines peoples who were oppressed in tsarist Russia, who were not given a possibility to fulfil their national awakening and for which the Soviet state itself must take special care in order to elevate them to the status of equal Soviet citizens. This term was used when referring to all peoples who were oppressed in Tsarist Russia, who were an object of special care of the Soviet state and for whom the nationalities policy was designed. Already in 1903, the famous ethnographer Lev Sternberg formulated the reason for including Gypsies in this category: “Gypsies to a large extent, and perhaps even completely, are victims of the historical injustice imposed on them by the surrounding nationalities” (Штернберг, 1903, pp. 304–308); in this way, as curious as it may sound, the modern conception of anti-Gypsyism is de facto also justified through soviet ideological lenses. Therefore, this definition (‘backward’ or ‘culturally backward’) was used when referring to all peoples who were an object of special care of the Soviet state and for whom the nationalities policy was designed. In the early USSR, the authorities repeatedly determined the various privileges that disadvantaged nationalities should enjoy; de facto all nationalities in the USSR including the Gypsies, except the Russians, Ukrainians, Georgians, Armenians, Jews, and Germans, were considered “culturally backward” (Martin, 2001, pp. 42–43, 179–180). Moreover, among all ‘backward nationalities’ a race ensued concerning which of them is more backward, which leads to correspondingly more special care (which in practice means much more additional privileges). This was expressed in the best way in the speech of Alexander Khatskevich at the Consultative Meeting of SN TsIK USSR that was convened on January 04–05, 1936: “That is why we must take special care of Gypsies as the most backward in the past” (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 794, l. 77).

In the general historical context of national policy in the early USSR, the specific dimensions of Soviet policy towards the Gypsies during this period became clear. Five leading priorities can be distinguished, namely: 1. Encouragement and assistance to nomadic Gypsies to pass to a sedentary lifestyle and to create national Gypsy *kolkhozes*; 2. Establishment and development of national Gypsy *artels*; 3. Creation and development

of national Gypsy education; 4. Creation and development of national Gypsy literature and art; 5. Creation of a national Gypsy elite. Of course, these priorities reflected the specifics of the particular community but, in general, they were included in the framework of the common national policy (and, more generally, in the overall strategy for social restructuring of the Soviet state).

Taking into account the dependence of Gypsy policy from general guidelines and particular steps in the overall Soviet national policy makes it possible to understand that the changes in the Gypsy policy of the Soviet state in the second half of the 1930s (e.g. the closure of Gypsy schools) were not a manifestation of some special policy of anti-Gypsyism of the Soviet state, but were an integral part (and, as will be seen below, far from the most important) of the overall turn in Soviet national policy at the time. Especially in the system of national schools, first steps had been taken by the Decision of Orgburo of the TsK VKP(b) of December 12, 1937, concerning national schools, which proposed (i.e. assigned) to Narkompros the task “to reorganise these schools into Soviet schools of ordinary type” (RGASPI, f. 17, op. 114, d. 633, l. 4). Ironically, Nikolay Pankov wrote his letter to Stalin (see below) in February 1938, about a month after the Orgburo of the TsK VKP(b) adopted the Decree *On the Reorganisation of National Schools* on January 24, 1938, i.e. at a time when the fate of these schools had already been decided. To put it in brackets, the title of this Decree *On the Reorganisation of National Schools* in all previous publications has been misrepresented as being *About the Liquidation of National Schools and National School Departments*, which changed the meaning of the sentence. This confusing repetition of past mistakes confirms once again the importance, and even the need, to verify the original historical sources, that are reproduced and move from book to book.

In this Decree, Gypsy schools are nowhere mentioned. It is noted that:

The practice [...] of special national schools did enormous harm to the cause of proper education and training, fenced the children off from Soviet life, deprived them of the opportunity to join Soviet culture and science, blocked the path to further education in technical schools and higher schools. (RGASPI, f. 17, op. 114, d. 837, l. 100–101).

Term National school referred to the “German, Finnish, Polish, Latvian, English, Greek, Estonian, Ingrian, Veps, Chinese, etc.” schools. For the first time, a mention of Gypsy schools appears only in the tables of the Report of the Narkompros of July 08, 1938 (Ibid., l. 108), which shows that the place of the Gypsies in the context of Soviet national policy was quite insignificant.

One of the most important goals of the Soviet national affirmative action policy was the creation of new, Soviet national elites, and this was especially true of those nationalities that were considered ‘backward’ (including the Gypsies). The successful results in the case of the Gypsies are unquestionable, the new Soviet Gypsy elite was established relatively quickly in the 1920s and 1930s.

This chapter is dedicated to the most prominent representatives of this new Gypsy elite, which was the leading force in the movement for Roma civic emancipation in the

early USSR. At the same time, it should be explicitly emphasised that, as will be seen from the portraits of its leading figures, this Gypsy elite was by no means just an instrument of Soviet Gypsy policy, whose main task was to acquaint the Gypsies with the decisions of the Soviet party and state institutions and ensure their implementation. There is no reason to think that there was a forced imposition from 'outside' of concepts foreign and unacceptable to Gypsies. On the contrary, it is obvious, that all of such 'outside' ideas were rethought and re-conceptualised through the point of view of the community and, more specifically, of its elite, which was the main generator of visions for its future. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that in most cases the leading ideas in the field of Roma civic emancipation during this period came from the Soviet Gypsy elite, and the authorities were those who took decision whether to accept them or not (and, which is perhaps more importantly, how these ideas will be implemented in practice).

When we are talking about the Gypsy elite in the early USSR, it should be borne in mind that this practically means the Roma elite. In the USSR, the general label Gypsies (*цыгане*) included not only Roma but also many other communities with different self-appellations and other identities (and some of them even with a different historical origin). These are the Lom (referred to as *Bosha*) and the Dom (referred to as *Garachi*) living in South Caucasus, as well as the diverse communities living in Central Asia, referred to collectively as *Lyuli* or *Jugi* (Marushiakova & Popov, 2016a). In the Soviet republics of the South Caucasus, there was de facto no Gypsy movement and no Gypsy elite at all, but in Central Asia, the situation was quite different, and Gypsy kolkhozes and Gypsy *artels* also started to be created there (Назаров, 1969; Marushiakova & Popov, 2016a). Furthermore, even a local activist elite began to emerge, albeit in a relatively small number, comprising mainly the chairmen of the kolkhozes and artels, as well as individuals who have received higher public positions, such as Mizrab Mahmudov from the Kokand region, a member of the TsIK UzSSR and the created Governmental Committee for Land Allocation to Gypsies (Назаров, 1969, pp. 120–121). However, there is no historical evidence of any attempts for contact and coordination between Roma activists in Moscow and representatives of Gypsies in Central Asia, and therefore Gypsy activists from Central Asia cannot be included in the field of Roma civic emancipation.

When presenting the biographical sketches of the leading Gypsy activists from the time of the early USSR, some specifics of the available source base must be taken into account. In most cases, this base, for various reasons, is more or less limited, and therefore in these biographies, respectively, there are quite a few missing pieces or even white margins. In some cases, there is not enough data even for a very fragmentary biography of individuals who undoubtedly arouse interest. Such is e.g. the case of A. I. Vishnevskiy (even his first name is not known). According to available information, in April 1926, preparatory work began in Kazak ASSR (the official name at the time, later Kazakh SSR) for the establishment of the Gypsy kolkhoz *Stalin's Way* (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 27, l. 63). In 1927, 27 nomadic groups united into the National kolkhoz in the Alma-Ata rayon (Ibid., l. 150; Платунов, 1976, pp. 265–266). This was, in fact, one of the first Gypsy kolkhozes in

the USSR; it was established on the initiative of A. I. Vishnevskiy, who was a holder of the Order of the Red Banner (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 27, l. 273–274), the highest Soviet order at the time, awarded to the heroes of the Civil War. Unfortunately, there is no additional information about him and, when in 1931 the collective farm was moved to Kyrgyz ASSR, the sources already indicate as its chairman the “Comrade Tsibulsky (a Gypsy)”, and the kolkhoz is already mixed, dominated by Russian families (Ibid.).

Lack of sufficient data also meant the necessary exclusion from this chapter of other activists, about whom we failed to discover information. The presented portraits, however, even when incomplete, give a clear idea about this generation of activists. Especially important is the fact that about them, along with the classical historical sources (archival documents, materials in the press, published author’s texts of the respective personalities, etc.) we received access to a unique type of source material – the memoirs of almost all Gypsy activists presented in this chapter. In the 1960s, Nikolay Satkevich collected their memoirs (most of them in the form of an Autobiography), and they are now preserved in the unprocessed personal archive of the late Nikolay Bessonov (LANB), and Ivan Rom-Lebedev published a whole book with his recollections (Ром-Лебедев, 1990). In this way, we have not only first-hand facts, but also something much more important – the overall assessment of the movement for civic emancipation of the Roma, made by the visionaries of this movement, which were at the same time its main moving power. Of course, these memories are not the ultimate truth; they are, more or less, subject to the author’s later editing of the past, but, nevertheless, they provide us with an opportunity to present much more fully the portraits of the pioneers of the Roma civic emancipation and to understand much better the character of the described historical processes.

Ivan Rom-Lebedev

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Ivan Ivanovich Lebedev (1903–1991) is publicly known by the surname Rom-Lebedev, which he adopted as his creative pseudonym. He first used this surname in the late 1920s (Ром-Лебедев, 1930), and, through it, he wanted to emphasise his ethnicity. The description of the long life of Rom-Lebedev is a fascinating story, through which one can trace (and understand) the history of the Gypsies, and in particular, the development of the processes of their civic emancipation over several historical epochs, starting with tsarist Russia, passing through the October Revolution, the Civil War, the early USSR, etc., until its collapse in 1991.

Compared to other Gypsy activists during this period, there is much more information about the biography of Ivan Rom-Lebedev thanks to his autobiographical book *From the Gypsy Choir to the Theatre Roman: Notes of a Moscow Gypsy* (Ром-Лебедев, 1990). Of course, as any memoir that creates a personal historical narrative, it is influenced by a

variety of factors from the time these memoirs were written. That is why in the review of this book Nikolay Bessonov defines Rom-Lebedev as “one of the most mysterious figures”, “a talented mystifier” and “a born myth-maker” (Бессонов, 2007). However, his autobiographical book can and should be used, but the data extracted from it must be subjected to critical analysis and comparison with other historical sources.

Ivan Rom-Lebedev's life is a vivid illustration of the historical destiny of the former Gypsy elite (the so-called Gypsy choirs' musician elite), which originated in the conditions of the Russian Empire (see Introduction). He was born on January 18, 1903, according to the so-called old style (i.e. according to the Julian calendar), or on January 31, 1903, according to the new style (i.e. according to the Gregorian calendar) in Riga, where his parents were on a music tour and had own program in a local restaurant. His father, Ivan Grigoryevich Lebedev, was a guitarist, conductor and leader of a famous Moscow Gypsy choir (the Lebedev's choirs), and his mother, Maria Nikolaevna Lebedeva, was a singer in the same choir (Ром-Лебедев, 1990, p. 7). Rom-Lebedev himself reveals suspiciously little information about his family. He unambiguously identifies his father as a Gypsy, but no longer gives any information about him, nor does he mention his parents or any of his relatives (which is strange, after all, and atypical for a Gypsy family). It is not clear how he, a Moscow's Gypsy, came to own two large houses in Vilnius, which he rented out and where the first few Rom-Lebedev's years passed, raised by his Russian grandmother. He also says almost nothing about his mother, except that he is a “Russian woman by birth” (Ibid., p. 91); even her maiden name is not clear, we know only that her mother, who raised him, was called Ekaterina Yegorovna Stulova (Ibid., p. 7). The scant information that Rom-Lebedev gives about his pedigree leaves the impression that he is deliberately concealing it.

Sometime around 1908–1909, Ivan Rom-Lebedev moved to live with his family in Moscow, where he found himself for the first time in a Gypsy environment. Later, his grandmother joined him. His family at the time rented a house in the vicinity of Petrovskiy Park, where also lived most of the Gypsy music elite of Moscow, working mainly in the nearby restaurants *Yar* and *Strelna*, which were extremely popular among Moscow's high society (aristocracy, wealthy merchants, people of art, etc.) precisely because of the Gypsy music. A few years later, Rom-Lebedev's family built a large two-storey house of their own, richly furnished (with prestigious and modern “leather furniture” at the time) and their servants, including a cook, a maid, a governess for the children and a janitor lived in a separate wing (Ibid., pp. 87–88). In the large yard of the house were located the small homes of young Gypsy women, participants in the choir recruited from the countryside. Rom-Lebedev himself defined his father as the “master” of the Gypsy choir (Ibid., p. 15), i.e. according to the class-party terminology adopted in the USSR in the 1930s, Ivan Rom-Lebedev came more from a family of Gypsy exploiters – kulaks, whom he so fiercely flogged in the plays he wrote at the time.

Maria Lebedeva (Ivan Rom-Lebedev's mother) was an extremely popular singer at the time, her songs were released on gramophone records, and she had many admirers in the

highest public circles. The home of the Lebedev family was often visited by many celebrities and were entertained with Gypsy songs and dances. Rom-Lebedev's description of such one of such visit (at the end of 1915 or the beginning of 1916) of the famous Grigoriy Rasputin, who was accompanied by a whole retinue and police guard, and who listened to Gypsy songs, danced Russian folk dances with Ivan's grandmother, and from their home phone spoke directly to Empress Alexandra. After the assassination of Rasputin in late 1916, it turns out that the leading conspirators in this assassination, Prince Felix Yusupov and Grand Duke Dmitriy Pavlovich, were also repeatedly guests in Lebedev's home (*Ibid.*, pp. 94–96).

At that time, Moscow Gypsy musicians were striving for their children to get a good education. Ivan Rom-Lebedev's parents enrolled him in a high school in the village of Vsekhsvyatskoye (now part of Moscow) near their home, but as he admitted, he was not attracted to the studies and his grades at school were unsatisfactory. In 1914, after the outbreak of the First World War, the then eleven-year-old Ivan escaped from home, and with the military echelons reached almost the very front in East Prussia, from where he was returned home by the authorities (*Ibid.*, pp. 89–90). Such an escape was not uncommon, this type of attempt to reach the front at the beginning of the war was very popular among students in the Russian Empire in the face of a general patriotic upsurge. Then Ivan continued his education until 1917, when he left high school without any regrets (*Ibid.*, p. 103), on the eve of the ongoing radical social changes, after the so-called February and October Revolutions and the collapse of the Russian Empire, which was replaced by the new Soviet state (formally the USSR was formed in 1922), ruled by the All-Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks).

The establishment of the new Soviet government in Moscow quickly destroyed the usual way of life of the Gypsy musical elite and forced them to look for other ways to provide their living in the new situation. The old restaurants with Gypsy music (and in general the whole old social elite) ceased to exist, and in the conditions of the so-called military communism, a sharp economic and food crisis ensued, leading to the imposition of a coupon system for food distribution, Gypsy musicians were literally faced with the question of their physical survival in the new realities. Thus, for example, the leader of the most popular Gypsy choir at the time, Yegor Polyakov, was forced to chop wood in a bakery for a piece of bread or a handful of flour (*Ibid.*, p. 100). Relatively quickly, many Gypsy musicians managed, through the protection of Anatoliy Lunacharskiy (head of Narkompros), to receive orders to give concerts to the newly formed Red Army, for which they received army rations (usually a minimum amount of dried fish). In this situation, fifteen-year-old Ivan Lebedev felt useless for his family, and he decided to make a radical change in his life by, again, running away from home (*Ibid.*, pp. 103–104).

Ivan Lebedev's escaped from his home in 1918 and his travels in Southern Russia during the Civil War left many questions open, to which no clear answers have thus far been given. The explanations he gives in his autobiographical book, in most cases, sound unconvincing and seems more like attempts to cover up facts that are inconvenient for him. In this

regard, we tend to accept to a large extent the critical reading of Rom-Lebedev's book by Nikolay Bessonov (Бессонов, 2007), according to whom Rom-Lebedev tried to conceal the true goals of his escape from Moscow and all his wanderings, namely his participation in the so-called White Armies fighting against the central communist Soviet government. Moreover, at that time, tens and even hundreds of thousands of people (officers and civilians, as well as their families) carried out this mass migration to the south, mainly from the two metropolises (St Petersburg and Moscow), to Southern Russia and Crimea.

Ivan Rom-Lebedev explained his departure from Moscow to the south on August 15, 1918, with stereotypical phrases about the Gypsies' aspirations for a free life and distant lands, as well as with his childhood dream of seeing the sea (Ром-Лебедев, 1990, pp. 103–104). From Moscow, he travelled by train to the last possible point in the south (Belgorod), after which he crossed the border with Ukraine, which was independent at the time under the terms of the Brest Treaty (which Rom-Lebedev presents in his book as a territory occupied by Germans). Making a living by temporary work in different places, he reached Sevastopol. After a short stay there, in his words, "he wanted new adventures, surprises" (Ibid., p. 124), and through Yalta and Novorossiysk, he reached Ekaterinodar (now Krasnodar), where he fell ill with louse-borne typhus and he was "accidentally" admitted to a military hospital of the White Volunteer Army, where he remained to serve as a paramedic after his recovery (Ibid., pp. 127–130). From Ekaterinodar, together with the White Army, he retreated to Novorossiysk, and from there he reached Kerch (on the Crimean peninsula), where he was again "accidentally" mobilised in the White Army and sent to training in a sapper unit, where he contracted typhoid fever (Ibid., pp. 134–140). In the autumn of 1920, after the breakthrough of the Red Army through the Isthmus of Perekop, Ivan Lebedev did not evacuate with the army of Baron Wrangel but remained in the Crimea, where he put a "red bandage" (symbol of belonging to the Red Army) on his sleeve and enlisted as a volunteer in the Red Army (Ibid., p. 140).

The military unit (267th Chongar Rifle Regiment of the 30th Division of the Red Army), in which Ivan Lebedev served as a cavalry scout, was located in Melitopol and its task was to "cleanse" the region of the remnants of the rebel army of a famous anarchist Nestor Makhno. After completing this task, he was transferred to the regimental music orchestra and was demobilised after three years of service in the Red Army in 1923 (Ibid., pp. 143–148).

Returning to Moscow after almost five years of wandering, Ivan Lebedev finds himself in a completely new situation. The civil war was over, and the so-called War Communism was replaced with the New Economic Policy (NEP) and a gradual recovery of the economy, social and cultural life started, so also the Gypsy music ensembles (called Gypsy choirs, according to an established tradition) were revived. Gypsy music restaurants reopened and many of the old Gypsy choirs were restored. Ivan Lebedev's father did not restore his choir, so he joined the Gypsy choir, led by Yegor Polyakov, as a guitarist. This is the most famous Gypsy choir at that time, which, however, not only played in restaurants but with the assistance of the authorities gave many public concerts in Moscow

and around the country (Ibid., pp. 150–158). It was exactly in this environment, namely in the famous Gypsy choir of Yegor Polyakov in Moscow, where the beginning of an organised Gypsy movement in the USSR could be set. Ivan Lebedev as part of this choir was an active participant in the events, and quickly became one of the leading figures in the field of Roma civic emancipation.

Although with some delay, the new opportunities for national development, which were guaranteed and supported (and at the same time accordingly controlled) by the Soviet state, reflected on the Gypsies. The organised movement for civic emancipation emerged amid the Gypsy music elite, which was concentrated in Moscow. The October Revolution and the creation of the Soviet state radically changed the life and social position of this Gypsy elite. One part left the country along with the White emigration (for example part of the famous Gypsy musical dynasty of the Polyakovs permanently established in France), and those who remained were looking for new ways of reaching achievements in the context of the Soviet realities.

In his book, Ivan Rom-Lebedev offers his own version of the beginning of Gypsy civic emancipation in the early USSR, which, however, in many cases differs (more or less) from the real situation reflected in historical sources. According to his book in 1923, amidst the Gypsy choir of Yegor Polyakov, at the suggestion of Dmitriy (Mitya) Mikhailov, a Komsomol cell of five young people was created, namely Dmitriy Mikhailov, Georgiy (Genya) Lebedev, Sergey Polyakov (son of Yegor Polyakov), Konstantin Leontiev and Ivan Lebedev himself (Ром-Лебедев, 1990, p. 160). A report from September 1926, signed by Andrey Taranov and Ivan Lebedev, states that the establishment of this cell of the RLKSM took place in mid-January 1923, but among the names of its members is omitted that of Georgiy Lebedev, and instead of the name of Konstantin Leontiev is entered that of Karpetskiy (GARF, f. A 259, op. 9 Б, d. 4233, l. 21; f. 3316, op. 17, d. 188, l. 1).

The first public action of the young Gypsy Komsomol members was to organise a Gypsy group to participate in the 1st of May Parade on Red Square in the same year, raising the slogan 'Gypsies of the world, unite!' (Ibid.), which is a paraphrase of the famous slogan 'Proletarians of the world, unite!' from *The Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1848). The young Komsomol members set up their own Gypsy club and began agitation among the Gypsies, as a result of which the *All-Russian Union* was created, whose Statute, with the help of Soviet institutions, was approved in 1925. Andrey Taranov was elected Chair of Union, and Union Secretary was elected Ivan Lebedev, who also became a representative of the Moscow Gypsies in the ON VTsIK (Ром-Лебедев, 1990, p. 163).

However, the preserved historical documents again present a more or less different picture of the course of events. On January 10, 1924, a Constituent Assembly was held, attended by 11 people, the majority of whom were members of Yegor Polyakov's choir and members of his family; among them, there is only one woman (Elisaveta Yurovskaya). Among the names of the founders, the name of Ivan Lebedev does not appear at all (but his brother Valentin is present); the names of most of the members of the Komsomol

cell are also missing (only Sergey Polyakov is present). The chairman of the meeting was Yegor Polyakov, and the secretary, who took the minutes was Alexander Polyakov (his son). The Assembly decided to establish the *Society for the Organisation of Backward Proletarian Gypsy Masses of the City of Moscow and Moscow Governorate*. The terminology used shows that the founders fit into the spirit of the era and the prevailing ideological norms of the time and used its phraseology. The Statute of the organisation was approved (drafted by Stepan Osipov), and the comrades Stepan Osipov and Sergey Polyakov were assigned to petition before the respective authorities for approval of the Statute and the legalisation of the new organisation (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 119, d. 9, l. 3).

Two weeks after this meeting, on January 25, 1924, the Initiative Proletarian Group, comprising the founding members of the previous meeting, together with 75 members of the All-Union Trade Union of Arts Workers (members of Gypsy choirs were members of this union), held a general meeting on which they unanimously decreed that they will respond to the death of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (January 21, 1924) with the establishment of a Society that will be called *The Lenin Society*, and adopted a Statute, which was sent for approval to the Administrative Department of Mossovet, noting that “the Society will agree that if any amendments, changes, additions and others are introduced in the Charter by the Department” (Ibid.). Both documents quoted above were prepared together (they are typewritten on one piece of paper) and submitted for approval to Mossovet, with almost the same version of the Statute attached, which clearly shows that in this case, it was the same Initiative Group and the same organisation, set up twice, trying to obtain official registration from the Soviet authorities, and at this stage, Ivan Lebedev (as well as the Komsomol cell) was not involved in this process.

Ivan Lebedev became involved in the activities of the emerging Gypsy organisation during the Meeting of the Initiative Group of the Founding Members of the Gypsy Proletarian Society, held on April 3, 1924. Alexander Polyakov is signed as Chair of this Initiative Group, and Ivan Lebedev as its Secretary. The meeting listened to a report from Stepan Osipov, who submitted the draft Statute of the organisation to the TsIK USSR, where it was amended by its co-chairman Nariman Narimanov (1875–1925). The Assembly unanimously adopted the amendments and took the following decision: “All activities of the Society are conducted under the leadership of the TsIK USSR” (Ibid., l. 8).

The next meeting of the Initiative Group was on August 24, 1924, and was held in a very limited composition. Present were Stepan Osipov, Yegor, Sergey and Alexander Polyakovs, Andrey Taranov and Ivan Lebedev. The meeting heard a report from Stepan Osipov on the results of his meeting with Gustav Klinger (1876–1937/1943), head of the ON VTsIK, who recommended reducing the membership of the Initiative Group and stated that the Statute of the organisation could not be approved as “it does not meet the spirit of the time”. It was decided to reduce the Initiative Group to those present at the meeting plus Ivan Bolashev and three candidate members, as well as to ask the “the Mossovet to change those details of the charter that do not meet the spirit of the times”. In the

Minutes from the meeting Andrey Taranov is signed as Chair of the Initiative Group, and Alexander Polyakov as Secretary, who took the minutes (Ibid., l. 9-906).

A list of the Initiative Group (the old and new members) which is attached to these Minutes (Ibid., l. 10–11) allows for further analysis. In this list of 14 people, all with the exception of the first three (Stepan Osipov, Andrey Taranov, and Ivan Balashev), lived near Petrovskiy Park. This was the main settlement of the Gypsy musical elite, and ten people from this list wrote that they are ‘actors’ by profession. As a ‘social status’, they all define themselves as a ‘proletariat’, which indicates that they had taken into account the new Soviet realities in which the most preferred social origin was the proletarian one (to what extent Gypsy artists can be considered proletarians is a separate question).

The case of Stepan Osipov is somehow obscure. He held leading positions in the first documents regarding the establishment of the organisation. The last mention of his name was in a statement of the Initiative Group to the Presidium of the ON VTsIK of September 23, 1924, which was signed by Stepan Osipov (born in 1888), but his name was scratched, and, in its place, the name of Andrey Taranov was written by hand (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 119, d. 10, l. 14). Judging by the List of the Initiative Group, Stepan Osipov had been a member of the VKP(b) since 1918, a participant in the Civil War, and his profession was ‘Soviet service’, i.e. managerial staff. It is unlikely that a Gypsy with such a background would stay away from the Gypsy movement, so it seems more likely that he was a non-Gypsy, attracted by the Union’s founders, to demonstrate a leading party presence in the organisation until a Gypsy Party member was found. Probably the situation with Ivan Balashev (born in 1869) was similar. He was also a member of VKP(b) from 1918, and for him, it was explicitly underlined in a note that he was “introduced as a public initiative worker” (Ibid., p. 11).

From the other members of the Initiative Group, members of VKP(b) were Stepan Osipov, Andrey Taranov and Ivan Balashev, the latter being the only one whose profession was that of a ‘worker’ (i.e. a true proletarian). The other two from the Initiative Group were Komsomol members, namely Ivan Lebedev and Sergey Polyakov, as well as candidate member Dmitriy Mikhailov (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 119, d. 9, l. 11). The emergence of Andrey Taranov (participant in the Civil War, member of the Party since 1922 and student at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East) and Ivan Lebedev into leading positions in the new organisation can be explained by the desire for its ideological-political strengthening by increasing the presence of members of the Party and the Komsomol in it, which was a requirement imposed by the Soviet institutions.

As stated above, one of the first things that the newly formed organisation decided on January 25, 1924 was to ask the Party and Soviet institutions for approval and support for its legal registration, and this was constantly repeated at all subsequent organisational events. There is a need to clarify here the administrative procedures regarding this registration. According to the legal norms of that time it must be carried out by the NKVD of the RSFSR. However, this was not the notorious NKVD of the 1930s, known as the

main executor of mass repressions. In the 1920s, the ‘sword of revolution’, called upon to fight the enemies of the Soviet state, was the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage (VChK) created in 1917 and headed by Felix Dzerzhinsky, later renamed the State Political Directorate (GPU), and then in 1924 to the Joint State Political Directorate (OGPU) at the SNK USSR. The NKVD of the RSFSR at that time was assigned to take care of public order, which included control over public organisations to which VSTs also belonged. Indicative of the lack of special interest to the NKVD in the Gypsy Union is the fact that the case for registration is located in a folder between the cases of the Society for the Study of Russian Manor and Kazan Society of Beekeepers (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1770).

The leading Party and Soviet institutions, however, have clearly expressed their support for the establishment of a new Gypsy organisation. In a letter to the NKVD of May 30, 1925, ON VTsIK defined this organisation as “extremely suitable” and asks to accelerate as much as possible the process of its registration (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763, l. 12). Particularly impressive is the letter from the sub-section National Minorities, APO at TsK VKP(b) of June 12, 1925, which says the following:

In view of the fact that the Gypsies for the first time are trying to create a Soviet public organisation among themselves and so far, we have not had any approach to them, I consider it proper to register their statute. We will follow their work and maybe we can find among them quite suitable elements for introducing their masses to a new life. (Ibid., l. 17).

As the letter shows, the top Party leadership itself is surprised by the initiative of Gypsies to engage in civic activities, and it is timidly hoping that the necessary staff will be found to run the new organisation in accordance with the Party line in order to integrate the Gypsies into the ‘new life’. It is also revealing that the letter was signed by the Deputy Head of the Department, Semyon Dimanstein (1886–1938), who was one of the leading theorists of Soviet national politics during this period (see Martin, 2001).

The crucial role of Party institutions in building the structure of the new organisation is beyond any doubt. A letter from the Moscow Committee of the VKP(b) dated July 10, 1925, to the NKVD agreed that the members of the VKP(b) and the VLKSM participating in the Initiative Group would be joining the new organisation (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763, l. 20–21). Despite this agreement, after a long process of coordination between the soviet institutions, only after receiving the approval of the central and Moscow party bodies, the NKVD quickly registered on July 23, 1925 the new Gypsy organisation (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 120, d. 27, l. 89–94; f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763, l. 89–94). According to the official registration, its full name is Union of Gypsies living on the territory of the RSFSR, but in the administrative documentation it is usually called the *All-Russian Gypsy Union* (VSTs), and under this name, it is publicly known.

There are some significant differences between the first Gypsy Society’s Draft-Statute from January 1924, and the Gypsy Union’s Registered Statute from July 1925, which reflect

the differences between the founders of the Gypsy Union and the Soviet State in their views on the objectives and tasks of the organisation. In the Society's Draft-Statute from 1924, its primary purpose is "the unification of the backward proletarian Gypsy masses on the territory of Moscow Governorate into a society of collective creative labour" (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 119, d. 9, l. 4). In the Union's Statute from 1925, however, its primary purpose is "uniting and organising the Gypsy working masses, living on the territory of the RSFSR, protecting their interests, raising their cultural level, and organising mutual assistance" (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 120, d. 27, l. 89; f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763, l. 89).

There are also differences in the methods of implementation of the planned activities of the Union in both versions. According to the first version, the Society only conducts the main activities of the organisation, whereas, in the second version, it is stated that there is an opportunity that the Union intercedes with Soviet authorities for the implementation of its provisions, and it is explicitly stressed that "all work is done under the guidance of VTsIK" (Ibid.).

Immediately after the official registration of VSTs the logical consequence is the results of the Plenum of the Moscow Gypsies, held on August 6, 1925, where Andrey Taranov was elected Chair of the Union, Sergey Polyakov became Vice-Chair, and Ivan Lebedev – Secretary (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 120, d. 27, l. 182). After the election of the Union Presidium by the end of the year, its composition had already changed and consisted of five members – in addition to the three leaders of the Union, this Presidium also includes Mikhail Bezlyudskiy and Nikolay Pankov – and three candidate-members – Alexander Polyakov, Georgiy Lebedev, and a woman, Leontyeva (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 120, d. 27, l. 83 The latter, however, does not occupy a leading position in the Union, i.e. probably she is presented there in order to demonstrate the equal position of a Gypsy woman.). It is interesting to note that the first issue of the journal *Romany zorya* (Gypsy Dawn) presents a photo of the leadership of the VSTs, namely Andrey Taranov, Ivan Lebedev, Dmitriy Polyakov, and Nina Dudarova (Романы зоря, 1927a, p. 3), thus it is obvious that the principle of women equality was preserved also later in case of changes in the leadership of the organisation.

The Soviet state quickly provided VSTs official premises in the centre of Moscow and a salary for his leaders. An organisational department, a cultural department, an ethnographic academic section for the study of the language of the Gypsies, as well as management for training and production were established at the Central Board of the VSTs. Plenipotentiaries of the Union for different districts of Moscow were also designated (Вся Москва, 1927, p. 233; 1928, p. 211). In addition, Plenipotentiaries were appointed to work in the different regions of the RSFSR too. In 1927, there were five such Plenipotentiaries – for the North Caucasus Kray, Leningrad Governorate, Tula Governorate, and Pochepsky Uyezd in the Bryansk oblast (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763, l. 173). Soon after, another Commissioner appeared – Ilya Gerasimov for Smolensk oblast (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 120, d. 27). Plenipotentiaries for other Soviet republics were also determined, particularly

for Byelorussian SSR and Ukrainian SSR, and action has been taken to establish Union branches there (for more details see Marushiakova & Popov, 2021b: 718–727).

Of interest is the question of whether the Soviet authorities and the Gypsy activists were thinking of unifying the Gypsy Unions existing in the RSFSR, the Byelorussian SSR, and the Ukrainian SSR at that time into one common for the entire USSR namely to create an *All-Union Gypsy Union*. There are no documented confirmations of the existence of such plans, but they cannot be ruled out; on the contrary, it is logical to assume that they existed, at least at the level of ideas. What is certain is that the authorities in the three Soviet republics have constantly exchanged information with each other about Gypsy politics and about the Gypsy unions, which is confirmed by the available archival materials preserved in Belarus (NARB, f. 6, op. 1, d. 1195; f. 701, op. 1, d. 14).

The membership of the VSTs had grown rapidly since its registration, and in 1927 and 1928, 640 people were counted as its members (Вся Москва, 1927, p. 233; 1928, p. 211). In 1927, a check of the documentation of VSTs was conducted, which found that there were 674 filled membership questionnaires, and of them 417 members were living in Moscow (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 140, d. 752, l. 3–4). Of the Union members, 80% were horse dealers in Moscow and 1% rural inhabitants; 19% were estrade artists; 5% were workers. Of these, however, only 82 people paid the membership dues, i.e. according to the rules only they can be considered full members of the Union (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763, l. 76). Interestingly, in the VSTs membership cards on the cover page is written in Russian the slogan “Proletarians of All Countries and Oppressed Peoples of the World, Unite!” [a paraphrase of the famous slogan from *The Communist Manifesto*]. Nevertheless, on the inside page of the card the same slogan is written in Romani language, but with quite different content: “Рома сарэ свѣтостыр скэндэнтупэ кхэтане” (Gypsies of All World, Unite!).

Immediately after its official registration, the VSTs became actively involved in the Soviet policy towards Gypsies. In September 1925 the Central Board of the VSTs appointed Ivan Lebedev as its representative in the ON VTsIK (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 120, d. 27); good relationships were also established with Narkompros and Narkomzem (GARF, f. P 3260, op. 6, d. 44).

In early 1926, the VSTs leadership adopted an ambitious Union Work Plan during the year, as well as a detailed Work Plan for its Cultural Department (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 120, d. 27). In these documents, Gypsy activists outlined their vision concerning the main lines of the state policy regarding Gypsies, including a number of specific ideas. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the main elements of this policy were proposed by the Gypsy leaders themselves and implemented by the Soviet institutions with the active participation of Gypsy activists.

It would also not be an exaggeration to say that at that time Ivan Lebedev held leading positions in the ranks of Gypsy activism. Moreover, the first visionary text in the field of Roma civic emancipation, explaining the entire history of the Gypsies and outlining their future in the USSR, with the indicative title *The Gypsies Are Awakening* was written

by him (together with Andrey Taranov), and published as an article in the official TsIK USSR (*Известия*, 1925, p. 6). It is not difficult to understand that in fact, the main author in this authorial tandem is Ivan Lebedev. A manuscript entitled *On Work among Gypsies* and signed only by Ivan Lebedev is preserved in the archives of VSTs (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 120, d. 27, l. 183–184), and between the two texts, the differences are minimal. The leading role of Ivan Lebedev is easy to explain – despite not finishing high school he still had a much better education than Andrey Taranov (about him see below), who was attracted as a co-author because of his public position (Chair of the VSTs).

These two texts from 1925 briefly outline the main ideological line that defines all the activities of the Gypsy Union. According to their postulates, Gypsies for centuries were subjected to brutal persecution and class exploitation, but the October Revolution and the building of the Soviet state gave them the opportunity for free and equal development (ie, in modern language, for their civic emancipation). Written in the language of the time:

The essence of Soviet rule, as a Union of workers and peasants of all nationalities, requires the equal participation of all nationalities in the construction of the economy and state. [...] Based on the point of view of the [soviet] national policy, which is based on the recognition of the equality and sovereignty of peoples in the matter of arranging their destiny and providing real assistance also in the economic and cultural development of backward peoples, it is needed to support this organisation [VSTs] in its aspirations. (Ibid., l. 184).

The presentation of the history of the Gypsies in these texts is fragmentary (with an emphasis on the persecutions to which they were subjected in the Middle Ages), in some places inaccurate (e.g. their arrival in Europe dates back to 1645) and even manipulative (e.g. it is claimed that the Orthodox Christian church in tsarist Russia burned Gypsies at the stake as heretics and sorcerers, for which there is no historical evidence). However, the main conclusion of this historical review (that nomadism among Gypsies is a direct result of their non-acceptance by society) is not only true but continues to be relevant today, when one can still find the questionable view in academia that the nomadic way of life of Gypsies is their most important and essential feature, a key pillar of their community identity (Marushiakova & Popov, 2020a, p. 265). In the historical context of the creation of the Soviet state as a new type of state, designed to solve the problems of oppressed classes and peoples, the message of the Gypsy visionaries about the expected attitude of the Soviet state towards the Gypsies and solving their problems is quite simple and straightforward, formulated by Ivan Lebedev and Andrey Taranov as leaders of the VSTs: “Gypsies must be helped to become a people equal in all respects with other nationalities inhabiting the USSR” (*Известия*, 1925, p. 6).

At that time, Ivan Lebedev was focusing on a public (and probably political) career. This is evidenced by his attempt to become a student at the most prestigious Soviet university – Moscow State University (MGU). In the summer of 1926, he received a letter of support from ON VtsIK, backing the VSTs’s petition to the Narkompros for providing

a position at the Faculty of Law of the Moscow State University for the Secretary of the VSTs Ivan Lebedev. Narkompros answered that the “allocated” places (i.e. for the needs of the Soviet institutions) have already been exhausted, but such a place is provided for Ivan Lebedev in the Faculty of Law of Leningrad State University (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 121, d. 46, l. 1–2). However, he refused this opportunity and remained in Moscow to work at the VSTs. The reasons for his decision are not clear, he may simply not have wanted to leave Moscow and move to Leningrad (now St Petersburg), but from a distance, it turned out to be a correct and far-sighted choice.

In 1926, the VSTs fell into a severe crisis, and the long procedure for its liquidation began (for more details, see the following sections). Rom-Lebedev was actively involved in the struggle to uphold the right of the Gypsy Union to exist and to save it. Along with the numerous inspections and discussions in various Soviet institutions of the Union's work, the internal struggles in its leadership also intensified. In the course of this struggle, Ivan Lebedev was subjected to numerous accusations (especially active in this regard were Mikhail Bezlyudsky and Trofim Yakovlev), who focused on his patronising the development of production activities (establishment of training workshops and production cooperatives and artels), which, according to them, instead of to financially support the activities of the Union, were a basis for several commercial and financial speculations to personally benefit their leaders (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763; f. P 1235, op. 120, d. 27; f. P 1235, op. 140, d. 498). According to his contemporaries, “since [Ivan] Lebedev did not know commercial matters, he invited his close friend Yakov G. Dombrovskiy” as an “expert”, “who has unlimited rights” and de facto directs and controls all economic activity (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763). However, Yakov Dombrovskiy (non-Roma) turned out to be a swindler with a criminal past, and it was he who was identified as the main initiator and executor of many speculative activities of Gypsy production cooperatives, training workshops and artels, which were revealed in numerous inspections and financial audits of the Union (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 140, d. 498). Due to his connection with Dombrovskiy, Ivan Lebedev was accused of numerous charges (including about the production of forged letterheads and stamps, on which the VSTs was designated as a subdivision of the VTsIK), and the question of his “wrong” social origin was raised (f. P 1235, op. 140, d. 498; f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763). As a result of all these accusations, Ivan Lebedev was excluded from the VLKSM (Ibid.), and he was even sentenced (together with VSTs chairman Andrey Taranov) to six months of correctional labour (Вечерняя Москва, 1927, p. 4). Luckily for him, this sentence was overturned by a higher court instance and he not only did not serve this penalty but remained in the leadership of the VSTs until its official liquidation in February 1928 (of course, about all these events, as well as about the orders imposed on him) not a word is mentioned in his book of memoirs.

Ivan Lebedev did not give up without a fight in his struggle for the preservation of the VSTs. Together with Andrey Taranov, he is the co-author (most likely, in fact, the main author) of two detailed Memoranda, sent to the highest Soviet institutions. The first of these Memoranda (in two versions), addressed to the Secretary of the TsIK of the USSR

Avel Enukidze (sent to other instances as well, e.g. the Council of Nationalities at the Central Executive Committee), is dated December 21, 1927, i.e. from the time when the debates in the Soviet institutions were ongoing and the fate of the VSTs and its future have not yet been finally decided. Therefore, its general tone is rather restrained, and the content moves according to a certain pattern – it describes the difficult situation of the Gypsies in the past, emphasises the successes of the VSTs with the decisive help of the Soviet state, notes the impact of Soviet policy on Gypsies on their co-brothers in other countries, etc. The only carefully formulated reproach addressed to the authorities was that the Union “could have done even more if the Soviet and Party institutions, which we had to turn to during our work, were more serious and attentive to our requests, and not with their grins and distrust, which we were allotted”, and concludes with a call not to allow the liquidation of the Gypsy Union (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 19, d. 588, l. 72–74; f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763).

However, much different is the text of the second Memorandum, addressed to SNK RSFSR, with copies to: Secretariat of the VKP(b) – comrade Stalin; All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions – Comrade Tomsy; Central Executive Committee of the USSR – Comrade Kalinin, comrade Yenukidze, Council of Nationalities; People’s Commissariat for Education – Comrade Lunacharskiy; The editorial offices of the newspapers *Pravda* (Truth) and *Izvestia* (News) of the VTsIK. This document is dated February 18, 1928, i.e. immediately after the publication of the NKVD Decree of February 13, 1928, to close down the Union of Gypsies living on the territory of the RSFSR. The main reason for its closure was that the Union not only failed to take any steps towards fulfilling its core tasks and was unable to do anything in its work to organise the Gypsy masses; it had also fostered indebtedness to government agencies, organisations and individuals (GARF, f. A 2306, op. 69, d. 1357, l. 9-906). This explains both the addressing of the Memorandum to all the highest Soviet institutions (including Stalin himself) and the extremely sharp tone of the Memorandum – its authors have nothing more to lose in their struggle to save the Gypsy Union and therefore decided to play *Va banque*. That is why, along with the already known arguments in defence of the Union, the leading place is occupied by the extremely (even shockingly) sharp accusations made against the so-called liquidators (representatives of the Soviet institutions who carried out inspections and decided on the liquidation of the Union, in particular, the NKVD), “who have not reached in their understandings of the Gypsy question and of the Gypsies farther from Elizabeth, the daughter of Peter the Great”, and which are called “walking anachronism”. Moreover, the Memorandum concludes emphatically:

THE UNION OF GYPSIES CANNOT ACCEPT THE DECREE OF THE NKVD FROM 13 FEBRUARY. This act of FRIVOLITY and THOUGHTLESSNESS of individual officials from the Commissariat who accidentally and by mistake have been given the opportunity to decide and write on behalf of the NKVD. The Union of the Gypsies asks Sovnarkom of RSFSR to point out to NKVD that the VSTs is the only Gypsy organisation that enjoys tremendous authority among the Gypsies; it should not be closed down but on the contrary,

THE UNION ought to be helped as is the only one all over the world and for the first time in history it works for the cultural and economic, not even the revival, but THE BIRTH of the Gypsy people and this work can be done and proved. [...]

The All-Russian Union of the Gypsies hopes that SNK and VTsIK of RSFSR will not allow the outrageous violence against the Gypsy organisation, as this phenomenon runs counter to the entire Constitution and national policy of the USSR. (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763, l. 102–108).

The courage shown in the struggle for Gypsy civic emancipation of the signatories of this Memorandum (Andrey Taranov, Ivan Lebedev and an illegible signature) cannot be doubted. It is no exaggeration to say that only a few years after these events, such a public act would be tantamount to signing one's own death sentence. However, the Soviet authorities did not pay any attention to the Memorandum, and these actions of the Gypsy activists did not lead to any changes in the decision made and no new Gypsy organisation was actually created. This may seem surprising, but none of the VSTs leaders was subjected to any persecution. On the contrary, all of them received positions at the lowest levels of the Soviet nomenclature – especially in the national sections of various publishing houses and in the newly created Gypsy Theatre *Romen*.

It is significant, however, that Ivan Rom-Lebedev does not put his signature on the latest attempt to preserve the existence of the Gypsy civic organisation. On April 3, 1928, the new third Memorandum was sent to the Council of Nationalities at the TsIK USSR (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 120, d. 27, l. 4–14), repeating the main messages of the two previous Memoranda and justifying the need for a Gypsy organisation, but the tone was now much humbler. The memorandum was signed by 8 people, led by Andrey Taranov, all members of the VKP(b) and the Komsomol, and most of them non-Roma. In this case, apparently, Rom-Lebedev correctly assessed that there is no chance for the restoration of the Gypsy Union and decided to focus on life and public realisation in other areas. This decision is based on an extremely accurate assessment of the political situation. The Soviet government had no intention of stopping the development of the processes of Gypsy civic emancipation or even restricting them, but on the contrary, it wanted to make them more effective and to achieve faster results. It, therefore, decided to look for other forms of directing them in certain areas and spheres, as well as to secure their guidance and constant control, and this was the main reason for the liquidation of the Union.

In the late 1920s, Ivan Rom-Lebedev joined the common movement to create Gypsy national literature, which was an important public expression of the process of Gypsy civic emancipation. In fact, the first two creative works that marked the beginning of Romani literature in the early USSR were the two short stories published in the first issue of the Gypsy journal *Романы зоря – Романо бенг* (Gypsy Devil) by Ivan Lebedev (Романы зоря, 1927d, pp. 23–29) and *Руворо* (The Little Wolf) by Alexander German (Романы зоря, 1927b, pp. 30–32). Rom-Lebedev's appearances in the field of Gypsy national literature continued later, and he published three collections of short stories, theatrical sketches and plays (one of them together with Mikhail Ilyinskiy) (Ром-Лебедев, 1930;

1931; Ильинско & Ром-Лебедев, 1938), but his greatest love, to which he remained faithful until the end of his life, and which determined his life and creative path, turned out to be the Gypsy Theatre *Romen*.

It should be borne in mind here that Gypsy Theatre *Romen*, where Ivan Rom-Lebedev worked from its inception to the end of his life, is far from being just an artistic and cultural phenomenon, but had a much broader social dimension. This theatre is an emblematic (we can even say symbolic) manifestation and at the same time an extremely important factor in the development of the processes of Roma civic emancipation and Roma identity, and not only in the USSR but in much wider time and spatial dimensions.

This choice of Ivan Rom-Lebedev is not accidental at all, but rather natural. He comes from a family that was part of the Gypsy pre-revolutionary musical elite, and his parents, brothers and sisters, as well as himself, were members of Gypsy choirs. One must note that Gypsy Theatre *Romen* did not arise out of thin air, and it was based on the theatrical traditions of Gypsy choirs in the Russian Empire (Bessonov, 2016, pp. 143–144). Nikolay Shishkin can be considered the true ancestor of Gypsy music and dance performances on the stage. The Gypsy Choir, of which he was the leader, was the basis of the production of the operetta *Цыганские песни в лицах* (Gypsy Songs in Characters) by Nikolay Kulikov, presented in 1886 in St Petersburg. After the success of the operetta, Nikolay Shishkin prepared his musical play *Чавэ адро вэша* (Children in the Forest), translated into Russian as *Children of Forests and Fields*, which was played in St Petersburg from 1888 to 1906. In 1892 he prepared a new play, *Цыганская жизнь* (Gypsy Life), which also enjoyed great success (Бауров, 1996, pp. 22–23; Бессонов, 2002b, 806–808; Bessonov, 2016, pp. 143–144).

Moreover, the Theatre *Romen* was not the first Gypsy theatre established in the USSR (Bessonov, 2016, pp. 144). At least two years before the creation of the Theatre *Romen* in Moscow, there was a musical-theatrical ensemble led by the Gypsy singer and composer Evdokia Orlova. It worked at the club named after Nadezhda Krupskaya (Lenin's wife), called also the Theatre of Small Forms or simply Orlova's Theatre (Ibid.). However, the Gypsy musical elite felt insecure about the new realities, and the creation of a state-supported national Gypsy theatre would ensure their stable existence. These aspirations met the understanding and support of the Soviet state, as evidenced from the quote:

The most urgent task is to create a Gypsy written language and [...] a Gypsy theatre. The Gypsies are tired; they are tired of wandering from one stage to another – they strive for a solid and constant basis for their creativity. (Блюменау, 1927, p. 29).

In this situation, the Gypsy activists, grouped around the Gypsy journal *Romany zorya*, formed an initiative group and appealed to the Soviet authorities to establish their national theatre. In the Narkompros RSFSR, in the sector of National arts, an *Organising Committee for the Establishment of Indo-Romen Theatre* (for the term 'Indo-Rom' see the section about Georgiy Lebedev) was set up, which included representatives of this initiative group and various Soviet institutions, and which at its meeting held on October 4,

1930, decided to the establishment of *A Studio of the Indo-Romen (Gypsy) Theatre* (RGALI, f. 2928, op. 1, d. 1, l. 2–3; Ром-Лебедев, 1990, p. 165).

This is not the first attempt by Gypsy activists to create a national Gypsy theatre. As early as in the Statute of the *Union of Gypsies, living on the territory of the RSFSR*, which was approved by the NKVD on July 23, 1925, one of the goals of the union stated: “Organise clubs, libraries and national theatres and studios” (GARF, f. A 259, op. 10 B, d. 2253, l. 20). The leadership of the VSTs was trying to do something in this direction, but its activities in this direction were limited to a request from 1926 to the Soviet institutions, which sought permission to hold a special theatrical lottery for 15,000 rubles, through which to obtain funds for the activities of the Union, including the establishment of their national theatre (GARF, f. A 259, op. 10 B, d. 1924). However, the answer to this request was negative, as the NKVD argued that the Gypsy Union is a cultural and educational organisation that should not profit from its activities and that if such a lottery is allowed, a precedent will be set from which would benefit many other organisations with similar legal status (GARF, f. 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763, l. 30).

After this attempt, the idea of a Gypsy theatre was left for better times. In all likelihood, the decisive influence here was the fact that VSTs was subject to numerous financial checks and the leadership of the union was under constant suspicion of financial machinations, so the authorities chose to refrain from allocating funds without the possibility of direct financial control. However, the situation changed after the liquidation of the VSTs, and the second proposal to create a national theatre, already on behalf of the initiative group of Gypsy activists, was accepted in a completely different way by the Soviet authorities. The proposed new form of such a theatre, already under the direct tutelage and control of Soviet institutions (in particular the Glaviskusstvo at Narkompros RSFSR), proved acceptable to the authorities, and they actively engaged in the theatre’s creation.

In his memoirs, Rom-Lebedev describes the process of creating the Theatre *Romen* in a way that raises some doubts. According to him, all the work on the creation of the theatre was assigned to him and Georgiy Lebedev, noting that Georgiy Lebedev was engaged in numerous other activities (Ром-Лебедев, 1990, p. 165), and thus, the main burden of the preparatory work fell on him. Together with Andrey Taranov, they visited Anatoliy Lunacharskiy, head of the People’s Commissariat, at his home, who welcomed them warmly, exclaiming “Gypsies?! So Lenin’s word reached you too?”, and provided them with full support in their endeavour. From this description, however, two serious questions arise that call into question its veracity. First, as early as September 12, 1929, the Narkompros was headed by Andrey Bubnov (1884–1938), and his predecessor Anatoliy Lunacharskiy was reassigned to another job. Secondly, it seems quite incredible that Lunacharskiy learned during this visit for the first time that an organised movement had emerged among the Gypsies in the USSR since he was not only involved at the beginning of this movement and actively contributed to the creation of the ‘Gypsy Alphabet’ and

his signature is under the letter, which officially confirms this alphabet in 1927 (LANB, f. Nikolay Pankov; a copy of this letter is also stored in OGMLT, f. 29, op. 1, d. 49, l. 33).

In any case, the Soviet institutions apparently gave their blessing for the establishment of the theatre, and on November 16, 1930, at a meeting of the Theatre Department of the People's Commissariat, the composition of the Organising Group, that had to create the new theatre, was approved. This group includes professional theatre specialists Moisey Goldblatt, Semyon Bugachevskiy and Isay Feil, representatives of Gypsy activists were Georgiy Lebedev, Ivan Rom-Lebedev (then already under this name) and Alexander German, and the famous theatre director Vsevolod Meyerhold was elected an honorary member. Among the members of this group were distributed the leading positions in the theatre – Chair (Georgiy Lebedev), Deputy-Chair (Isay Feil), Art Director (Moisey Goldblatt), Musical Director (Semyon Bugachevskiy), Dramaturg (Ivan Rom-Lebedev), and Alexander Germano was commissioned to write a play on a Gypsy theme (Ром-Лебедев, 1990, p. 165). According to Ivan Rom-Lebedev, after a public discussion, the concept proposed by him was adopted, according to which the future theatre should be musical-dramatic, Gypsy in form and international in content (Ibid., p. 166).

The very creation of the Theatre *Romen* was interpreted by the Soviet authorities in a class discourse as part of the struggle against *tsyganshchina*, which was declared an art of the petite urban bourgeoisie, created in the past to serve the upper aristocracy and the haute bourgeoisie. That is why *tsyganshchina* was seen as a class-laden bourgeois art that has become obsolete and must be opposed by a new type, proletarian Gypsy music, which is “folk” and “traditional” and which originates in midst of the “genuine” Gypsies (only those who lead a nomadic way of life were accepted as such).

The description of the creation of Theatre *Romen* in Ivan Rom-Lebedev's book (Ром-Лебедев, 1990, pp. 164–165), including the selection of the artists by a commission in which he participated, is subordinated to this scheme. In this description, the candidates (men and women) are presented as nomadic Gypsies coming straight “from the tabors” (‘tabor’ is a separate unit of nomadic Gypsies in the Russian Empire and the USSR) and who looked like “savages men” and “savages women”, and the whole competition is defined as follows: “if the Neanderthals had conceived of creating a theatre studio, it would probably be something similar” (Ibid., pp. 167–169). After his review of the preserved protocols from this competition Nicolay Bessonov revealed that 21 people were admitted to the theatre, none of whom came from the ranks of nomadic Gypsies, and only seven of them had lived a nomadic way of life as young children (Bessonov, 2016, pp. 147–148). Moreover, almost as many additional artists have been accepted, all of whom came from the Gypsy musical elite. All artists in the theatre were approved by a commission from the point of view of their social origin, as the representative of the Gypsy activists in this commission was Andrey Taranov. However, this commission was palpable closing its eyes to the social background of the artists in the theatre, and the case of Nadezhda Kiseleva (the future star Lyalya Chernaya, at that time a soloist

in Polyakov's choirs) is particularly striking. Her mother, Maria Polyakova, is of mixed, Gypsy-Russian descent; as a participant in Lebedev's choir, she married Prince Sergei Golitsyn (whose mother was a Gypsy), and after her divorce, she remarried to Sergey Kiselev, also a hereditary nobleman who was the father of Lyalya Chernaya; however, in her personal questionnaire in the column of background, it is indicated that her parents were "employees" (Ibid., p. 146). Thus, in the end, despite the previously declared intentions, in practice the new theatre was formed mainly by representatives of the Gypsy musical elite, and, in 1932, only three artists who indicated nomadic origin worked there and they never reached leading positions (Ibid., p. 147).

The official opening of the theatre was on January 23, 1931 (RGALI, f. 2928, op. 1, d. 3, l. 5); the first public performance took place in May, including two parts – the scene *Атася и ададывец* (Yesterday and Today) by Edward Sholok translated in Romani by Mikhail Bezlyudskiy and *Ethnographic Sketches* by Mikhail Bezlyudskiy (Ром-Лебедев, 1990, p. 173); in December 1931 was the first premiere, the play *Джиибэн прэ роты* (Life on Wheels) by Alexander German, in which Ivan Rom-Lebedev played one of the main roles – the old leader of the tabor (Ibid, p. 176–177). In addition to performances in Moscow, the theatre toured the country every year: in 1932 in Vitebsk, Gomel, Mogilev, Smolensk and Kiev; in 1933 in Orenburg, Saransk, Penza, Baku and Tbilisi; in 1934 in Rostov-on-Don, Kharkov, Dnepropetrovsk, Zaporozhye and the cities of Donbass (RGALI, f. 2928, op. 1, d. 66; f. 2928, op. 1, d. 68; f. 2928, op. 1, d. 69).

Along with his artistic career, Ivan Rom-Lebedev actively worked as a playwright at the theatre. The plays he wrote in the 1930s, staged by the Theatre *Romen*, fully reflect the spirit of the time and the ideological attitudes towards the Gypsies, in particular the class struggle in the Gypsy *tabor* (nomadic camp), where on the one side are the so-called kulaks (the leader of the tabor, the elders), and on the other side – the progressive Gypsy youth, who strive for the new life, for the communist ideas, the realisation of which will lead to a radical change in the life of the Gypsies, i.e. to their civil emancipation. This simple ideological scheme unfolds in different conditions and takes different forms, e.g. the cessation of the nomadic way of life and the entry into the Gypsy collective farms as in the 1933 stage play *Sun in the Swamp*, or the inclusion of the Gypsies in the struggle for the Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919 in the 1940 play *Song of Ursar*.

In Rom-Lebedev's dramaturgy work, the topic of the emancipation of the Gypsy woman, discriminated against by the traditional norms in the community, in the new Soviet realities deserves special mention. To this topic is devoted his first stage play, *Ganka*, written in 1933 (Ром-Лебедев, 1990, p. 178). The original has not been preserved, but probably its revised version is the play *Daughter of the Steppes* (premiered in 1935), as well as the stage play (defined as a "theatrical tale") *Wedding in the Tabor* (1935). Particularly impressive in this regard is the play *Daughter of the Steppes*, which proclaims the right of a Gypsy woman to leave her unloved man, whom she is married to without her consent from her parents. This reflects the idea of free love, which was widely promoted in the early USSR, especially by the famous Alexandra Kolontay. To put it in brackets, the

famous actor Lyalya Chernaya, soon after the premiere of this play, in which she played the lead role, realised the main message of the play, left her partner Ivan Rom-Lebedev and married the famous actor Mikhail Yanshin (non-Roma), who directed the play, and who soon after became the main art director of the Theatre *Romen*.

In parallel with his work at Theatre *Romen*, Ivan Rom-Lebedev did not end his public engagement in other fields of Gypsy civic emancipation. He was the head of the trade union in the theatre, and as its representative participated in many discussions on more general issues of state policy towards the Gypsies, such as the Meeting of Council of Nationalities at the TsIK USSR *On the Questions of the Employment of Toiling Nomadic Gypsies and Their Cultural and Economic Services*, held on January 4 and 5, 1936, at which the question of establishing a Gypsy autonomous territorial-administrative unit was discussed (GARF, P 3316, op. 28, d. 794, l. 77–125). In the theatre itself, he was also socially active, and his position in discussing the case of the removal of Georgiy Lebedev from the post of chair of the Theatre *Romen*, followed by a court verdict for financial abuses, is particularly impressive. At the Meeting of the *Gypsy Active at the Theatre Romen* held on April 8, 1933, Rom-Lebedev publicly accused his former close friend and colleague Georgiy Lebedev of not justifying his voted political trust as director of the theatre, compromising himself as a candidate member of the VKP(b), for committing multiple violations as an administrator, etc. (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 28, l. 98–99). Naturally, in his memoirs, Rom-Lebedev “forgets” to mention these events.

In his autobiographical book, Ivan Rom-Lebedev also omits (perhaps consciously) another important topic in the history of the Theatre *Romen* – the transition from the Romani language to Russian in the theatre’s performances. Archive documents witness that Ivan Rom-Lebedev was present, at numerous discussions and heated debates about the language of performances of stage plays in the Theatre *Romen* (see part about Georgiy Lebedev) but did not make statements, so his attitude on this issue is not very clear. His opinion became visible only in 1948. Then, at a meeting of the All-Russian Theatre Society, the theatre critic Georgiy Kryzhitskiy (a non-Roma), stated that “[the Theatre] *Romen* has lost the main feature of a national theatre – its language that is, from a Gypsy theatre it turned into a kind of theatre about Gypsies”. (В театре “Ромэн”, p. 39). This statement was met with strong opposition from the Roma – Ivan Rom-Lebedev and Vasily Bizev (leading artist in the theatre) (Ibid., p. 40). This was the first case in which Ivan Rom-Lebedev takes a public and categorical view on the issue of language in the theatre, but at the same time, it was more a question of defending the theatre itself. After this meeting, the issue of language at the Theatre *Romen* was completed, and to this day the performances remain bilingual, with a leading position of the Russian language (which greatly contributes to the preservation and development of the theatre itself over the years).

During World War II (called the Great Patriotic War in the USSR), the Theatre *Romen* was formally evacuated to Stalinabad (now Dushanbe in Tajikistan), but virtually all the artists joined various music and dance groups (including two so-called front-line brigades)

and gave numerous concerts – both in different places throughout the USSR and on the fronts and in military hospitals. The funds raised from the concerts were donated to the Defense Fund, and they went to the manufacture of military equipment, including a bomber called ‘Romenovets’ (in the archives of the Theatre *Romen* is stored a telegram signed by Stalin to the theatre staff, with which he as Supreme Commander-in-Chief thanks for this donation). Although the artists from the Theatre *Romen* were released from mobilisation, some of them went as volunteers to the Soviet Army, and some of them died on the fronts of the war (Бессонов, 2010, pp. 214–244). Ivan Rom-Lebedev was also actively involved in all these activities; he was a member of the First Front Brigade, which gave concerts to fighters at the front, and he also wrote a play *On the Banks of the Dniester* (staged in 1942) about the participation of Gypsies from the occupied territories in the war.

After the end of the war, Ivan Rom-Lebedev’s public engagement in the field of Roma civic emancipation found expression in the preparation of a special letter addressed to Stalin. The letter was submitted on May 3, 1946, and in the first place among the signatories is his name (i.e. he is if not the single contributor, then at least one of the authors), with the explanation under the signature – a playwright of the Theatre *Romen* and a candidate member of the VKP(b). The letter was signed by a total of 12 people, among them are missing the leading Gypsy activists of the interwar period, but are included mainly Gypsy intellectuals (members of the SSP, artists from the Theatre *Romen*) and war heroes, most of them party members, and the list ends with a junior lieutenant serving in the NKVD (GULAG camp system). In the letter, written in the spirit of the time, the signatories, identifying themselves as “representatives of the advanced part of the Gypsy population”, addressed the “leader, teacher and friend of large and small peoples of the Soviet Union”, noting that “in our country, the Leninist-Stalinist policy gave the Gypsies the opportunity, along with other backward peoples of the Soviet Union, to join the ranks of working people and raise their national culture and their art”. It then briefly describes what the Gypsies achieved before the war “thanks to the activities of the Party and the Soviet Government”, emphasising that “all these comprehensions are the result of your attention to all fraternal peoples, your daily concern for a toiling person”. The letter continues with a description of the difficult years of the war, the persecution of Gypsies in the occupied territories, their heroism in defence of the Fatherland, noting the names of Gypsies who fought in the army and partisan units and received military orders and awards. It is noted that in the difficult conditions after the war, when the restoration of the Soviet state took place, “on the ground, the approach to the peculiarities of the Roma nationality is not taken into account”, but the publication of literature in the native language, cultural-educational work among the backward Gypsy masses was suspended, not enough attention was paid to the Theatre *Romen* as the only cultural centre of the Soviet Gypsies, and a return to the nomadic way of life was observed. The signatories of the letter, therefore, addressed Stalin personally with a request “to establish a Gypsy Cultural Representation under the Council of Nationalities [of the Supreme Soviet of the

USSR], which will pose to the relevant organisations all pressing issues related to working among the Gypsies and would monitor and ensure that these issues were fully resolved in a timely manner”, that “would give positive results in the introduction of Gypsies to socialist society” (GARF, f. P 7523, op. 17, d. 132, l. 124–127).

With this letter, the new Soviet Gypsy elite (more precisely, a part of it, uniting the artistic and creative intelligentsia, grouped around the Theatre *Romen*) asked the Soviet state to return to the special policy of affirmative action targeting Gypsies as a separate community, which was replaced with mainstream policy towards them as Soviet citizens in the second half of the 1930s as part of a paradigm shift in Soviet national policy (Martin, 2001, pp. 309–461). No response to the letter was found, and no change in state policy towards the Gypsies followed. This should not come as a surprise, nor should it be interpreted as a manifestation of anti-Gypsyism, and this reaction (namely lack of reaction) is easily explained. The Soviet authorities at that time had to solve grandiose and incredibly difficult tasks of eliminating the consequences of the war and rebuilding the Soviet state in the conditions of the starting “Cold War”, and the problems of a “small” (in the context of the multinational Soviet state) nation as Gypsies were too far from the main state priorities.

Ivan Rom-Lebedev’s engagement with this letter to Stalin had no negative consequences for him, just on the contrary. In the following year, 1947, he was accepted as a member of the VKP(b) and the Union of Soviet Writers and received the title of Honoured Artist of the RSFSR, and all these memberships and awards brought him many social (including financial) privileges. From then on, he ceased his public activities and focused on his work at the Theatre *Romen*.

In the 1950s, he did not sign several letters sent by Gypsy activists to top Soviet leaders and institutions (see below); in the 1960s he did not take part in Nikolay Satkevich’s attempts to raise the Gypsy issues again in front of the Soviet institutions (see below). Moreover, when Nikolay Satkevich collected the memories of old Gypsy activists from the interwar period, Ivan Rom-Lebedev was the only one who did not respond to his request. The only exception he made was for the young Roma historian Vladimir Ivashchenko, who in the 1970s collected materials for his dissertation (Иващенко, 2011), to whom he shared his memories of that period (largely repeating what was written later in his autobiographical book).

Ivan Rom-Lebedev’s work after the Second World War at the Theatre *Romen* continued until the end of his life and was extremely successful, which is why in 1981 he received the title of Honoured Artist of the RSFSR. He has been a playwright at the Theatre *Romen* for decades, and has written numerous plays and adapted screenplays by the theatre: *Sun in the Swamp* (1933), *Tabor in the Steppe* (1934), *Daughter of the Steppes* (1935), *Wedding in the Tabor* (1935), *Song of Ursar* (1940), *On the Banks of the Dniester* (1942), *Gayduki* (1944), *Heroic Poem* (1948), *Gypsies* (1949), *Daughter of Tents* (1950), *Esmeralda* (1951), *Woman Dancer* (1954), *Estaminet “Mackerel”* (1957), *Carmen from Triana* (1961), *By the Road* (1965), *I Was Born in a Tabor* (together with the famous Soviet writer Yuriy

Nagibin, 1970), *We – the Gypsies* (together with Nikolay Slichenko, 1976, nowadays it has become a symbolic emblem of the theatre), *Birds Need Sky* (1985) and others. In addition, Ivan Rom-Lebedev is also the author of smaller stage works, e.g. one-act plays in Romani named *Kofapu* (Hawker) about the class struggle in the kolkhoz, and *Goat's leg* (i.e. a roll-up cigarette) about the elimination of illiteracy among the Gypsies, presented at the kolkhoz *Oktyabr* (October) in the Western region with centre Smolensk during the 1935 Theatre *Romen* tour (Германов, 1954, p. 90). In the same year, on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the First Russian Revolution, was presented a stage interlude with the title *1905*, was written by Ivan Rom-Lebedev “based on factual materials” about the participation of Gypsies in the Moscow Uprising (Ibid., P. 96). It is not clear whether such materials existed at all, no one apart from Rom-Lebedev mentions them, as if they did exist, they would be widely used by Gypsy activists in their propaganda and journalism.

In the last years of his life, Ivan Rom-Lebedev published several more of his books: the collection of plays *The Gypsies Rode* (Ром-Лебедев, 1983) and the already mentioned autobiography *From the Gypsy Choir to the Theatre Romen: Notes of a Moscow Gypsy* (Ром-Лебедев, 1990), and after his death the collection of short stories *Tabor's Gypsy Woman* was published (Ром-Лебедев, 1992).

Ivan Rom-Lebedev's personal life, like his public life, is also full of various vicissitudes and not completely clarified. According to some unconfirmed information from the oral history of the Gypsies in Moscow, in the late 1920s, he had a relationship (the so-called civil marriage at that time without official registration) with the famous Gypsy star Lyalya Chernaya; then she had a short marriage with Augustina Kolomeytseva, daughter of the artist Kolomeytsev and a Gypsy nicknamed *Lesovichka* (the nickname is a designation of a forest Tutelary deity), who studied at the Moscow State Stroganov Academy of Industrial and Applied Arts, worked in painting fabric, including the Bolshoy Theatre, as an illustrator in Gypsy journals. It is certain that from the 1930s he married Nina Georgievna Rafanskaya (1917–2009), known by her Gypsy name Gadya, an artist at the Theatre *Romen*, and spent the rest of his life with her.

During the last years of their lives, they lived in the villa given to Ivan Rom-Lebedev by the SSP in the writer's village of Krasnovidovo, Istra district, Moscow region, where he died on January 5, 1991. He was buried in the Luzhki cemetery, his wife is buried next to him.

There is something symbolic in the fact that the death of Ivan Rom-Lebedev coincides with the end of the USSR, which collapsed in the same year. In fact, he was the “last Mohican” of a bygone era, which, however, is extremely important in the history of Roma civic emancipation. If we need to determine the place of Ivan Rom-Lebedev in this field, we fully agree with the words of Nikolay Bessonov, who after many critical words about his contradictory historical and artistic heritage, evaluates him “without any irony – an outstanding figure in [Gypsy] national culture” (Бессонов, 2007), and we would only add, also in the movement for Roma civic emancipation.

Andrey Taranov

Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov

The tumultuous life of Andrey Semyonovich Taranov (1896 – after 1966) was filled with various vicissitudes, ups and downs, which was a common phenomenon throughout the historical era in which he lived – an era of wars, revolutions and radical social changes.

For the early years of Andrey Taranov's life, we can fully trust the data he presented in his detailed Autobiography (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Андрей Таранов; published in Marushiakova & Popov, 2021b, pp. 918–922). There, he wrote that he originated from a family of “Gypsies *Servi*”, his mother was a Russian woman, and during the first ten years of his life, his family led a nomadic way of life but settled under the influence of his mother. He was born in 1896 in the former Kursk governorate but did not specify the exact date and specific location (likely, he did not know more details). According to this information, it can be assumed that his father was from the subgroup of the so-called *Voronežskie Servi*, called also *Khandžari*, who wandered in the Southern Russian provinces and, unlike most *Servi* in Ukraine, did not have a permanent residence and their own homes. Some authors wrongly claim that Andrey Taranov was a “graduate of a state school in the Urals” (Lemon, 2000, p. 133), i.e. it goes without saying that he was from this region but, in this case, there is a clear confusion of his biographical data with those of Ivan Tokmakov.

According to a biographical essay about Andrey Taranov, his father was a blacksmith, he played the violin, his mother's name was Nastya (Anastasia), and he had brothers Grigoriy, Vasilii and Andrey (Равдин & Хмельковская, 1968, pp. 96–97). According to another such journalistic essay, Taranov's family came from Bessarabia and his mother was “black-haired” Zemfira (Цона, 1974). These two descriptions are a complete representation of the stereotypical notion of Gypsies formed by Alexander Pushkin's famous poem *Gypsies* (including mentioning Bessarabia and also the name of the main character in the poem attributed by the journalist in the second essay to Taranov's mother) because neither in the past nor even today did *Servi* live in Bessarabia and this was not an area of nomadism for them. Moreover, in the past, the *Servi* lived on the left bank of the Dnepr River, while the *Vlaxi* lived on the right bank, and it was not until the 19th century that the two groups began to resettle and explore new territories. (Баранніков, 1931; 1933).

However, other information from these two essays about Taranov can be trusted – for example, that his father was a village blacksmith, or that he had an older brother, Grigoriy (facts that are also confirmed by other historical sources).

It is not clear in which settlement Andrey Taranov's family lived but, judging from the indirect data from his Autobiography, it was a village near the town of Korocha (today in the Belgorod region of the Russian Federation). It is also not clear what kind of education

he received. When he was about 10 years old, once his family settled, he most probably attended the local village school for at least a few years. At the age of 16, in 1913, together with his older brother, he worked as a blacksmith in the railway workshop at Otrozhka station (now a suburb of Voronezh), from where in 1915 he was mobilised and sent to the front during the First World War (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Андрей Таранов). According to Tudor Tsopa, Taranov served as a cavalryman on the Riga front and, immediately after the October Revolution, he joined a cavalry detachment and defended the rebel Petrograd (St Petersburg) in the ranks of the Red Army (Цопа, 1974). According to Taranov himself, however, in February 1918 (when the Red Army was created) he returned home and, in April of the same year, he actively participated in the formation of the cavalry division “against the counter-revolution and bands” in Korocha (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Андрей Таранов).

At the beginning of 1919, the cavalry division, in which Andrey Taranov participated, was included in the 11th Cavalry Division, one of the military units based on the famous First Cavalry Army, led by Semyon Budyonny, that was formed in November 1919. As part of the First Cavalry Army, Taranov took part in the great battle near Kastornoye, in which the cavalry units of the famous white Cossack generals Andrey Shkuro and Konstantin Mamontov were defeated, and during which the attack on Moscow of the Armed Forces of South Russia (uniting the Volunteer Army and the Don Army) led by General Anton Denikin was stopped. The next major battle in which Taranov participated was at Debaltsevo in December 1919, when the Red Army defeated the units of the Armed Forces of South Russia led by General Sergey Ulagay, and opened the way for an offensive in Southern Russia. In January 1920, Taranov took part in the battles during the conquest of Rostov-on-Don by the First Cavalry Army (Ibid.).

In April 1920, the Polish army launched a large-scale military operation against the USSR. The first cavalry, stationed at that time in the Kuban region, was urgently transferred to the West. After several battles with Nestor Makhno's troops in the Zaporozhye region, and then with Polish troops, the liberation of Kiev in June 1920 followed, after which the army headed for Lviv. As a participant in a reconnaissance cavalry squadron, Taranov got into a fight with a detachment of Polish cavalry near the village of Bilyi Kamin (near Brody, in the Lviv region), and received a sword wound in his right hand (Ibid.; Цопа, 1974). After his release from the hospital, he was recognised as an invalid from the Civil War but remained in military service as a *politruk* (political leader) of a squadron in the 11th Cavalry Division. In this position, Taranov took part in the purge of Belarus from Stanisław Bułak-Bałachowicz's troops. In the spring of 1922, the division was transferred to Central Asia, where it participated in the fight against the Basmachi movement in the region of Samarkand (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Андрей Таранов).

In 1922, a serious change took place in the life of Andrey Taranov. This year he was accepted as a member of the VKP(b), and immediately afterwards sent by the Political Department of the 11th Cavalry Division to Moscow for training at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East, named after I. V. Stalin (KUTV) (Ibid.; GARF,

f. P 1235, op. 119, d. 9, l. 3). This university was established in 1921 (i.e. Taranov was among the second generation of graduates). This University prepared two main cohorts of students: students from the USSR, from which Party and Soviet workers were trained for the National's nomenclature of the Soviet republics; and foreign students who were prepared to fight for the establishment of communism in their countries, the organisation of uprisings and revolutions. In the autumn of 1921, when the university was opened, 713 students studied there; in 1922 (when Taranov inscribed in it) – 930 students; in 1923 – 1,015 students, from 62 nationalities. It should come as no surprise that the Gypsies, as most of the nationalities in the USSR at that time fell into this category, were classified as “toilers of the East”. It should be borne in mind that the “second echelon” of the Soviet national party and administrative nomenclature was being prepared in the KUTV (the highest Soviet cadres were being trained in the Sverdlovsk Communist University).

During his training at KUTV, Andrey Taranov became involved in the activities of establishing the Gypsy Union. His name first appeared at a meeting of the Initiative Group, held on August 24, 1924, in a limited composition, and in a note explicitly stated that he was “introduced as a useful public worker among the Gypsies” (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 119, d. 10, l. 11). At this meeting, on the recommendation of ON VTsIK, its membership was greatly reduced, a new, revised Statute was adopted, and Andrey Taranov was elected chairman of the Initiative Group, as the only Gypsy member of VKP(b) among them (Ibid., l. 14). As chairman of the Initiative Group, Andrey Taranov actively participates in the process of coordination of the Union's programming documents. After he graduated from KUTV, with a letter from the Moscow Committee of the VKP(b) dated July 10, 1925 to the NKVD, “comrade Taranov was commissioned to lead the work in this [Gypsy] Union” (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763, l. 20–21). Shortly afterwards, on July 23, 1925, the NKVD officially registered the Union of Gypsies living on the territory of the RSFSR (publicly known as VSTs), with Andrey Taranov as its chairman (Ibid., l. 89–94; see also GARF, f. P 1235, op. 120, d. 27, l. 89–94).

In his position as chairman of the VSTs, Andrey Taranov was a co-author (with the secretary of the Union Ivan Lebedev – the future Rom-Lebedev) of the article *Gypsies are Awakening* published in the official newspaper of the TsIK SSSR (Известия, 1925, p. 6). This program article not only presents to Soviet society the main goals and objectives of the new Union but also offers (of course, through established ideological phraseology, common in the early USSR) a brief and comprehensive concept of the essence of Gypsy civic emancipation.

The leading ideas in the work of the Union were presented in a special poster printed in a circulation of 2,000 copies in 1927. The poster is an appeal To Gypsy Inhabitants of RSFSR on behalf of the *All-Russian Union of the Gypsies living on the territory of RSFSR*. It begins with the political slogan ‘Proletarians of the world, unite!’ which is one of the rallying cries from The Communist Manifesto by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1848). In a synthesised form, the goals of the VSTs are formulated as follows: “[...] By gradually transferring the Gypsies to agriculture, eradicating illiteracy, teaching them the craft,

uniting them into Sections, the Union will raise the self-awareness of our backward people and put it on a par with other peoples who are participating in the construction of our Soviet state” (GARF, f. P 9550, op. 2, d. 2010, l. 1; published in Marushiakova & Popov, 2021a, pp. 712–718). The poster was signed by the Chairman of the VSTs Andrey Taranov, Secretary Ivan Lebedev and Board Members Nikolay Pankov, Nina Dudarova and Dmitriy Polyakov (Ibid.).

As head of the VSTs, Andrey Taranov also undoubtedly played an important role in the preparation and adoption of the Work Plan of the *All-Russian Union of the Gypsies* for 1926 (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 120, d. 27, l. 99–101), which was probably adopted in January 1926, and about which a few more words need to be said. This plan actually concretises as immediate tasks the ideas set in the creation of VSTs by its founders. The very structure of the plan is built on a logic that is not always understandable, and it includes many different intentions, without clearly outlining the priorities in the Union’s activities.

Based on this Plan, three departments have been established at VSTs: a) Cultural and educational; b) Organisational; c) Production. However, these departments are not directly related to the main sections of the Plan, and the task of “organising production cooperatives and training workshops” is listed as part of the cultural and educational activities, and the organisation of agricultural cooperatives and communes (future Gypsy kolkhozes) is defined as part of the Organisational Activity. This unstructuredness of the Plan allows for arbitrary interpretations of its leading priorities, which are not based on real historical research. Such interpretation is visible for example in the title of the article *From “Unsettled Fortune-Tellers” to Socialist Workers: Education Policies and Roma in the Early Soviet Union* (Dunajeva, 2021b). It contains a direct suggestion that allegedly the main task of Gypsy politics (and VSTs as its instrument) at the time was the struggle against the Gypsy fortunetelling. It is true that the fight against “everyday life phenomena (fortunetelling, begging, theft)” is listed as a separate item in the Plan (as in all previous versions of the Statute of the VSTs), but there is no historical evidence of any specific activities conducted in this direction. Moreover, in his memoirs, Ivan Rom-Lebedev writes that when fortune-telling women appeared on the stage of the Theatre *Romen*, they were received with great success by the audience (both Gypsies and non-Gypsies) as especially attractive images (Ром-Лебедев, 1990, p. 175). Here we come again to a serious problem in the field of Romani Studies – whether it is enough to study only the ‘desired’ history (laws, decrees, regulations, statutes, etc.), and whether these historical sources do not need to be verified through ‘real’ history (i.e. how these norms and intentions are realised in practice), and what results they lead to.

We need to use the second, syncretic approach to understand the place and role of Andrey Taranov and his visions about the present and future of the Gypsies in the overall activities of the VSTs. Taranov as VSTs’s chairman had the task to coordinate the overall activities of the organisation, for which he was responsible before the Soviet authorities. The Work Plan of the *All-Russian Union of the Gypsies* for 1926 sets out a whole range of different specific activities that VSTs must perform. These include (in the order in

which they are listed): the opening of Gypsy schools, adult literacy courses (likbez) and Gypsy clubs and “red corners”; holding broad meetings with presentations of lectures, reports and agitation performances and materials on socially important topics; sending active members of the Union for training in Rabfaks and universities; the organisation of Komsomol cells, pioneer detachments and kindergartens; organising a section for work with Gypsy women at the VSTs; holding agitation meetings on these topics; conducting a study of the sanitary condition of the Gypsy families; opening special outpatient clinics for medical care of Gypsies in the divisions of the VSTs; creating various craft circles (sewing and tailoring, basket weaving, etc.); directing the Gypsies through social institutions to socially useful work; sending the Gypsy youth to factory, craft and technical schools; organising production cooperatives and training workshops; creating a Gypsy Alphabet; to publish textbooks and periodicals in the Gypsy language (newspapers, journals, series with general education literature); opening studios for national singing and music, pursuing a course towards the establishment of a national theatre; appointing a representative of the VSTs in Narkompros; applying through the relevant authorities for assistance and implementation of Union decrees; clarifying through the relevant authorities the statistics on the Gypsies in the RSFSR; explaining through the local authorities the cultural and economic situation of the Gypsies in places with the greatest concentration of them; organising VSTs sections at these localities; holding there broad meetings with presentations on the need for the transition to an agricultural way of life; organising, if there was an expressed desire (sic!) in places, agricultural artels, communes, etc. (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 120, d. 27, l. 99–101).

In his position as head of VSTs, Andrey Taranov was directly committed to achieving the goals set in this ambitious Plan. Of course, he would not be able to manage all the activities of the Union operationally, even if he wanted to; thus, he transferred some of the responsibilities in certain areas to other Gypsy activists. In his Autobiography, he described, for example, how, when creating the Gypsy Alphabet (an achievement that VSTs was especially proud of and everywhere highlights), he visited the famous academician Nikolay Marr, who advised him to turn to Prof. Maxim Sergievskiy (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Андрей Таранов). From then on, the cooperation with the Narkompros and the activities for the creation of the alphabet, as well as of Gypsy schools, were de facto undertaken by Nikolay Pankov and Nina Dudarova. Similarly, he described his contribution to the creation of the Theatre *Romen* (Ibid.), although in practice the actual activity of creating the theatre began only after the dissolution of the VSTs (see above).

Chronologically speaking, one of the first directions in which Taranov himself was actively engaged was set in the Work Plan of the VSTs for 1926, where it is explicitly stated:

To preserve from the degenerating national characteristics of the Gypsy masses and because of their everyday characteristics, the Union proposes a) Allocate a territory in the Southern region for the settlement of Gypsies there and to unite all types of agricultural organisations, as well as Gypsies who want to settle independently. (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 120, d. 27, l. 100).

In fulfilment of this task, on March 2, 1926, a report signed by the leaders of the VSTs (Andrey Taranov and Ivan Lebedev) was sent to the Federal Committee of the VTsIK, from where it was redirected to the Resettlement Committee at the TsIK of the USSR. The report stated:

The All-Russian Union of Gypsies, organised in 1925, aims to organise these backward masses, fight against nomadism, raise their cultural level, and introduce them to the Soviet society and working life. It is possible to raise their economic and cultural level only if they are concentrated in one place, therefore the Presidium of the All-Russian Union of Gypsies asks the Federal committee of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee to allocate one part from the state fund's land for the settlement of Gypsies, mainly in the South, since the Gypsies are the southern people, and provide them state assistance with construction materials, seeds, some agricultural stocks and free them from state taxes for several years until they acquire their own economy. (GARF, f. P 3260, op. 6, d. 44, l. 5–6).

Another report, also signed by Ivan Taranov and Ivan Lebedev, sent to the Federal Committee of TsIK on April 1, 1926, specified:

[...] the Presidium of the VSTs reports about the amount of land necessary for the settlement of Gypsies and about the desirable territory for this settlement. [...] The Presidium is supposed to settle up to 100 000 (one hundred thousand) people. [...] According to the results of the survey of the masses, there is a common attraction of Gypsies to the South. The Presidium determined for the settlement of Gypsies the North Caucasus or Kuban regions. (Ibid., l. 4).

These proposals of the VSTs marked the beginning of the aspirations to create a Gypsy territorial-administrative unit (Gypsy Autonomous Rayon/Oblast/Republic) – an issue that became particularly relevant in the 1930s. An interesting question to which there is no answer is whether this idea came from the midst of the settled Moscow Gypsies, who had an overwhelming majority in the membership and leadership of the VSTs, or Taranov himself. However, the Soviet authorities did not support this proposal of the VSTs and the idea was left for better times.

Directly related to this proposal of VSTs is the issue of sedentarisation of Gypsy nomads. Surprisingly it appears at first glance that the active side pleading for the sedentarisation of Gypsy nomads in the USSR was initially the Gypsy activists. Already in the Application dated September 23, 1924, of the Initiative Group to establish a Gypsy Union, it is emphasised that the Group had set itself the task of “organisation the proletarian Gypsy masses and raising their cultural, educational and political level, and their transition to a settled way of life” (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 119, d. 10, l. 14). A number of changes had taken place in the process of registration of the Gypsy Union between the Draft-Statute of January 1924 and the Registered Statute of July 10, 1925, regarding the issue of nomadic lifestyle Gypsies in both versions. It can be seen that the Gypsy activists were much more radical in their wish to see the Gypsy nomads settled. In their 1924 Draft-Statute, they brought the issue of nomadism to the fore as one of the main tasks of the organisation,

and they spoke directly about the need for a “transition to a sedentary lifestyle” (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 119, d. 9, l. 4), while in the 1925 Statute, which was approved by the authorities, the wording is much softer and less engaging – “conduct the moral fight against the public evil among the Gypsies ... such as: drunkenness, fortune-telling, begging, gambling, nomadism” (GARF, f. A 259, op. 10 B, d. 2253, l. 21), which means that the fight against nomadism was the last goal of the Union.

Almost immediately after the registration of VSTs, its leaders began taking active steps to change the Statute of the organisation. The first of such requests addressed to the VTsIK and dated September 05, 1925, was already accompanied by Motives of the Application with a demand that the “inconsistencies of the clauses in the approved charter with the practical work of organising nomadic and sedentary Gypsy masses” be considered. It is underlined that one of the Union’s most important tasks is “the fight against nomadism, poverty, and against all that remains of the tsarist inheritance” (GARF, f. A 259, op. 9 B, d. 4233, l. 2). In the prepared new Draft Statute from 1926, proposed for approval by the institutions and re-registration by the NKVD, Article II (Aims of the Union), § 1 it reads: “The Union aims at uniting and organising the Gypsy working masses living on the territory of the RSFSR, protecting their economic and legal interests, raising the cultural level and organising mutual support and transfer nomads into the productive and agricultural way of life”. (Ibid., l. 5). In the new edited Statute of the Union, approved by NKVD on July 15, 1926, however, the sentence ‘transfer nomads into the productive and agricultural way of life’ was removed. The problem with the nomadic way of life is mentioned in Article III (Method of Implementation), § 6 d, which literally repeats the wording from the 1925 Statute: “The Union [...] conducts a moral struggle with the public evil among its members, such as: drunkenness, fortune-telling, begging, gambling, nomadism” (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763, l. 112). This sentence in fact repeats the wording of the Statutes approved on 23 July 1925. From this wording, apparently made under the influence of the Soviet institutions with which the Statute was agreed, it is clear that the Soviet authorities, at least at this stage, did not consider the sedentarisation of Gypsy nomads as such an important and topical issue, and therefore did not want to force activities in this direction.

This attitude of the Soviet authorities to the demands of the VSTs for an active combating of the nomadic lifestyle of the Gypsies and for their sedentarisation was not accidental, as it is very clearly displayed in the following example. In 1927, the NKVD received a letter from local authorities of the Tver Governorate which contained complaints of “thefts and scams” carried out by Gypsy nomads and sought to limit the “activity of this parasitic element”, i.e., it asked for administrative measures against the Gypsy nomadic way of life. NKVD’s reply of September 20, 1927, was categorical and unambiguous:

The Central Administrative Department of NKVD clarifies that compulsory restriction of the Gypsy nomadism is inadmissible as a matter of principle. The Soviet legislature does not know the measures you propose to combat the tribes that lead a nomadic way of life. (GARF, f. P 393, op. 71, d. 6 A, l. 2).

It sounds incredible but, in this case, the NKVD is the guardian of Soviet laws and opposes forced sedentarisation. In this spirit, in terms of combating nomadism for which the Gypsy activists also make appeals, in the end, they were only given the opportunity to lead a 'moral struggle' against nomadism.

Despite clearly expressed a reserved attitude towards the idea of sedentarisation of the nomadic Gypsies and creating national Gypsy kolkhozes, the Soviet authorities did not reject the idea in principle and took some incentive measures in this direction. The first official state document relating to Gypsies is the Decree of the TsIK and SNK USSR from 1926, October 1, *On Measures to Facilitate the Transition of Nomadic Gypsies to a Settled Lifestyle* (Постановление, 1926). By this Decree, Gypsies wishing to settle were entitled to receive agricultural land with priority over the rest of those wishing to do so, as well as the right to enjoy all the privileges enjoyed by the so-called *pereselentsy* (resettlers). The second Decree of the VTsIK and SNK RSFSR from 1928, February 20, *On Land Allocation of Gypsies, who Transit towards Toiling Settled Way of Life* (Постановление, 1928) not only confirmed those privileges but extends them further by assuming the costs of settling from the state budget. In this way, Gypsies were given the opportunity to enjoy privileges that were inaccessible to the vast majority of the population of the USSR.

Gypsy activists participated actively in the preparation and implementation of these founding documents of state policy concerning Gypsies. Representatives of VSTs participated in the specially created Commission for Land Management of Gypsy Workers under the Federal Committee on Land Affairs at the Presidium of VTsIK. Such representatives from May 08, 1926, were Andrey Taranov and Mikhail Bezlyudskiy who, by a decision of the Presidium of VSTs of February 15, 1927, was replaced by Sergey Polyakov (GARF, f. P 3260, op. 6, d. 44, l. 33–34). It is significant that the first issue of the journal *Romany zorya* published an article by Andrey Taranov *About the Land for Romanyčhavenge* (Романы зоря, 1927h, pp. 4–6). This topic is a leading one in other publications by Gypsy activists in the central press, addressing the mainstream population. This is clearly evident from their titles, e.g. *From Nomadism to Sedentarisation* by Andrey Taranov (Известия, 1927, p. 6) or *Let Us Put aside the Past Nomadism: We Will Include Gypsies in the Construction of Socialism* by Georgiy Lebedev and Daniil Savov (Комсомольская правда, 1930c, p. 3).

The management of VSTs, and Andrey Taranov personally, were directly involved in supporting the nomadic Gypsies who wanted to settle down. A letter was received in the VSTs, sent on December 27, 1926, from the residents (former nomads) of *khutor* (a designation of type of rural settlement, unit composed of several homesteads) Krikunovo. The letter was written two months after the issuing of the Decree of TsIK USSR and SNK USSR (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 20, d. 653, l. 22–24) *On Measures to Facilitate the Transition of Nomadic Gypsies to a Settled Lifestyle*. From the text of the letter, it is clear that the founders of *khutor* Krikunovo learned about this decree from a letter they received from the VSTs (which indicates that they already had an established relationship with the Union). It also became clear how the connection between VSTs and the inhabitants

of khutor was established – among these inhabitants were Andrey Taranov's brother, Grigoriy, and his cousin Vasiliy.

The khutor Krikunovo was founded in the spring of the same year, around half a year before the Decree came into existence, i.e., among one part of Gypsy nomads there was an aspiration to move to a sedentary way of life before the Decree itself was issued. This is perfectly understandable given the general situation in the USSR at that time when the country was devastated by the Civil War, and in many regions, the population dropped significantly. Under these conditions, a nomadic way of life became much more difficult, while there were many free uncultivated land areas and thus the work in agriculture proved to be a possible alternative for survival. The name of the khutor was given by its inhabitants after their leader Alexander Pavlovich Krikunov, and they presented themselves as former “red partisans” who also served in the Red Army during the Civil War, who together decided to move to a sedentary way of life. In the beginning, there were 20 families (87 people), later they were joined by another 25 families. The signatories of the letter ask the VSTs to assist them in their request to the local authorities to obtain new land and to significantly expand the plot received by the khutor at its inception.

Chronologically, the letter from khutor Krikunovo was not the first such letter written by Gypsies who asked for free land allocation for making a living from agriculture. As early as the summer of 1926, a similar letter was sent to the VSTs and to SN TsIK from the village of Gribani (no longer existing today), near Smolensk (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 120, d. 27, l. 28–29). The letter from khutor Krikunovo, however, entered public circulation within the Soviet propaganda. Articles about it have been published in both Soviet officious – daily of VKP(b) *Pravda* (Правда, 1927, p. 4) and also in the newsletter of the TsIK SSSR *Izvestiya* (Известия, 1928, p. 6). With his articles in Russian and in Romani language, Alexander German has also promoted khutor Krikunovo several times (Молодой Ленинец, 1928, p. 3; Крестьянская газета, 1928, p. 4; Романы зоря, 1929а, pp. 7–10). Khutor Krikunovo thus became, among the public, an iconic symbol of nomadic Gypsies' ambition to settle down and to start moving to collective agriculture. However, this was not enough to survive khutor, in which things were not going so well. After the local authorities did not satisfy the demands of the Gypsy residents living there to obtain land, some of them left in 1929. In 1931, after several people from the khutor were accused of stealing horses, the process of settlement was finally abandoned, and its inhabitants left it (O'Keeffe, 2013, pp. 152, 286).

Overall, the VSTs actively involved in the Soviet policy towards Gypsies. In September 1925 the Central Board of the VSTs appointed Ivan [Rom-]Lebedev as its representative in the ON VTsIK (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 120, d. 27); good relationships were also established with Narkompros and Narkomzem (GARF, f. P 3260, op. 6, d. 44). In early 1926, after adopting the ambitious Union Work Plan, a detailed Work Plan for its Cultural Department was also affirmed (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 120, d. 27). In these documents, Gypsy activists outlined their vision concerning the main lines of the state policy

regarding Gypsies, including a number of specific ideas. It will not be an exaggeration to say that the main elements of this policy were proposed by the Gypsy leaders themselves and implemented by the Soviet institutions with the active participation of Gypsy activists. At first glance, the cooperation between the VSTs and the Soviet state appeared to be successful and the right balance had been found in relations between the two parties. At the same time, however, the leadership of the VSTs was spending a great deal of time and making considerable efforts in another, additional direction – they tried to go ahead with the development of their own economic and commercial activity – which ultimately turned out to be fatal to the very existence of the Union.

One of the first actions taken by the Presidium of the VSTs after the registration of the Union Statute was the submission of an Application to the VTsIK dated September 05, 1925, which contained a request for an amendment of the just registered Statute. A new Draft Statute has been prepared with amendments that were aimed at “giving the union the opportunity to organise production workshops and other enterprises” (GARF, f. A 259, op. 9 Б, d. 4233, l. 5), i.e., to develop their own economic activity. In fact, this was the original idea of the founders of the Union (the Initiative Proletarian Group of Gypsies), laid down in the first version of the Statute of the organisation from the beginning of 1924 (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 119, d. 9, l. 4); in the later revisions of the Statute, this idea fell away, but immediately after the official registration of the Union, it came to the fore again.

The request of the VSTs for changes in the Statute of the Union, which would enable it to develop its own economic (production and trade) activity, was the beginning of a huge official correspondence, which lasted nearly two and a half years, and which, apart from VSTs, included a number of Soviet leading institutions and their internal structures – VTsIK, TsIK, TsK VKP(b), SNK, NKVD, Moscow authorities, etc. The presentation of this whole epistolary saga could be done in several volumes. It can be said very briefly that some institutions supported the request for amendments to the Statute, others opposed them, and others changed their opinion several times (GARF, f. A 259, op. 9 Б, d. 4233; f. P 1235, op. 120, d. 27; f. A 259, op. 10 Б, d. 2253, l. 39; f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763). In turn, VSTs not only rapidly began to develop a number of economic activities through the so-called educational production workshops, but continued to make new requests to institutions, for example for providing tax benefits to commercial enterprises of the Gypsy Union, for permission to set up a mutual aid fund, to open a cinema, to run a theatrical lottery, etc. (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 120, d. 27; f. A 259, op. 10 Б, d. 1924; f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763, l. 136).

The new version of the Statute of the VSTs was approved by the NKVD on July 15, 1926 (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763, l. 111–116), and the development of economic (production and commercial) activity by the Union had already been formally resolved (at least partially). The first Gypsy production artels in Moscow were established in 1925 (Погин, 1934, p. 17), but their true heyday began immediately after the change in the Statute of the VSTs in 1926. The same year, in Moscow, production artels were organised: furniture and upholstery, knitting, packaging (chemical), toy, chandlery and others (Герман, 1931,

p. 52). In the majority of cases, however, these are artels in which Gypsies did not work at all (either their number is minimal or they are fictitiously employed), but the artels themselves received the necessary certificates from the VSTs management that they are “Gypsy”. To that end, the Union had two stamps and two forms, one with its actual name and the other one with the name VSTs at ON VTsIK, on which these certificates were issued (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 140, d. 498, l. 1–22). This was done so that these artels could receive from the state at preferential prices and with priority deficit raw materials, which they then sold on the free market. Moreover, in this profiteering activity, they were assisted by the leadership of the VSTs (including Andrey Taranov himself), who lobbied for them before the Soviet institutions. Almost all of these pseudo-Gypsy artels ceased to exist after the liquidation of the VSTs in 1928, and only a few of them (e.g. *Tsygkhiprom*) continued their activities in the 1930s (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 794, p. 93).

Despite the rapid development of the activity of the Gypsy (at least formally speaking) production cooperatives and artels, the financial problems of VSTs did not end here but, on the contrary, they widened and deepened further. At the end of the same year (1926), a full audit of the activities of VSTs on behalf of ON VTsIK was executed (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 140, d. 498), followed in the subsequent year by new inspections made by the Moscow Workers and Peasants’ Inspectorate (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763). The audit found numerous financial violations, and even frauds, such as using fake stamps and letterheads with the misuse of the ON VTsIK abbreviation. By using these fake documents, and hiding behind the authority of the institution, loans and deficient materials were obtained, which were then sold on the private market for higher prices, not paying loan interests, non-payment of salaries and insurances, the default of contracts and many other profiteering activities, mainly performed by suspicious ‘experts’ employed by the VSTs (*Ibid.*).

Because of all these violations, the Chairman of VSTs Andrey Taranov and Secretary Ivan Lebedev were sentenced to forced labour for a period of six months (Вечерняя Москва, 1927, p. 4), but the sentence was subsequently suspended (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 140, d. 498, l. 7–8). Andrey Taranov also received a punishment on the Party line – after a series of investigations by the Moscow Workers’ and Peasants’ Inspection at a meeting of the Moscow Control Commission of the VKP(b) it was proposed that he be expelled from the Party, but at the end, he was not but was punished with severe reprimand with the entry into a personal file (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763, l. 228).

Individual Gypsy activists were also involved in this endless official correspondence, sending memos to different institutions about the problems existing in VSTs, for which they blamed its leaders (the most active in this regard being Mikhail Bezlyudskiy). The main target of their allegations was the leadership of the VSTs and, first of all, its secretary Ivan Lebedev, chairman Andrey Taranov, and their supporters (“the Lebedevs and Polyakovs”, the members of “the Polyakovs clan”). His appeal to the authorities was “the union should not be closed, but reorganised, cleared of weeds” (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 120, d. 27). The VSTs, for their part, have made unsuccessful attempts to re-register by replacing

the VSTs Presidium with the Board of Founders, which included Andrey Taranov, Ivan Lebedev, Georgiy Lebedev, Dmitriy Polyakov and Nikolay Pankov as members, and Dmitriy Shishkov, Nina Dudarova and Agva as candidate members (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763, l. 160). The idea was for the Board of Founders to form a new Gypsy Union; subsequently, was offered another idea – to register as a subsidiary of the VSTs the *Society for the Attraction of Gypsies in Labour*, which would take over the Union's economic activities (Ibid., l. 136; f. P 1235, op. 140, d. 498). Meanwhile, NKVD discussed whether to bring the leadership of VSTs to justice (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763). However, the Soviet authorities preferred not to make unnecessary noise about the existing problems and did not take any repressive action against the leaders of the VSTs. The leadership of VSTs, however, tried to improve the situation, thus on July 18, 1927, they exclude from its ranks' "comrades Bezlyudskiy and Agva because of their dirty actions" and undermining the authority of the Union (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763, l. 77–78).

In the course of numerous inspections and discussions of the problems in the VSTs in the various Soviet institutions, it turned out that there were disagreements between these institutions about the future of the Union. ON VTsIK tries to preserve VSTs by looking for different options to solve the existing problems in its activity, e.g. closure of the so-called training and production workshops and a ban on all economic activities (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763, 136; f. P 1235, op. 140, d. 498), secondment of a famous party figure Vagarshak Ter-Vaganyan (1893–1938) as his permanent representative in the leadership of the Union (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 17, d. 188), including even attempts to replace whole VSTs leadership. Mikhail Bezlyudskiy (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 140, d. 498, l. 2) was nominated for new Chairman of VSTs from ON VTsIK, the option of attracting a non-Gypsy to be the head of the Union has even been discussed (Ibid., pp. 22). However, the Moscow authorities, which were directly responsible for the activities of the VSTs, were pleading for its liquidation, because in this way they would get rid of the many problems that these activities constantly created for them. It was the differences between the Soviet institutions that caused the process of liquidating the VSTs to take so long. Moreover, there is even a very rare and seemingly unbelievable case of prolonged delay, and in fact boycott, by the Soviet institutions of a decision taken by the highest party bodies. At its extended meeting of the Subdivision of National Minorities of the Department for Agitation and Propaganda at TsK VKP(b), held on May 3, 1927, at which Andrey Taranov and his main opponent Mikhail Bezlyudskiy were invited to attend, the following decision was made:

[1.] Since the All-Russian Union of Gypsies did not fulfil its main work – cultural and educational, [and] despite repeated instructions from the APO at TsK VKP(b), it took up production activities, which entailed a large debt that the Union could not repay, agree on the official liquidation of the Union with the recognition of its insolvency.

2. To organize work among the Gypsies, to convene a consultative meeting of the Gypsy communists for organising an initiative group of 3 people to work among the Gypsies.

3. After thoroughly checking the work of the newly organized troika on a Moscow scale, it will be raised the question of creating a body for work among the Gypsies on the scale of the RSFSR. (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763).

Despite this clear and unambiguous decision, the leadership of the VSTs, in cooperation with the various Soviet institutions, managed to delay its implementation by 10 months, until February 1928, when the VSTs was officially liquidated. It is clear from the quoted document that the Soviet state did not set itself the goal of depriving the Gypsies of its national organisation; on the contrary, it wanted to have one and gave a new opportunity to the Gypsy activists to create such an organisation that would meet the requirements of the authorities. In fact, the main problem was that the leadership of the VSTs (and personally Andrey Taranov) had clung to their attempts to preserve the old Gypsy Union at the cost of its transformation, and failed to take advantage of the opportunity offered to them. By the way, as all his further life destiny shows, the nomenclature hardware games were never the strong point of the red cavalryman Andrey Taranov.

This whole epic story concluded with the NKVD Decree of February 13, 1928 (published on 19th of February 1928) to close down the *Union of Gypsies living on the territory of the RSFSR* (GARF, f. A 2306, op. 69, d. 1357, l. 9-906). Both the Memorandums signed by the heads of VSTs, Andrey Taranov and Ivan Lebedev, already mentioned above, constitute the last attempts to stop the liquidation of the Union (the first memorandum) and to create a new Gypsy organisation (the second one). But they did not lead to any changes in the decision made and no new Gypsy organisation was created. Moreover, the third Memorandum to the Council of Nationalities at the TsIK USSR organised by Andrey Taranov (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 120, d. 27, l. 4-11) clearly shows that he (unlike Ivan Rom-Lebedev, who was no longer among the signatories) still hoped that the mission of the VSTs could be saved by creating a new national Gypsy organisation that would express the wishes of the Gypsy masses and would be their representative before the Soviet state. At the same time, this new Gypsy organisation would have a completely new status, closely linked to the Soviet institutions. Attached to the Memorandum was a draft for this new unit, named the Committee for the Promotion of the Economic, Cultural and Land Management of Gypsies Living in the Territory of the USSR (Ibid., l. 12-14), i.e. it no longer encompassed the only RSFSR but the whole Soviet Union. This Committee, on the one hand, was to have its subdivisions in the individual Union's and Autonomous republics and regions and to assume the functions of the former Gypsy Union, with its autonomous status (with its letterhead, seal and other attributes of a civic organisation), and, on the other hand, to be supported by the budget of the TsIK USSR. As a part of the apparatus of the Soviet state, it was expected, it would perform many of the functions of TsIK regarding the Gypsies at the State and local level. Judging by this proposal, Andrey Taranov has understood that the civic organisation will not ensure the real empowerment of the Roma, and that is why he proposed this new form. However, it was too late, the chance had been lost and the right moment had been missed, and therefore his call for "the creation of such an organisation as the only one capable of resolving Gypsy issues in the lane of Soviet [national] policy" (Ibid., l. 11) remained without any consequences, despite the above-cited decision of APO at TsK VKP(b).

In this third Memorandum, an interesting concept can be revealed, which was obviously the work of Taranov himself, and according to which:

The Gypsy tabor itself, as a form of organisation of a way of life, the embryo of Communism, exists in the Gypsies and their transition towards agriculture could easily be introduced into the necessary forms of the agrarian unions. On this basis, the settlement of the Gypsies could serve as a useful example also to the peasants around them who do not easily accept the idea that there is a need to re-organising their agricultural economy. (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 120, d. 27, l. 6.).

This concept of Andrey Taranov has old historical roots and parallels that he hardly knew about. In fact, one of the first serious differences in the nascent communist movement in the 19th century was between Karl Marx and the famous anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, who saw in the Russian rural community ‘the embryo of Communism’; during the first two decades of the 20th century, it was this interpretation that formed the basis of the distinction between the Bolsheviks on the one hand, and the so-called *Esers* (socialist-revolutionaries) and anarchists on the other. Nobody paid serious attention to Taranov’s wording – fortunately for him, the Gypsy movement later imposed the thesis of the need for a constant struggle against the “class enemy” among the Gypsy community itself (for more details, see below).

An interesting question concerns the reasons for the liquidation of VSTs and whether the allegations of wrongdoing in its economic activities were not, in fact, a mere pretence for its closure. In its Memorandum, the leadership of the VSTs did not deny any of the allegations of wrongdoing but tried to justify it by emphasising the Union’s need for funds for the development of its activities. The persuasiveness of these justifications and explanations is difficult to assess, but it is undoubtedly a fact that the production cooperatives and artels operating under the emblem of the VSTs did not, in practice, invest any funds (literally not a single kopek) earned from its dubious economic activities for the activities of the Union as a public organisation.

However, the numerous economic irregularities are the specific reason for the decision to liquidate VSTs, which was also the explanation for the public (Вечерняя Москва, 1927, p. 4). The accusations made during the inspections of the activity of the VSTs regarding the class composition of its administration, which “included 9 people horse dealers, 4 estrade artists, 1 Komsomol member, 1 Party member candidate, and 5 people employees” (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763, l. 7), fully correspond to the spirit of the epoch but are also not the leading reason for its liquidation. In fact, the real and main reasons for the liquidation of the Union were set out very clearly in the NKVD Decree *On the Closure of the Union of Gypsies Living on the Territory of the RSFSR*, which stated: “The Union of Gypsies [...] was unable to do anything in organising the Gypsies masses, attracting them to participate in the work of the Union” (GARF, f. A 2306, op. 69, d. 1357, l. 9–10; f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763, l. 145–148; f. P 1235, op. 120, d. 27, l. 236–238). This accusation was very difficult to dispute because the facts are unambiguous – for the entire period of its existence

(from the official registration of the VSTs in July 1925 to its liquidation in February 1928) the Union failed to create any (sic!) operating unit outside Moscow (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763; f. P 1235, op. 140, d. 498). Andrey Taranov's allegations made in 1964 in a letter to Vladimir Ivashchenko that the Union had branches in Leningrad, Pskov, Rostov-on-Don, and other cities in the RSFSR, as well as in Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, and other Soviet republics (Иващенко, 1996, p. 42) lack any documentary evidence.

The liquidation of the VSTs was not the result of a special NKVD operation against Gypsies. It is part of the general process of re-registration (actually cleansing) of public organisations, carried out after the adoption of the Provisions on Societies and Unions on February 6, 1928, and which lasted until 1930, as a result of which their number was significantly reduced (Ильина, 2000, p. 80; Шаповал, 2020b, pp. 198–199). In the same way and at the same time, the Assyrian national organisation was liquidated (Данилова, 2005, p. 107). In many cases, the documentation of the Gypsy organisation is stored together with that of the Assyrian organisation in the record-keeping of Soviet institutions (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 64, d. 1637; NARB, f. 34/133c, op. 1, d. 727). It is clear that the Soviet state considered that the model of working with common public organisations of diasporic nationalities was not appropriate, and decided to look for other forms and methods to continue working with them (and, accordingly, to control them).

Viewed in the discourse of Anti-Gypsyism, the liquidation of the VSTs was a repressive measure of the Soviet authorities against the Gypsies in the USSR and their activists. The analysis of historical material, however, offers a very different interpretation. The case here is not a change in the strategy of the state policy of affirmative action towards the Gypsies, but only a change in the tactics in its implementation. In fact, after the liquidation of the VSTs, the Soviet state took the Gypsy policy entirely into its own hands, and this is when its most impressive results were achieved.

It was the firm intention of the Soviet authorities to continue the affirmative Gypsy policy in the conditions of a shortage of politically trained personnel that explains the seemingly strange circumstance that the leaders of the VSTs, despite their undoubted responsibility for the violations committed in the Union's economic activities, were not subject to any persecution. On the contrary, all of them received positions at the lowest levels of the Soviet nomenclature – in the editorial staff of the Gypsy journals *Romany zorya* (Gypsy Dawn) and *Nevo drom* (New Way), in the Gypsy national sections of various publishing houses, and in the newly created Gypsy Theatre *Romen*.

Moreover, in a sense, VSTs continued to exist, albeit under a new name – *Актив Московских цыган* (Functionaries of the Moscow Gypsies). This was a group that included the same people who were in the leadership of the former Union; It was not officially registered as an organisation but performed largely the same functions as VSTs.

This group (namely the group, not its individual members) was invited by the Soviet authorities to various events as a representative of the Gypsies, e.g. when discussing the problems at the Gypsy State Theatre *Romen* (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 28). The group itself addressed official letters to the Soviet institutions on various occasions and even

sent her representatives to these institutions, for example to the Assistance Bureau for the Gypsy Board in *Promkooperatsia* (Workers' Cooperative) at the All-Union Council of Workers Cooperatives (GARF, f. 5449, op. 1, d. 1412, l. 27). It is significant that in the latter case the Minutes of the meeting of the Functionaries of Moscow Gypsies, held on January 25, 1931, were signed, as in the days of the VSTs, by Andrey Taranov (Chairman) and Ivan Lebedev (Secretary), but written on the letterhead of *Tsyppishcheprom* (Gypsy Food Industry) and stamped with its seal. What is even more significant – the management of *Tsyppishcheprom* included Ivan Lebedev, Georgiy Lebedev, Sergey Polyakov, etc. (in fact, the whole group of Moscow Gypsies from the leadership of the VSTs), even Alexander German, but not Taranov himself (Ibid.). Taranov was obviously among signatories because of his public and party position.

In connection with the liquidation of the VSTs, the issue of Andrey Taranov's personal responsibility for the failure of the Union is of particular importance. From a formal point of view it is unquestionable and clearly formulated during the inspections of the activities of VSTs: "Comrade Taranov, as the leader of this Union and as a party member, is most liable for this" (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 140, d. 498, l. 22). It should be borne in mind here that before taking up the post of head of the VSTs, Taranov's entire life path passed into a completely different environment – as a child among wandering Gypsies, later a proletarian and a military serviceman – and he knew little about the life of Moscow Gypsies (mainly from the circles of the Gypsy musical elite) with which he was surrounded. Moreover, the specific economic activity of the VSTs, according to the testimony of his contemporaries was "led by specialist Dombrowski, who has unlimited rights" (Ibid., l. 11–12). When analysing the large amount of available documentation, it becomes clear that in his capacity as Chairman of the VSTs Andrey Taranov was used more as a substitute person, probably because he had no sufficient knowledge and managerial skills. The program and administrative documents were, in fact, prepared mainly by Ivan Lebedev, and the economic activities were led by members of the 'Polyakov clan' and the hired 'experts' who were non-Roma.

In the autumn of 1926, in the time of numerous inspections of the Union's activities, the Presidium of the VSTs decided to create a new organisation under name the *Society for Attracting Gypsies to Labour*, which would take over its previous economic activities and would make regular deductions of a certain percentage of the revenues received and would invest them in the other activities of the Union. Andrey Taranov himself sent a letter with such a proposal to the NKVD. However, he was not listed among the founders of the new organisation. Among the founding members were there following famous names: Ivan Lebedev, Georgiy Lebedev, Sergey Polyakov, Dmitriy Shishkov, Konstantin Leontiev and others (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763). Nevertheless, the Soviet authorities did not approve this extraordinary idea, and it remained unrealised.

Of course, all this does not take away from Taranov's the responsibility as the head of the Union, for which he was repeatedly punished. Naturally, he skips these moments

in his memoirs (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Андрей Таранов), including the fact that due to problems with the VSTs he received a Party sanction – a severe reprimand inscribed in his personal file (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763, l. 227–228; f. P 1235, op. 140, d. 498, l. 7–8). Nevertheless, immediately after the liquidation of the VSTs, Andrey Taranov took the lead of the Gypsy journal *Romany zorya* (1927–1930) and its continuing journal, *Nevo drom* (1930–1932), in the role of executive editor. These were important and responsible positions, and his appointment at these posts demonstrated the confidence assigned to him by the Party and the Soviet state regarding Gypsy policy.

Moreover, the Soviet authorities even tried to secure Andrey Taranov's official post in the central management nomenclature. In an official letter to the Narkomzem (General Directorate of Land Management), signed by the Deputy Head of the Department of Nationalities of VTsIK Rauf Sabirov (1894–1937) from May 1929, it was recommended that if a post in the Gypsy population's land management service is opened, "Comrade Taranov – former chairman of the VSTs [i.e. his post in VSTs was regarded not as a minus, but as a plus – authors note]" should be appointed there (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 121, d. 31). In all likelihood, no such position was found, and the question of Taranov's appointment to the Narkomzem RSFSR was dropped.

In his position as executive editor of the two Gypsy journals, Andrey Taranov published several important articles, in which he presented the official position of the Gypsy activists and the Soviet state on current issues of Gypsy policy. Three of them – *About the Land for Romanyčhavenge*, *How to Improve the Gypsy Agriculture*, *On the Organisation of Kolkhozes* – were a call for mass sedentarisation of Gypsy nomads, which would be associated with the creation of national Gypsy kolkhozes (Романы зоря, 1927h, pp. 4–6; 1929c, pp. 4–6; 1930i, pp. 1–3). Indicative of Andrey Taranov's political status is his article *The Thirteenth Anniversary of October [Revolution]*, published in 1930 (Нэво дром, 1930h, pp. 1–3) – such type of introductory articles in the press, dedicated to important anniversaries, were the prerogative of party leaders at various levels, i.e. despite the liquidation of the VSTs, Andrey Taranov retained his status as leader of the Gypsy movement. This position is confirmed by the fact that it was he who delivered the introductory political report at the Dzerzhinsky District Gypsies Conference in Moscow, devoted to the USSR's national policy and its dimensions towards the Gypsies, based on which the Conference adopted a special resolution expressing support for the Soviet authorities and making several concrete proposals to the central and local authorities (Нэво дром, 1931n, pp. 4–5, 8–9).

In the quoted article *The Thirteenth Anniversary of October [Revolution]* there is another point which deserves attention: "Tsarist Russia ... called the Uzbeks 'Sarty', the Jews 'Zhidy', the Ukrainians 'Khokhly', the Gypsies [цыгане] – 'Pharaohs' [фараоны], and so on" (Нэво дром, 1930g, p. 1), i.e., the insulting name for Roma according to Andrey Taranov was considered not the word 'Gypsies', but the designation 'Pharaohs'. This wording is an indirect response to the proposal made by Daniil Savvov, supported by Georgiy

Lebedev (see below) to replace the name Gypsies ('цыгане') with 'Indo-Rom' (Романы зоря, 1930g, p. 9; 1930c, p. 46). Apparently, this opinion was also shared by other Gypsy activists, and it is no longer discussed in the pages of the journal *Nevo drom*.

In the journal *Nevo drom*, Andrey Taranov published another important programmatic article, which defines one of the main directions of the movement for Roma civil emancipation in the USSR – *War against anti-Gypsyism* (Нэво дром, 1931s, pp. 1–3). In fact, the concept of Anti-Gypsyism was first formulated by Alexander German (Безбожник, 1928, pp. 11–13; see below), and Taranov's article is a presentation in Romani of the basic postulates of this concept, inscribed in the general framework of Soviet national policy. In doing so, he refers to the case in Tver about the sentencing of two workers to forced labour for the ethnic mockery of a Gypsy colleague (Тверская правда, 1931abc), to make it clear that the Soviet state's struggle against Anti-Gypsyism is not just a propaganda slogan, but a real policy (for more details see below).

In parallel with his work in the two Gypsy journals, in 1930, Andrey Taranov held the important and responsible position of political editor in the Gypsy Section, established at the Central Publishing House of the Peoples of the USSR under TsIK USSR (GARF, f. P 4033, op. 1, d. 68, l197), and from this position exercised political control over the published editions, separately and independently of the censorship carried out through the Glavlit (General Directorate for Literature and Publishing at the Narkompros RSFSR). At that time, in the conditions of the rapid development of the publication of numerous books in the Romani language (Shapoval, 2020; 2021abc), encouraged and supported by the Soviet state, Taranov also (like most of the leading Gypsy activists) published several of his books. As can be seen from their titles, they are all in the field of political education and propaganda – *New Village; Komsomol and Class Struggle among Gypsies; Religion and Class Struggle; Trade Unions under Lenin's Banner* (Таранов, 1930; 1932b; 1932c; 1933), and also a social science textbook for Gypsy schools (Таранов, 1932a). It should be noted that Andrey Taranov (as well as Ivan Tokmakov) were the only leading Gypsy activists who were not tempted to try their hand at fiction, perhaps because of their position as leaders of the Gypsy movement.

In these books, as in all his other publications, Andrey Taranov used the same (or at least similar in content) concepts and idioms, expressing the basic ideology of the Soviet reality, in regard to the different nationalities and the national policy of the Soviet state during this period. First of all, this is the definition of the Russian Empire as a 'people's prison' repeatedly used by Lenin, which implies that individual nationalities in the Empire were under the constant oppression of Tsarism. Hence, the constant emphasis on the role of the October Revolution and the Soviet state, which eliminated the old bourgeois system and opened up wide opportunities for oppressed peoples. Only in the Soviet state were these nationalities able to actively engage in the construction of a 'new life'. This includes, in addition to the main task of building socialism, also the development of the national identity, language, and culture of all individual nationalities. Within this discourse, the Gypsy theme fits without any problems into the general ideological

paradigm. Moreover, it is within these frameworks that the ideas of Roma civic emancipation are given the opportunity for its practical realisation because the Soviet state (at least in the early USSR) pursued a consistent affirmative policy in this direction. In this case, there is a coincidence (if not full, at least in basic lines) of the aims of the state policy and the vision of the Gypsy activists concerning what this politics should be, or in his words in the programmatic article by Andrey Taranov and Ivan Lebedev, published at founding of VSTs, which we quoted already above: “Gypsies must be helped to become a people equal in all respects with other nationalities inhabiting the USSR” (Известия, 1925, p. 6).

After 1932, there was a new turn in the public position and the life of Andrey Taranov. A report on the state of work on Gypsy co-operation in Moscow in the autumn of 1932, sent to the Head of the Nationalities Department of the VTsIK Nygmet Nurmakov (1895–1937), shows that at that time Andrey Taranov was an instructor in this department (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 29, l. 20), which means that at that time he was already included in the composition of the highest Soviet nomenclature. Very soon, however, this situation changed, and in an official letter to TsK VKP(b) from ON VTsIK, Ivan Tokmakov (about him, see below) was recommended to lead a new task in the new Gypsy newspaper in connection with “the planned reorganisation of the Gypsy journal *Nevo drom* in a newspaper” (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 27, l. 266), which was a direct connection with the replacement of Andrey Taranov with Ivan Tokmakov as an instructor in ON VTsIK. Thus, Andrey Taranov was officially replaced by Ivan Tokmakov as the leader of the Gypsy movement.

This change came as a result of transformation in the status of the journal *Nevo Drom* and a series of letters from Gypsy activists about the existence of serious shortcomings in its content and leadership. In 1932, the publication of the journal was transferred from Tsentrizdat to Uchpedgiz, which was a de facto downgrade (the first publishing house was to the TsIK USSR and the second to the Narkompros RSFSR), which created several problems (Ibid., l. 263). At the same time, a letter was sent to ON VTsIK in the form of a feuilleton, signed under the pseudonym ‘Sibiryak’ (Ibid., l. 144–151), in which the editor-in-chief of the journal *Nevo drom* Andrey Taranov and his fellows Nikolay Pankov and Ivan Lebedev and entire editorial board were accused of “opportunism, separation from the masses, nepotism, quarrels, the clamp of Bolshevik self-criticism, etc.”, and call on the authorities to “surgical operation” (Ibid., p. 151), i.e. to change the entire management of the journal. A memorandum also sent to various Soviet institutions and signed by Mikhail Bezlyudskiy and Georgiy Lebedev, provides a thorough critical analysis of all issues published (up to No. 5 of 1932) of the journal *Nevo drom* (Ibid., l. 241–247). The conclusion reached by the authors is that the journal as a whole has not coped with its tasks and needs serious restructuring to eliminate all the mentioned (including political) shortcomings.

In this situation, de facto (i.e. without a special decision) the journal *Nevo drom*, according to one report written by Ivan Tokmakov, “ceased to exist in 1932”, and efforts

were made to create a Gypsy newspaper (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 28, l. 268–269). Andrey Taranov tried to maintain his position in the Gypsy movement and in an official letter to ON VTsIK from October 1933 shifted the blame for the failure of *Nevo drom* to the National Sector of Uchpedgiz, which had a “disgusting attitude” towards the journal and did not pay the necessary attention to it. Further, Taranov proposed that, as a compromise option, along with the future publication of a Gypsy newspaper, *Nevo drom* should also be preserved as an art and literature magazine (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 27, l. 260–263). At the same time, as another option, he also proposes to convert the journal into a Romani language newspaper, which would be published three times a month; he argued that, for this purpose, a larger editorial team (i.e., more people on the payroll) would be needed (Ibid., l. 260–265).

In the end, Andrey Taranov turned out to be insufficiently prepared for all these bureaucratic games and his fate as a leader of the Gypsy movement ended in vain. In 1934 he was sent to work in the Kyrgyz ASSR (then part of the RSFSR), where he held lower nomenclature positions – for a short time he worked in the apparatus of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan, and then director of the tobacco sovkhos *Kyrgyzstan* (ЛАНВ, ф. Николай Саткевич, д. Андрей Таранов). Such sending of party cadres from the capital Moscow to the distant province was a specific form of punishment at that time, and it was because of this attitude that Taranov was the only prominent Gypsy activist who was not invited to the Meeting at the Council of Nationalities at the TsIK USSR *On the Questions of the Employment of Toiling Nomadic Gypsies and Their Cultural and Economic Services*, organised by the Council of Nationalities at the TsIK USSR and held on January 4 and 5, 1936, in Moscow, attended by Gypsy activists from different regions of the USSR (see below).

Andrey Taranov’s exile in Central Asia lasted a relatively short time and, in 1936, he was sent back to work in the capital, in the central Soviet state apparatus, i.e. it can be said that he was not only rehabilitated but also promoted in the nomenclature hierarchy. Here are some slight mystifications in the memories of Taranov himself, according to whom: “in 1937 [there is an error in the year here – authors note], when the government raised the question of creating a Gypsy rayon, I was recalled from Kyrgyzstan to Moscow and worked in the Resettlement Committee at the Sovnarkhoz of the USSR as a commissioner for employment of Gypsies” (ЛАНВ, ф. Николай Саткевич, д. Андрей Таранов). The Sovnarkhoz system, however, was abolished in 1932, and the All-Union Resettlement Committee at SNK was transformed in 1936 into the Resettlement Department of the NKVD. Andrey Taranov’s new career coincided with this administrative reform. The first two reports of inspections carried out by him in July 1936 in Central Asia were signed by him as ‘Inspector of the VPK SNK Taranov’, while the inspection in Yaroslavl Oblast in August 1936 was already signed as “Inspector of the Resettlement Department of the NKVD of the USSR Taranov” (RGAE, f. 5675, op. 1, d. 160, l. 39; f. 5675, op. 1, d. 179, l. 36). Perhaps it was his work in the NKVD that he did not want to speak about since the

time when he wrote his Autobiography, in the 1960s, was the time when the USSR commanded an anti-Stalinist discourse and when the NKVD became a symbol of Stalin's repressions.

The focus of Andrey Taranov's inspections was primarily on the existing Gypsy kolkhozes. In the Kazakh ASSR he checked the condition of the Gypsy kolkhoz named *Stalin's Way* in the Chelik's rayon, near Alma-Ata (today Almaty); in the Kyrgyz ASSR, the Gypsy kolkhoz *Нацпионал* in the Alarchinsky rayon, the Novo-Troitsky selsoviet, and the Gypsy Artel *Нэво дром* (New Way) for the production of wooden toys in Frunze (now Bishkek) were subject to inspection. Taranov's assessments of his inspections were generally objective, noting not only the many difficulties faced by Gypsy kolkhozes and the lack of support from local authorities but also highlighting the shortcomings of the leadership of these kolkhozes (RGAE, f. 5675, op. 1, d. 160, l. 39–42). This critical line is especially noticeable during the inspection of the Gypsy kolkhoz named *3rd International*, in Yaroslavl region, Kostroma rayon, Minsk selsoviet, Turabyevo village, established in 1936 by the *Kelderari* nomadic group ("There are specialists – coppersmiths, tinkers, plumbers, etc.") and Gypsies who came from other kolkhozes (RGAE, f. 5675, op. 1, d. 179, l. 36–38). The creation of a collective farm by *Kelederari* is quite unusual because they usually created their own artels in the cities (Chernykh, 2020: 358–366). In his report, Taranov noted that Comrade Bello, the chairman of the kolkhoz, "cannot be trusted" because he not only covers up many violations against collective farmers (e.g. theft and resale of horses) but also issues false certificates to people for early release from prisons (Ibid, p. 39).

Andrey Taranov's work in the NKVD system was related (at least in the beginning) to the activities of creating a Gypsy national rayon (for more details, see below), but in his memoirs, on this issue, he limited himself to the note: "the creation of the Gypsy rayon was hindered by the war and ... *vavre renda*" (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, д. Андрей Таранов). The allusion 'vavre renda' (other things) in Romani language is with hidden significance. In this case, that means Taranov wouldn't write about some important details in his Autobiography.

During the Second World War, Andrey Taranov was not mobilised in the army, most likely due to the consequences of the wounds received in the Civil War. In the autumn of 1944, the Ministry of Food Industry sent him to the city of Rezina, Moldova, to work as the director of a tobacco factory that had been destroyed by the Germans and was to be rebuilt (Ibid.). The dispatch of Taranov to Moldova, immediately after its liberation from the German army, shows that he still enjoyed the Party's confidence, though he remained in the low levels of the Soviet nomenklatura. There is little information about his fate in the new Moldavian USSR. According to his memoirs from 1948, he worked in the Rezina Raykom, then worked as the head of the Social Security Department of same rayon. According to other data from oral history, for a short period of time, he was the director of a kolkhoz near Rezina, but the local Moldovians began to write complaints to

various institutions asking why a Gypsy was appointed as a director, and in the end, he was replaced.

In 1950 Andrey Taranov retired for health reasons, in the category of a personal pensioner (Ibid.). The title 'personal pensioner' in the USSR means that its holder received the so-called 'personal pension' (hierarchised at three levels – local, republican, and union), which was given to retired persons for "exceptional contribution to the construction of the Soviet state". The holders of this title received individual pension supplements and several privileges in the field of communal services, health services, public transport, and even special food bonuses on respective holidays. The name of Andrey Taranov was not present in the lists of pensioners of union and republican significance, i.e., his personal pension was at the lowest, local level.

Andrey Taranov's retirement did not end his public activity, nor did it take him out of the field of Roma civic emancipation. After Stalin's death in 1953, in November of the same year, he wrote a letter to Nikita Khrushchev, First Secretary of the KPSS Central Committee, regarding the employment of Gypsies and their attraction to a sedentary lifestyle (PAVK). He did not receive a reply to this letter, so he wrote a second letter, which is not dated (in all probability it was written in the first months of 1954). In this letter, he again raised the issue of employment of nomadic Gypsies "because the question concerns the only nationality, most of which led a nomadic way of life in the Soviet Union and, thanks to this, found themselves involuntarily aloof from participation in the building of the communist society" (Ibid.). Taranov then tells briefly about what the Soviet government had done for the Gypsies in the 1930s, and about their current problems. According to him, the war destroyed the existing Gypsy kolkhozes, many of the achievements had already been lost, a process of secondary re-nomadisation occurred, and "in the Gypsy tabors (camps), the poor again came under the influence of kulak chief-men in the tabor". Although "young people are trying to escape from the tabor" and move to a sedentary lifestyle, "without help from outside ... it is not possible". However, the local Soviet authorities did not cooperate and hindered this process of job allocations for Gypsies, as they refused to accept them in the existing *sovkhoses* and kolkhozes for technical and administrative reasons (such as lack of permanent address registration). Based on this situation, he came to the conclusion that: "It is needed to hold such events among nomadic Gypsies throughout the Soviet Union, which would make it possible to attract the bulk of nomadic Gypsies to agricultural production – kolkhozes" (Ibid.).

The concluding passages in Andrey Taranov's letter are particularly indicative of the vision of Gypsy activists from the early USSR in the new post-war situation:

It is known that in our country, previously nomadic, backward peoples who did not know letters, with the help of our party and government, became sedentary, mastered literacy and education, [...], and today only Gypsies have remained nomads. [...] Turning to you with this letter, I consider it my duty to ask you to resolve the issue of employment of nomadic Gypsies and with the help of the government, to make the Gypsies full-fledged people of our Motherland, to involve them in agricultural production, as well as in industry. [...].

This question should not be left unresolved. Under the leadership of TsK KPSS and the Soviet government, Gypsies in the USSR, as well as all nationalities in our Motherland, can become active participants in the building of a communist society. (Ibid.).

No answer was received to this letter from Andrey Taranov either, thus it is clear that the Soviet government at this time still did not consider it necessary to engage with the problems of the Gypsies.

In the 1960s, Andrey Taranov actively collaborated with Nikolay Satkevich and Vladimir Ivashchenko in gathering material on the history of the Gypsy movement for civic emancipation and Gypsy policy in the early USSR. It is interesting to note that he, in a letter from 1964 to Nikolay Satkevich, gave a positive assessment of Nikolay Pankov (“who did a lot for the Gypsy literature”), Alexander German, and Mikhail Bezlyudskiy (“very talented and much more”), but did not mention a word about Ivan Rom-Lebedev, together with whom they were at the head of the VSTs in the 1920s. Moreover, in the same letter, he noted that he was in constant correspondence only with Bezlyudskiy (at that time, Pankov and German had already died), although it was Bezlyudskiy who, with his reports against him, had contributed considerably to the problems he had in VSTs and journal *Nevo drom*.

The exact date of Andrey Taranov’s death is unknown; his last letter to Vladimir Ivashchenko was in October 1966 (Иващенко, 2011, p. 7). He lived the rest of his life as a respected pensioner, who often met with pioneers (a communist children’s organisation), with whom he shared stories and recollections of his time. In the 1960s and 1970s, after his death, a large biographical essay was published about him, in which his life was presented as a role model for the younger generations (Культура, 1967, pp. 3–4; Равдин & Хмельковская, 1968, pp. 95–109; Цопа, 1978, pp. 14–22). Based on the difficult and complicated life path of Andrey Taranov presented here, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the same can be fully applied to his role in the processes of Roma civic emancipation.

Mikhail Bezlyudskiy

Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov

Mikhail Timofeevich Bezlyudskiy (1901–1970) is an outstanding figure in the entire cohort of leading Gypsy activists in the early USSR. On the one hand, his biography contains many moments that bring him close to the others and form a common type, typical for the historical epoch, but on the other hand, it also has quite a few clearly expressed personal characteristics.

Bezlyudskiy’s Autobiography, as well as the autobiographical texts of several other members of the Gypsy movement, are kept in Nikolay Satkevich’s personal archive

(ЛАНВ, ф. Николай Саткевич, д. Михаил Безлюдский; Marushiakova & Popov, 2021b, p. 932–949). However, it differs markedly from them. While other veterans of this movement generally adhere to established norms for this type of Soviet-era document, his text is more detailed, contains even fictional elements, and stands on the border with the literature narrative which, however, in no way compromises its value as a historical source.

Mikhail Bezlyudskiy was born on August 8, 1901, in a Gypsy tabor, pitching his tents in the woods near the small town of Sapozhok in the Ryazan province. Bezlyudskiy himself does not explicitly indicate to which Roma group he belongs, but from some indirect data and descriptions in the text (his parents' occupations, his Romani dialect, his surname, etc.), it is clear that he is from the group of *Ruska Roma*.

His father traded in horses and his mother was a fortune-teller. His family led a semi-nomadic way of life, and in the winter the entire tabor stayed in another small town, Mikhaylov, also in the Ryazan Governorate, where each family had a permanent residence. This model of wandering shows that they were already in a transition to permanent settlement – they did not leave the region in which they lived and spent most of the year in rented abode in the city, and in the summer roamed the nearby markets for horses. At the same time, some of the children were left to live alone in their city residence, as in the case of Mikhail Bezlyudskiy – from 10–11 years old (ЛАНВ, ф. Николай Саткевич, д. Михаил Безлюдский). As can be seen from these data, Bezlyudskiy can be considered a former nomad only with a certain amount of conditionality, but this was not an obstacle for him to constantly promote himself as such when joining the Gypsy movement and to emphasise his distinction from other activists, who (with some exceptions) came from settled Gypsies.

It is not entirely clear exactly what type of education Mikhail Bezlyudskiy received. In his autobiography, he claims to have learned to read and write from his house lord's son during the long winter evenings and subsequently had a Russian friend who was a student at the local high school who helped him in many ways, including in his self-education. However, Viktor Shapoval carefully analysed the handwriting in Bezlyudskiy's manuscripts and concluded that in this case he deliberately edited his biography in the spirit of the times (to present himself as a typical proletarian from an early age) and that he graduated from several classes in the so-called 'people school' (former church-parish educational establishment) (Шаповал, 2020a, p. 237).

Mikhail Bezlyudskiy started his working life at the age of 11–12, helping in the small carpentry workshop of his friend's family for food, and on Sundays, he went around the small shops in the city and asked for a "piece of bread". Soon after, he started working in a small bakery – first as a helping hand for everything, then as a qualified assistant baker. His father was opposed to his son being a hired worker (for which the other Gypsies mocked him) instead of wandering around with him and learning "Gypsy deeds" (in this case, horse-trading), but Bezlyudskiy was adamant in his choice, and his parents finally stopped insisting that he quit his job (ЛАНВ, ф. Николай Саткевич, д. Михаил Безлюдский).

The situation changed radically in the summer of 1918, when Soviet power was established in the city, which led to a complete collapse of economic activity in the conditions of the so-called military communism. In these circumstances, due to lack of livelihood, Mikhail Bezlyudskiy joined his parents' nomadic camp, taking with him a bag of books he had bought over the years – mainly editions of mass folk literature at this time, as well as works by authors such as Maxim Gorky, Mikhail Saltikov-Shchedrin, and others (Ibid.).

During his stay in the camp, Mikhail Bezlyudskiy ran all day in the woods to read books, and spent the evenings in a nearby village where, in the company of Russian boys and girls, he played the accordion and sung *stradanīya* (the musical-poetic genre of Russian folklore, a kind of short humorous folk songs with lyrical-comedic content).

Because of this, he was repeatedly punished by his father with a whip but did not change his behaviour. Then his father, hoping to permanently attach him to the Gypsy way of life, decided to marry him off. Mikhail Bezlyudskiy was at that time 17 years old. His father negotiated with the father of a girl from another nearby Gypsy tabor, they agreed on a future marriage and forced Mikhail to officially ask for the girl's hand. When her father asked her if she agreed, she refused because the future groom could not steal horses and trade them, and all the support of the future family would fall on her. Nevertheless, her father forced her to agree with the reason that "he will learn it". During the night, Mikhail, unwilling to accept his arranged future, took advantage of the fact that his parents were drunk, stole his baptismal certificate and fled the camp (Ibid.).

Mikhail Bezlyudskiy, who escaped from the tabor, walked the streets of the town of Sapozhok early in the morning and told the first policeman he met his story. The policeman wanted to help him and took him to his chief, who recommended that he enlists as a volunteer in the Red Army, called the military administration, and Bezlyudskiy went to Ryazan, where he enlisted in the army. His parents learned of his decision, arrived at the military unit and tried to persuade him to return to the camp, but he refused (Ibid.).

After completing his military training, Mikhail Bezlyudskiy left for the Caucasus Front in 1920 in the composition of the 11th Army. There are no more details about his military service in his Autobiography, the only specific information is that in 1921 his military unit in the Red Army entered Georgia and that he participated as a cavalry scout in the battles for the conquest of Batumi (Ibid.), although properly speaking, Batumi was handed over without a fight by the military of the independent Georgian government, which left the country.

Mikhail Bezlyudskiy apparently won the trust of his military commanders and, in the same year (1921), he was sent to study at the Baku Infantry Command Courses of the Red Commanders (training courses for the lower command staff), which he successfully completed in May 1922 and received the rank of Red Commander. After completing the courses, Bezlyudskiy was entitled to one month's leave, during which he looked for his parents who were wandering. He managed to find their tabor in the familiar places of Ryazan province, but stayed only two weeks with them and returned to the army (Ibid.).

Mikhail Bezlyudskiy arrived at his military unit in Tbilisi, from where he received referrals to the headquarters of the Transcaucasian Cheka. The guards of the state borders of the USSR and the border troops, respectively, were part of the Cheka' department, transformed in 1923 into the OGPU, and he was sent to a border outpost on the shores of the Caspian Sea (probably in Azerbaijan). There he served as assistant chief, and then as chief of this border outpost until 1925 when he was sent to study at the Higher Border School of the OGPU in Moscow (Ibid.).

In Moscow, Mikhail Bezlyudskiy studied at a school for 10 months, after which he was demobilised "for health reasons" and began to take an active part in the work of the *All-Russian Union of the Gypsies* (Ibid.). His name appeared for the first time in the Union's documentation in the last months of 1925 (the document is not dated) when the General Work Scheme of the VSTs and the General Objectives for the Work of the Union were adopted. It is clear from this document that the model of governance had been reformed, and the Union had to be then governed by a small Presidium, which included not only Chair Andrey Taranov, Vice-Chair Sergey Polyakov and Secretary Ivan Lebedev, but also Nikolay Pankov and Mikhail Bezlyudskiy, and the larger (including 17 people) Central Board of the Union was allowed to lead the activities of the VSTs within Moscow (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 120, d. 27, l. 83–85).

At first glance, it seems a little strange that Mikhail Bezlyudskiy was elected to the leadership of the VSTs so soon after he arrived in Moscow, without ever having been known to local Gypsy activists. However, this has its explanation. Until his inclusion in the Union, there was only one Party member (Andrey Taranov) and two Komsomol members (Ivan Lebedev and Sergey Polyakov) in the leadership of the VSTs. It turns out that at that time Bezlyudskiy was already a candidate member of the VKP(b), thus his inclusion in the new leadership significantly strengthened the Party's presence in the leadership of the Union. The candidate members were part of the Party nomenclature, and the transfer of Mikhail Bezlyudskiy to his new field naturally took place with the knowledge (and permission) of the Party apparatus. The strange thing here is that he did not explicitly mention such an important event in his life (Party affiliation was a mandatory point in every autobiography at the time), which occurred in 1922 during his service in the army (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763).

Initially, the activity of Mikhail Bezlyudskiy in the leadership of VSTs developed successfully. At a meeting of the Presidium of the VSTs on May 8, 1926, he (together with Andrey Taranov) was elected as representative of the Union in the Commission for Employment of Toiling Gypsies at VtsIK, from where subsequently, by decision of the Presidium of VtsIK, Bezlyudskiy was included into the Commission for Land Allocation for Gypsies at Resettlement Department of Narkomzem. On May 14, 1926, Taranov and Bezlyudskiy submitted to the Federal Committee for Land Affairs under the VtsIK Presidium a project for the establishment of a Department for Land Allocation for Gypsies (GARF, f. R 3260, op. 6, d. 44, l. 12). The proposal was not accepted because there

were no national departments in Fedkomzem at VTsIK and there was no reason to do so specifically for Gypsies.

This proposal of Andrey Taranov and Mikhail Bezlyudskiy contains an interesting point that deserves more attention. As the main argument for the need for a department for Gypsies, they point out the following:

Because the most radical means for uniting, organising and raising the cultural level of the working Gypsy people living in the USSR is their transition from a nomadic lifestyle with odd jobs to workers in 'agricultural economy. (Ibid., l. 20).

As can be seen, Gypsy activists were the ones who were pleading with the Soviet state for more active measures to sedentarise the Gypsy nomads, while the authorities preferred to refrain from more active actions in this direction and favour to limit themselves to incentive preferences for those who themselves express a desire to settle and make a living from agriculture (Marushiakova & Popov, 2020a).

This approach of the Soviet authorities is reflected in the first official state document relating to Gypsies – the Decree of the TsIK and SNK USSR from 1926, October 1, *On Measures To Facilitate the Transition of Nomadic Gypsies to a Settled Lifestyle* (Постановление, 1926). By the first Decree, Gypsies wishing to settle were entitled to receive agricultural land with priority over the rest of those wishing to do so, as well as the right to enjoy all the privileges enjoyed by the so-called *pereselentsy* (resettlers); since the times of the Russian Empire, this was the designation of a special category of people who have been encouraged, through numerous privileges, to settle in economically undeveloped territories. This practice has been preserved and further developed in the early USSR; the inclusion of the Gypsies, who wish to settle, into this category signified that in this way they were given the opportunity to enjoy all these privileges. The second Decree of the TsIK and SNK RSFSR from 1928, February 20, *On Land Allocation of Gypsies, Who Transit towards Toiling Settled Way of Life* (Постановление, 1928) not only confirmed those privileges but extended them further by assuming the costs of settling from the state budget. In this way, as already said, Gypsies were given the opportunity to enjoy privileges that were inaccessible to the vast majority of the population of the USSR.

The adoption of these Decrees gave impetus to the development of the processes of sedentarisation of Gypsy nomads and the establishment of Gypsy national kolkhozes. In fact, the umbrella term 'kolkhoz' here (and hereinafter) means any form of agricultural collective. In the 1920s, there were three such types of collective land cultivation, with some differences between them – *tovarishchestvo* (from *товарищ* – 'comrade', i.e. 'comradehood'), *artel* and *communa*; in the 1930s in the process of mass collectivisation of the agriculture, all these started to be called kolkhozes. As already mentioned above, the first steps in process of sedentarisation happened before the adoption of the Decree of October 1, 1926, when in April 1926, preparatory work began for the establishment of the Gypsy kolkhoz *Stalin's Way* in the Almaty region (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 27, l. 63). Later

in the press, new messages appeared in this direction, e.g. about the creation of an agricultural artel *Новая жизнь* (New Life) in the Vitebsk District, Belarussian SSR (Беднота, 1927, p. 4; Калинин, 2005, p. 89), or about the creation of a Gypsy kolkhoz in the Sofievskiy rayon, Dnepropetrovsk (today Dnipro) oblast, Ukrainian SSR (Экономическая жизнь, 1928, p. 4). In the archives, evidence about these kolkhozes have not yet been discovered, so it is probable that they survived only a short time.

In 1926, there was complete unanimity and concerted action between Mikhail Bezlyudskiy on the one hand, and the leadership of the VSTs (Chairman Andrey Taranov and Secretary Ivan Lebedev), on the other. This unity of the leading strategy and the concrete actions for its implementation was very clearly manifested in the above-mentioned proposal for the establishment of a special Department for Land Allocation for Toiling Gypsies of Fedkomzem at VtsIK, which repeated the request for mass sedentarization of 100,000 Gypsy nomads in Southern Russia, made by VSTs as early as March 1926 (GARF, f. P 3260, op. 6, d. 44, l. 4–6). The purpose of this proposal was to create a compact territory inhabited by Gypsies, “taking into account the experience of land use of the Jewish population” (Ibid., l. 8), which would serve as a basis for the creation of a Gypsy national rayon (in the perspective of a Gypsy national Autonomous Republic).

However, this unanimity and full agreement between Bezlyudskiy and the leadership of the VSTs was abruptly terminated in early 1927, when at a meeting of the Presidium of VtsIK, held on February 15, 1927, it was decided to remove Mikhail Bezlyudskiy from the Commission for Land Management of Gypsy Workers under the Fedkomzem at VtsIK, and to replace him with Dmitriy Polyakov (Ibid., l. 33–34).

The reasons for this turn in Mikhail Bezlyudskiy's relations with the leadership of the VSTs become clear from the preserved historical documents. Beginning in the autumn of 1926, Mikhail Bezlyudskiy sent several official letters to various Soviet institutions informing them of existing weaknesses and irregularities in the work of the VSTs.

One clarification is needed here. This type of document during the Soviet era was welcomed and encouraged by the state because it was considered a manifestation of communist vigilance and high civic responsibility; after the collapse of the USSR, on the contrary, in the already dominant anti-Soviet discourse, they became assessed unambiguously as denunciations (including in the academic literature). There is no point in entering into the debate about which assessment is correct here. We will only note that this issue should not be approached unequivocally, but depending on the specific circumstances. In the case of Mikhail Bezlyudskiy, as will become clear, these were official documents that have been signed by him and thus he assumed his full responsibility for their content and reflected his aspirations for improving the work of VSTs.

In fact, Mikhail Bezlyudskiy initially (the document is not dated, but it is clear from the context that it is from the end of 1926) submitted an Application to leave the Presidium of the VSTs, explaining the reasons for his decision with the isolation in which he was placed in the leadership of the Union, which does not allow him to combat the existing shortcomings in the work of this leadership (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763). In early 1927,

he sent a new Application to the Presidium of the VSTs, now with a copy to ON VTsIK (Ibid.), and in this way he notified the Soviet institutions of the case. By the end of the year, Bezlyudsky sent two more Statements, to the Economic Department of the OGPU (Ibid.) and to ON VTsIK (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 140, d. 498), in which he repeated the old accusations and revealed new irregularities in the work of the VSTs and its management.

Mikhail Bezlyudskiy's letters could not be considered a reason for initiating numerous inspections by various Soviet institutions of the activities of the VSTs, although they also had their influence in this direction. At that time, similar letters were sent by other Gypsy activists, e.g. Trofim Gerasimov (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763). It is also very likely that irregularities in the economic and financial activities of the VSTs were noticed by other Soviet control institutions, which was also a reason to conduct a check.

From all the documents signed by Mikhail Bezlyudskiy, it is clear that as soon as he joined the leadership of VSTs, he began a struggle against the leading representatives of the Moscow Gypsy musical elite, who were associated with the former choir of Yegor Polyakov ("the Lebedevs and the Polyakovs") and against whom there was discontent among the members of the Union. He accused them of linking the Union's activities with dubious "experts" in the economic field, which led to numerous violations of the law (primarily false stamps) and trade speculation. As a result of this struggle, Ivan Lebedev, Sergey Polyakov and Georgiy Lebedev were expelled from the Komsomol, but they were sided with by VSTs chairman Andrey Taranov, and they retained their leading positions in the Union. Taranov himself not only covered up the violations and even personally contributed to some of them, but also sabotaged the implementation of the recommendations made by the commissions of inquiry and the decisions taken by the Soviet institutions supervising the Union to improve its activities (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763; f. P 1235, op. 140, d. 498).

Special attention deserves the explanation that Mikhail Bezlyudsky himself gave about the motives that determine his activity in his struggle against the leadership of the VSTs:

The Party [...] brought me up and tempered me to hate those who used to earn a fortune at the expense of others under the rule of tsarism, [and] who, under Soviet rule, live without working. As proof that I am completely alien to careerism, I voluntarily left the Presidium of the Union and, on an order of the Raykom of the VKP(b), went [to work] as a policeman for 40 rubles a month. [...] To be in the [Gypsy] Union and work [there], I consider it my direct duty to the toiling Gypsies and the Party of workers and peasants. [...] With honour I will carry out everything envisaged by VKP(b) for the implementation of the organisation and self-determination of the Gypsy toiling people and the revival of the Gypsy nationality. (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763).

After taking a job as an agent (a lower position in the official hierarchy) in the Moscow Department of Criminal Investigation (MUUR, later famous as MUR), Mikhail Bezlyudskiy (at that time already married) continued his struggle against the leadership of the VSTs. Indicative of the validity of his accusation was the lawsuit against the

3 members of the leadership of VSTs. According to the court decisions Chair Andrey Taranov and Secretary Ivan Lebedev were sentenced to six months of correctional labour (subsequently the sentences were overturned) for economic violations of the Union, and Mikhail Bezlyudskiy was acquitted (Вечерняя Москва, 1927, p. 4).

The leadership of the VSTs, in its Opinion (on behalf of the Founding Members) sent to the Soviet institutions in July 18, 1927 (almost immediately after the court decision), accused “former members of the Board Comrades Bezlyudskiy and Agva” of their “dirty deeds” for which they were removed by the leadership of the Union GARF, f. 393, op. 43 A, d. 17–63. In parentheses, Agva is perhaps the most mysterious figure in the history of the VSTs. His rare surname is from the Caucasus, and nothing more is known about him – neither his first name, nor whether he is a Roma (probably not), nor when and why he was involved in the leadership of the VSTs, and in what quality (perhaps as an “expert”).

Bezlyudskiy himself continued his struggle, and in his Statement to ON VTsIK of October 26, 1927, he again alerted that despite the recommendations made by the Soviet institutions, “[A.] Taranov, [I.] Lebedev, S. Polyakov, D. Polyakov and others sit in the board of VSTs, as it was before”, and the shortcomings in the activity of VSTs were not eliminated, but continued to exist (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 140, d. 498). In an attempt to save the VSTs, ON VTsIK proposed to elect Mikhail Bezlyudskiy (Ibid.) for Chair of the Union in the place of Andrey Taranov, but the proposal did not materialise and the VSTs was eventually liquidated.

One might assume that after the liquidation of the VSTs in 1928, there would be more peace in Mikhail Bezlyudskiy's life, but the opposite is happening. According to Bezlyudskiy himself in 1928, after completing short-term courses for teachers, MONO sent him to a Gypsy school that had opened in Maryina Roshcha (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Михаил Безлюдский). However, there is an interesting fact from his biography, about which he is silent, which was brought to our attention by our colleague Viktor Shapoval. As Bezlyudskiy himself wrote in his article *My Literary Way* (Нэво дром, 1932e, pp. 22–23), the first poem he wrote was in 1929 in the Corrective Labour Colony in Liazonovo (now a suburb of Moscow). Judging by his numerous publications in the prison's newspapers *To the Labour Dormitory*, he was in Taganka Prison in Moscow and in Corrective Labour Colony in Liazonovo during the period 1928–1929. No information has been found on what grounds he was convicted, probably (given the minimum sentence) it was a minor offence that was clearly not political in nature; but in any case, this did not in any way affect his career as a Gypsy activist. On the contrary, he enjoyed the particular confidence of the Party and the Soviet institutions that sent him, to a leadership position, to the Gypsy selsoviet and kolkhoz of the North Caucasus (see below).

In 1930 Mikhail Bezlyudskiy joined as an actor the emerging Gypsy State Theatre *Romen* (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Михаил Безлюдский). Moreover, the first public performance of the new theatre in May 1931 included two parts – the scene *Yesterday and Today* by Edward Sholok and *Ethnographic Sketches* written by Mikhail Bezlyudskiy

(Ром-Лебедев, 1990, p. 173). It should be noted here that de facto Mikhail Bezlyudskiy was the only one among the leading Roma activists who know from his own experience the Gypsy realities and cultural traditions that are related to the nomadic way of life (some of the others were nomads only as children, and most were settled urban dwellers for generations).

From 1931 Mikhail Bezlyudskiy worked as an editor in the national departments of the State Publishing House for Fiction Literature (Goslitizdat) and State Publishing House of Agricultural Literature (Selkhozgiz) for publishing fiction and agricultural literature in Romani language (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Михаил Безлюдский). This was the time when he developed an active literary and journalistic activity.

Mikhail Bezlyudskiy's literary, publicistic and journalistic legacy is impressive. It is not only large in volume, but also very diverse in terms of genre, and almost all of its publications were published in the Romani language. His first publications were in the first issue of the Gypsy journal *Nevo Drom*, where his article *Чюрден фелда* (literally 'to throw away the field', in sense 'to abandon nomadism') was published, calling on Gypsy nomads to settle down and create their own Gypsy kolkhozes (Нэво дром, 1930б, p. 8), as well as his poem *Ракирибэн е вьюгаса* (Story with Winter Storm) (Ibid., 1930а, p. 13). From here until the end of the journal in 1932, in almost all of the 19 issues published, there was at least one text by Mikhail Bezlyudskiy, who turned out to be one of the leading authors with the most publications (if not first in this list). It should be borne in mind that the editor-in-chief of the magazine was the former Chairman of the VSTs Andrey Taranov, with whom Bezlyudskiy was until recently in a sharp and protracted conflict, i.e. the two have forgotten (or at least left in the background) their previous debates in the name of the higher common goal pursued – the civic emancipation of the Gypsies in the USSR.

Mikhail Bezlyudskiy's publications in the journal *Nevo drom* covered a wide range of topics and genres. This included both journalistic coverages of current events with a focus on the achievements and problems of Gypsies in various fields (national Gypsy kolkhozes, artels and production cooperatives, schools, theatre, literature, etc.), as well as journalistic and propaganda materials on key themes of Soviet policy towards the Gypsies, and of the development of the Gypsy movement. Bezlyudskiy's creative literary work includes not only poems and short stories but also a now-forgotten specific genre that stands on the borders between literature, musical theatre, publicistic and the media. This is the so-called 'live newspaper', which was a stage performance (usually performed in front of a Gypsy audience in various clubs), in which the main messages and slogans addressed to the illiterate audience were presented, accompanied by music, songs and artistic recitations (Нэво дром, 1930д, p. 14).

The diversity in the work of Mikhail Bezlyudskiy was also expressed in his published books. He was the author of four collections of short stories – *Broken Whip* (Безлюдско, 1932b), *Horse* (Безлюдско, 1933а), *Shoulder to Shoulder* (1933е), and *Wish for Life* (Безлюдско, 1936) – as well as a children's book (Безлюдско, 1932а) – *Misha, the Little Octobrist* ('Little Octobrists' was a soviet organisation for children between 7 and 9 years).

He also participated in the two almanacks of poetry in the Romani language (Германо, 1931; 1934e) with his poems, and published an author's collection of poetry – *New Life* (Безлюдско, 1933c). Mikhail Bezlyudskiy (together with Alexander German) was a translator of the text of the world proletarian anthem, *Internationale* (Нэво дром, 1932c, p. 1; Пандж массова гиля, 1932, pp. 2–3), which was the national anthem of the USSR (and also of its Union Republics) until 1944.

Mikhail Bezlyudskiy also developed a tumultuous activity in the field of publicistic, the result of which was three books: *What Gave the Soviet Power to the Gypsy Women* (Безлюдско, 1932c), *Combating Gypsy Domestic Crimes in the USSR* (Безлюдско, 1933b), and *For the Kolkhoz against Nomadism* (Безлюдско, 1933d). Together with Alexander German, they prepared the book *Forward to Work: What Gypsies Need to Know Upon Entering a Collective Farm* (Безлюдско, & Германо, 1933), which combines propaganda (the significance of the October Revolution and Soviet rule for Gypsies), agitation (a call for Gypsy nomads to settle down and set up their own national kolkhozes), and numerous specific practical pieces of advice (how to register Gypsy kolkhoz, how to keep records, how to cultivate the land, etc.).

The whole work of Mikhail Bezlyudskiy is characterised by an extremely high degree of political propaganda and agitation, and in this respect, there is almost no difference between publicistic and fiction and, in both cases, through different literary genres, the same leading ideas were proclaimed (or, more precisely, communist postulates and slogans from this historical period) and transmitted by various means of expression. From a comparative point of view, in this respect, he does not differ significantly from the other leading authors of the newly created national Romani literature and differs from them mainly in the directness of the class-party messages in his work. This main characteristic of Romani literature in the early USSR has its explanation – like today, the civic engagement of authors (poets, writers, scholars, etc.) was highly valued and supported by the powerful of the day; this factor proved to be even stronger in the case of the Gypsy literature, which was completely dependent on the favour of the Soviet authorities.

The main and clearly expressed leading theme in the texts of Mikhail Bezlyudskiy (both in journalism and in fiction) was that of the internal class division in the community, and more specifically of the so-called kulaks. In this respect he is not unique, this topic was also a principal one for many of the works of other leading authors (e.g. Alexander German and Ivan Rom-Lebedev). The very idea of a class divide among the Gypsies was a direct reflection of the dominant ideology and relevant public language in the USSR at that time, leading to attempts to define the class structure of the Gypsy community in the spirit of Marxism-Leninism. As already said above, in 1928 Andrey Taranov proposed the concept of an existence of the 'embryo of communism' in the Gypsy tabor, which made it easy for Gypsies to move to collective agriculture. Very soon after, this was changed, in the spirit of Stalin's thesis from the late 1920s on sharpening the class struggle in the process of strengthening the socialist state, the concept of the need to combat the 'class enemy' within the Gypsy community became evident. In this

category, united under the label 'kulaks' were declared before all the leaders of Gypsy tabors (nomadic or settled in big cities), as well as the heads of former Gypsy choirs, and also the so-called Gypsy courts have also been included there, condemned as a traditional institution through which the exploited Gypsy masses are kept under control (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 28, l. 194–199; f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 27, l. 197–221; f. 10035, op. 1, d. 74091, l. 188–205; RGAE, f. 5675, op. 1, d. 142, l. 15–17; *НЭВО ДРОМ*, 1932a, p. 12). This interpretation reflected the universal slogan 'to destroy the kulak as a class' that was a leading one during the mass collectivisation of agriculture, which began in the late 1920s and lasted until the early 1930s.

In his texts, Mikhail Bezlyudskiy finds and exposes class enemies among the Gypsies everywhere – among the nomads, among those living in the cities, in the Gypsy kolkhozes, even among the Gypsy activists themselves. Concerning the enemies among nomadic Gypsies, namely the leaders of the Gypsy camps, he limited himself to condemning them in his literary work. This is understandable – he was in this environment for a short time and left it more than ten years ago, and, obviously, he had no specific information (including names) other than general ideological patterns. However, it was different for the areas he knows well and where he pointed to specific personalities. Such was, for example, the case with the article with the revealing title *There is No Place for Kulaks in the Kolkhoz*, signed with the initials MB, in which the chairman of the kolkhoz *Svoboda* (Freedom) in Kardimovo, in the Smolensk region, namely Efrosiniya (Ruzya) Tumashevich and her father, were declared kulaks (*НЭВО ДРОМ*, 1930a, pp. 9–10). In this key were also two notes signed by the author with the pseudonym 'Feldytko' (Nomad). The first one under the title *To Destroy the Kulaks as a Class* the charges against the Tumashevich family are reiterated (*НЭВО ДРОМ*, 1931h, p. 14). In the second one *Are There Gypsy Kulaks in Moscow* the discovered 'kulaks' in the ranks of Moscow Gypsies were Egor Polyakov (the head of the famous Gypsy choir), Mikhail Masalyskiy, Yakov Vishnyakov and others (*НЭВО ДРОМ*, 1931g, pp. 14–15). Another article against Mikhail Masalyskiy, with the eloquent title *The Class Enemy Does Not Sleep*, is dedicated to exposing the kulaks among the Gypsy choirs too (*НЭВО ДРОМ*, 1932a, p. 13). The class approach is the leading one for Mikhail Bezlyudskiy in the overall assessment of Nikolay Kruchinin's famous music studio, which was self-defined as the "ethnographic studio of old Gypsy singing". In an article entitled *More Class Alertness on the Theatre Front* (*НЭВО ДРОМ*, 1932d, pp. 10–11), he described her repertoire as "kabatskiy" (i.e. belongs to pubs) and associated it with the kulaks, who were to be destroyed as a class shortly (a well-known slogan in Soviet politics at the time). Mikhail Bezlyudskiy criticised even the famous theatre specialist Vsevolod Vsevolodskiy-Gerngross, director of the Ethnographic Theatre in Leningrad, on the stage of which in 1932 two performances were shown – *Gypsy Way* and *Gypsy Songs and Dances*. The main accusation against these performances, made by Bezlyudskiy, was that they did not show the transition from the nomadic way of life to collective agricultural labour (*Ibid.*), and this condemnation put an end to attempts to break the monopoly of the Theatre *Romen* as a national Gypsy Theatre.

Of course, in terms of historical and ethnographic realities, the concept of the existence of class stratification in the Gypsy community is completely untenable, and from today's point of view, it sounds more like an absurd joke. Property and power stratification in the Gypsy tabor (among the nomads) or in the Gypsy choir (among the musical elite), as far as they existed, were within the old, "traditional" forms, and were too far from the key Marxist-Leninist notions of classes and class struggle. It is even less likely that those Gypsies who have moved to a sedentary lifestyle (mainly in northwestern Russia and Ukraine) would become so established within local rural communities that they would become kulaks and 'exploiters' of their countrymen. However, still in the mass collectivisation of agriculture (1928–1932), when one of the leading slogans was "liquidation of the kulaks as a class" (Сталин, 1947а, pp. 178–183), and when were deported from their native lands more than 2 million people (Земсков, 1990, pp. 3–17; 2005), it turns out that among the repressed were also Gypsies.

Such was the case with Anna Kozlovskaya, married into a Russian family, from the village of Koshiorovo, Pesочно-Dubrovskiy village council, Kozhevnikovskiy rayon, West Siberian kray, who were sentenced to exile in 1932 (Жертвы политического террора в СССР). Of course, this case is clearly an exception, but it is indicative of the need to avoid generalising conclusions based on randomly selected cases, without attracting sufficient comparative material and without taking into account the general historical context.

Seen in a historical context, however, the concept of the existence of class struggle in the Gypsy community seems different in terms of specific time and place (early USSR). The civic emancipation of the community involved, first and foremost, an equal integration into the social realities among which they lived, and it is quite clear from this point of view that Gypsy activists used the language of the Soviet public discourse. For them, apart from the Soviet realities, there were no other alternatives, which means they needed to accept these realities as they were; therefore, the processes of Roma civic emancipation in the early USSR should accordingly be analysed from this point of view. Gypsy activism in the conditions of the early USSR developed within the framework set and limited by Soviet ideology. Although impressive, the Roma movement did not prove to be able to reach its full potential in these conditions. Despite this limitation, there have been isolated attempts in this direction. In 1931, a large article was published in the journal *Nevo drom* with the indicative title *About Work among Gypsies* (Нэво дром, 1931j, pp. 5–7; Marushiakova & Popov, 2021a, pp. 808–816). The article is signed with the pseudonym Kalysh (Gypsy personal name). Its author, at least so far, cannot be identified, because the style and content of the text differ significantly from the other texts of the leading Gypsy activists at the time. The unknown author naturally conforms to the historical context, spirit and phraseology of the time, but unlike other similar publications by leading Gypsy activists that focused on specific contemporary issues, he placed the problems of Roma civic emancipation strategically and outlines his vision for its future development. The editors of the journal accompanied the publication with an editorial note stating that the article is published in a discussion format and that it

is expected other readers of the magazine to express their opinion on the issues raised (Ibid.). However, the invitation for discussion remained unanswered, and the proposed idea of publicly discussing the strategically important issues facing the Roma movement did not lead to any continuation or development. Instead, the Gypsy activists entered the well-known regime of internal struggles from the time of the VSTs, for which the Soviet institutions supervising the Gypsy movement were again called upon to be arbiters.

In 1932, Mikhail Bezlyudskiy and Georgiy Lebedev sent a memorandum to the Soviet institutions, in which many critical remarks were made about the journal *Nevo drom* (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 27, l. 243–247). In this memorandum (sent as a copy to the editor-in-chief Andrey Taranov), an analysis was made of the content of the published materials (up to No. 5 of 1932), based on which the individual specific shortcomings were formulated in 16 points – starting from “Insufficient quality materials on land management from the point of view of the attraction the Gypsies to labour” and ending with the statement that in the article *About the Work among Tilling Gypsies* (which was, in fact, a translation in Romani of the Decree of the Presidium of VTsIK of 01 April 1932 *On the Situation with Work in the Services for Toiler Gypsies*), published in the last issue of the journal, “a gross political mistake was made inadvertently” (Ibid.). Based on these critical remarks, it was concluded:

The existence of the Gypsy journal *Nevo drom* plays an important role in the organisation of the thought and class consciousness of the Gypsy toiling masses.[...] However, the journal, which set itself the goal of helping to attract Gypsies to work, organize them into kolkhozes and raise the general cultural level, largely failed in this task. For our part, we believe that the journal should be rebuilt to eliminate the above shortcomings [...] (Ibid., l. 243–244).

This memorandum was also supported by letters from other Gypsy activists (such as K. E. Matyushenko and an unknown author, signed with the pseudonym ‘Sibiryak’), who noted numerous shortcomings in the work of the journal *Nevo drom* (GARF, f. P 1235, op.123, d. 27), and they played their part in the liquidation of the journal. Ivan Tomakov’s (at that time already an instructor at ON VTsIK) made attempt to replace the journal with a Romani-language newspaper, published three times a month, that lasted for years and ultimately proved unsuccessful (see below).

However, Mikhail Bezlyudskiy remained outside these activities because a new, radical change took place in his life – he left the capital Moscow and moved to another, completely new for him sphere in the field of Roma civic emancipation.

In the autumn of 1932, Mikhail Bezlyudskiy at the initiative of the publishing house *Molodaya Gvardiya* was sent by VTsIK to inspect the Gypsy kolkhozes in Southern Russia. He visited the Gypsy kolkhozes *Nevo drom* (New Way) in the khutor of Novo-Velichkovsky, Novo-Titarovsky rayon, Azov-Black Sea region; *Trud Romen* (Gypsy Labour), located near the town of Mineralnye Vody in the North Caucasus region, for the condition of which he wrote a detailed report, which was sent to ON VTsIK, Kolkhozcenter and the journal *Nevo drom* (RGAE, f. 7446, op. 13, d. 83, l. 2–6). In this

report, he highlighted two main problems facing these collective farms that are halting their successful development – the kulak Gypsies who have taken over their leadership and the lack of support from local authorities. At the same time, Bezlyudskiy not only exposed his findings, such as:

The kolkhoz *Nevo drom* [...] is clogged with a criminal element [...] horse thieves feel like the owners of the collective farm [...] there is not a single Gypsy party member on the collective farm [...]

but something more he immediately acted to solve the issues:

[...] during my visit to the kolkhoz, I had to [...], together with the kolkhoz board, through a general meeting of collective farmers, withdraw from the kolkhoz three merchants (Nikolay Lebedev, Ignat Ivanenko, Pavel Ivanenko), [who] were systematically engaged in horse-trading on the bazaar, which weakened labour discipline among the kolkhoz workers. (Ibid., l. 4).

After getting acquainted with the situation in Southern Russia, in July 1933 Mikhail Bezlyudskiy was sent there by ON VTsIK as chairman of the kolkhoz *Trud Romen* (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Михаил Безлюдский). This new appointment was part of the general strategy of Ivan Tokmakov, an instructor at ON VTsIK, to create a Gypsy national rayon that would later grow into a Gypsy autonomous oblast or even to a republic, which will be discussed in more detail below. As early as 1932, the kolkhoz *Trud Romen*, which until then had been located on the outskirts of the town of Mineralnye Vody, was moved to the nearby village of Kangly, inhabited mainly by Nogay Tatars; in the same year, the first (and the only one) Gypsy National selsoviet was established there (GARF, f. A 385, op. 17, d. 2037; Бугай, 2015, pp. 48–49). It was the Gypsy village council selsoviet and the Gypsy kolkhoz that had to be strengthened, developed and become the core of the future Gypsy autonomous territorial-administrative unit. Mikhail Bezlyudskiy was entrusted with this responsible task. With his publicistic and journalistic work, he became an authority in the issues of kolkhoz endowment and thus received the opportunity to put his ideas into practice in this direction. Mikhail Bezlyudskiy devoted a lot of space in his autobiography to recall his activities as chairman of the kolkhoz *Trud Romen* and at the same time as chairman of the Gypsy National selsoviet in the village of Kangly (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Михаил Безлюдский). This was, in fact, the brightest and most memorable period of his entire turbulent and tumultuous life, when he was the main engine and leader of processes that were supposed to lead to a complete and radical turn in the life of the Gypsies in the USSR.

The kolkhoz *Trud Romen* was established in 1928 (RGAE, f. 5675, op. 1, d. 168; Терек, 1928, p. 4) or in 1929 (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 793); in the village of Suvorovskaya, Mineralvodsky rayon (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Михаил Безлюдский). The organiser of this kolkhoz was Nikolay Lebedev. The kolkhoz consisted of about 120 Roma

families, with the overwhelming majority of Roma previously living in the cities of Krasnodar, Maykop, Armavir, Kropotkin, Rostov-on-Don (Ibid.), i.e. the kolkhoz was not created by Gypsy nomads, but by Gypsies settled in the cities. The description given by Mikhail Bezlyudsky on the history of the kolkhoz is as follows:

For the organisation of the Gypsy kolkhoz *Trud Roman*, the Soviet State released a huge amount of money loans for the purchase of agricultural machines, implements, productive and working livestock. The kolkhoz was assigned to forever about two thousand hectares of land and land convenient for farming. However, this land area was not cultivated enough. Low yields were taken, and the state grain supply plan was not fulfilled from year to year [Maybe that's why the kolkhoz was moved to another place – authors note].

For about three years, the chairman of the kolkhoz Lebedev N. I., who was surrounded by unscrupulous Gypsies-collective farmers, through all sorts of machinations received large sums of money from the state bank and spent them not for their intended purpose. So, for example, Lebedev N. I. personally gave out money for the organisation of magnificent weddings, christenings, etc. As a result of the lack of proper control on the part of regional organisations, Lebedev N. I. organised a pedigree horse farm at kolkhoz, which later turned into a source of enrichment for Lebedev N. I. and his entourage. This was done in the following way: Lebedev N. I. supplied his confidants with the relevant certificates, giving them large sums to travel to large cities to buy horses, ostensibly for a horse farm. Horses were bought and sent in wagons to other cities, where they were sold at speculative prices. Thus, Lebedev N. I. and his drinking companions amassed huge sums of money. [...]. The poor Gypsies working in the kolkhoz quickly figured out the face of their chairman. Lebedev N. I. and his entourage were exposed in speculation by Gypsies-collective farmers, and the horse farm was liquidated. Gypsies, collective farmers began to leave the kolkhoz. For his anti-state actions, N. I. Lebedev was put on trial but got off with a suspended sentence. (At the trial, he emphasized his illiteracy). Subsequently, it was established that Lebedev N. I. before the revolution was a big kulak, which in the city of Armavir had its own post office, inns and several residential buildings. (Ibid.).

Shortly after the removal of Nikolay Lebedev as chairman of the kolkhoz and his replacement with Mikhail Bezlyudskoy in 1933, in 1934 the latter also became chairman of the Gypsy National selsoviet which thus concentrated all power in his hands. The condition of the kolkhoz was desperate – only 11 Gypsy families remained, and the men in 7 of them were in prison or a corrective camp. Although Bezlyudskiy himself (as he admits) had never been engaged in agriculture before, he, with the help of the local authorities, managed to significantly improve the condition of the kolkhoz and the life of the collective farmers in a relatively short time. Significant loans were granted to the kolkhoz, agricultural machinery and equipment, working and domestic animals were purchased. The arable land with wheat and fodder for the animals had been expanded, a cow farm and a poultry farm were operating. The houses of the collective farmers were repaired and each family received a separate home. A primary school was opened, where Gypsy teachers sent from Moscow thought, as well as a crèche and a kindergarten for the children of the collective farmers. In the autumn of 1933, 17 families of nomadic Gypsies joined the kolkhoz, and in 1934 another 45 families. The same year for the first time, the plan for state

supplies of bread grain from the collective farm was successfully implemented, and each kolkhoz's family received as a premium its one own cow for milk (Ibid).

The improvement of the condition of the kolkhoz *Trud Romen* is undoubted, but this description is made by Bezlyudskiy himself, and therefore it is good to cross-check it also with an assessment "from the outside", i.e. from other, not directly involved persons. Here come the results of the inspection of the kolkhozes *Noviy put* (New Way), *Krasniy Romanes*, *Nevo drom* and *Trud Romen* ordered by VPK at SNK at USSR:

The general conclusion about Gypsy collective farmers is this: they live better than nomads but worse than other kolkhozes (the Russian ones), and therefore they need help with people, organisers and funds. (RGAE, f. 5675, op. 1, d. 141).

Along with his other activities, Mikhail Bezlyudskiy does not forget his journalistic past. He initiated the publication of two newspapers in the Romani language: *Пало большевистско колхозо* (About the Bolshevik's kolkhoz) edition of the MTS Political Department in Mineralnye Vody; and *Сталинцо* (Stalinist) edition on the Raykom of VKP(b) in Mineralnye Vody and Raykom of VTsSPS. During the sudden German offensive in the summer of 1942, Soviet authorities failed to evacuate local archives and libraries, and much of their contents were destroyed during the military occupation of the region, so only three numbers of these newspapers have been found so far. These are the first two issues of the *Пало большевистско колхозо* from May and August 1934 (i.e. it was published once every three months), and issue 3 (137) of *Сталинцо* from October 1935 (i.e. it went out twice a week). From these issues it can be seen that the members of the editorial board of these newspapers were Ivan Tokmakov, Mikhail Bezlyudskiy and Justus (cannot be identified), the main author is Bezlyudskiy himself, and their content was devoted mainly to the activities of the kolkhoz *Trud Romen*.

At the same time, the Soviet press ran a constant propaganda campaign, creating an image of *Trud Romen* as a model of a Gypsy kolkhoz. This propaganda began even earlier when two articles were published in the journal *Nevo drom*, devoted to the success of kolkhoz construction in the USSR on the example of the kolkhoz *Trud Romen*, authored by the French communist writer Paul Vaillant-Couturier (Нэво дром, 1931г, pp. 7–9) and of the Hungarian poet, writer and journalist Emil Madarász (Нэво дром, 1931р, pp. 11–14). This propaganda became especially active after Mikhail Bezlyudskiy took over the leadership of the kolkhoz. Nikolay Pankov's archives contain numerous clippings of publications in the Soviet press from the 1930s about Gypsy kolkhozes, most of which are dedicated to the *Trud Romen* collective farm, most of which focus on the role of Mikhail Bezlyudskiy for the successful development of the kolkhoz (ЛАНВ, ф. Николай Панков).

Mikhail Bezlyudskiy's activity as chairman of the kolkhoz *Trud Romen* was promoted by the Soviet state not only in the press but also with other means. *Trud Romen* turned out to be the only Gypsy kolkhoz invited to participate in the Second All-Union Congress

of Collective Farmers-Shock Workers, hold solemnly in Moscow (February 11–17, 1935), with Bezlyudskiy himself a delegate to the Congress. Along with him, a woman delegate from the kolkhoz *Trud Romen* was the kolkhoz's 'udarnik' (shock-worker, who accomplish super-productive, enthusiastic labour) Evgenia Tsigunenka, who was included in the congressional delegation that met with Lenin's widow, Nadezhda Krupskaya (Всесоюзный съезд, 1935).

Of particular interest is the participation of Mikhail Bezlyudskiy in the work of the Meeting at the Council of Nationalities at the TsIK USSR *On the Questions of the Employment of Toiling Nomadic Gypsies and Their Cultural and Economic Services*, held in Moscow on January 4 and 5, 1936 (for more details see below). This meeting was attended by representatives of the central Soviet institutions working on these issues, as well as representatives of existing Gypsy institutions – the Gypsy Pedagogical College, the Theatre *Romen*, Gypsy artels from Moscow, Gypsy kolkhozes from the country. In his speech at this meeting, Mikhail Bezlyudskiy stated:

[...] About allocation of the rayon for Gypsies. If Gypsies have their own territory, their own newspaper, the work will go very differently. The most suitable area for the settlement of Gypsies would be the Stavropol area. Now there are a lot of wandering Gypsies because in this area there are big markets. [...] About relocation to my kolkhoz. I can take 150–200 families, but on one condition – if assistance is provided with regard to finishing the plumbing of water pipes, which has been under construction for a number of years, and with timber. (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 794, l. 91).

The public reaction to this statement by the participants in the meeting is indicative:

Comrade Pankov (Gypsy writer): [...] Comrade Bezlyudskiy is not an ordinary Gypsy, he knows the Constitution, he will be able to step up on anyone's throat (i.e. to convince anyone in a dispute), but there are kolkhozes where there are no such Bezlyudskiys, and there the situation is horrible. (Ibid., l. 92). [...]

Khatskevich: [...] Comrade Bezlyudskiy is a Communist, activist and Gypsy writer, he apparently did not pass any university before the October Revolution, I'm certain of it. But he, and other comrades like him working towards self-education have succeeded in many aspects and have become big people not only among Gypsies but also for our common task of the socialist construction in the USSR. Now all nationalities, including Gypsies, have free access to any educational institution. But you need to learn from work too, and many of you do it. (Ibid., l. 117).

Of particular importance here is the assessment of Alexander Khatskevich (1895–1943), at that time Secretary of the Council of Nationalities at the TsIK USSR, who chaired the meeting, which laid the foundation for the work on the establishment of a Gypsy territorial-administrative unit to later come to the basis for the future Gypsy Autonomous Republic (Marushiakova & Popov, 2021b, pp. 910–918). The development of events in this direction is described by Mikhail Bezlyudskiy himself:

In 1935 I was invited to Moscow for a meeting at the ON VTsIK on the employment of nomadic Gypsies. At this meeting, I made a proposal to make the kolkhoz *Trud Romen* an Exemplary kolkhoz to attract more nomadic Gypsies. And in 1936, the Government adopted the decision about creation on the territory of the Gypsy Village Council in Mineralnye Vody district, on the basis of the kolkhoz *Trud Romen*, an exemplary socialist town. In the same year, the projects of this settlement were designed, and in the fall of the same year trains with the round and sawn wood began to arrive in the kolkhoz *Trud Romen*. The construction of the socialist town was ordered to the Resettlement Department of the Stavropol Krai Executive Committee. Builders began to arrive. In the spring of 1936, the foundations for the first 20 single-family houses were laid. The news of the socialist town construction on the kolkhoz *Trud Romen* flew nomadic Gypsies roaming within the Krasnodarsky krai and Stavropolsky krai, Rostov and Grozny regions. The Gypsy tabors moved to kolkhozes. (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Михаил Безлюдский).

This description of Mikhail Bezlyudskiy as a whole is confirmed in archival documents. The only thing that is not clear is the case with the so-called “Exemplary socialist town”. The idea of building ‘socialist towns’ was introduced and discussed from the 1920s to May 1930 when the Politburo of the TsK VKP(b) rejected it. The idea reflected a search for the establishment of efficient and socialist living spaces, with communal housing, communal services, socialisation of the way of life, etc., especially for Siberia and the Far East, where new cities were to be built. In the archives, no documents witnessing a government decision to create such a ‘socialist town’ based on the kolkhoz *Trud Romen* were found. Such an idea had also not been discussed at any meeting in the VTsIK concerning the activities aimed at creating a Gypsy national rayon or county. This idea may have been present among the Gypsy activists or, more likely, Bezlyudskiy himself had hoped that would happen.

The implementation of the decisions to establish a Gypsy national territorial-administrative unit was entrusted to the NKVD (see below). Trains with round and sawn wood, for the construction of houses and outbuildings, were sent as a priority to the Gypsy kolkhozes in the period 1936–37. The organisation of these deliveries was entrusted to the Resettlement Department of the NKVD, using the resources of the NKVD GULAG (for the deliveries in the region of the North Caucasus see RGAE, f. 5675, op. 1, d. 149). At the same time, the NKVD structures were intensively preparing lists of Gypsies (including more than 200 families) in various places in the Kursk region who have expressed a desire to move to the kolkhoz *Trud Romen* (Ibid.).

All these activities end up in vain, according to Bezlyudskiy:

Unfortunately, the construction of the socialist town was stopped by the People's Commissar of Agriculture of the USSR in 1937. After the order of the Resettlement Department of the Executive Committee of Stavropol krai all wood was removed from the territory of the kolkhoz *Trud Romen* to the kolkhozes of Mineralnye Vody district. (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Михаил Безлюдский).

No such decision is known to have been issued by the Narkomzem, and it seems unlikely that such a decision would have been made at the level of Resettlement Department of the Executive Committee of Stavropol kray, without coordination with the other higher institutions. In any case, this development had a very severe effect on Mikhail Bezlyudsky himself, who described this period of his life as follows:

For me it was a shock and, as I fell ill of nervous causes, I couldn't work in the kolkhoz. After a three-month-long treatment, I went to Mineralnye Vody Party Committee with a request to transfer me to work in Mineralnye Vody regional [...]. Thus, my main dream could not be realised. (Ibid.).

After the resignation of Mikhail Bezlyudskiy from the post of Chairman of the Kolkhoz *Trud Romen*, the kolkhoz itself continued to exist, but its activities ceased to be promoted in the public sphere. The end of the existence of kolkhoz occurred during the Second World War when in 1942 parts of the North Caucasus region were occupied by the German army. In fact, the Second World War put an end to the existence of many of the Gypsy kolkhozes, which were located in territories occupied by the German army. The remaining Gypsy kolkhozes, which were in regions that were not occupied, ceased to exist after the war.

Despite the radical turn in the national policy of the USSR, they were not closed by a special administrative act, and this happened in the course of the complete reorganisation of the kolkhoz's system in the USSR after the war when there was a mass consolidation of existing kolkhozes. After the war, in the new post-war realities, everyone forgot about the existence of a Gypsy selsoviet in the Kangly village. Ironically, this selsoviet was not officially closed until June 12, 1952 (!), when Gypsies no longer lived there (and had not lived there since the war years and German occupation) (GARF, f. A 385, op. 17, d. 2037).

The history of Gypsy kolkhozes in the early USSR continues to be poorly studied, although significant progress has been made in recent years and several new, interesting studies have emerged in this direction (Кишин, 2005; Истягин, 2015; Бугай, 2015; Каменских, 2017; Черных & Каменских, 2020). However, in the generalising research of the Gypsies in the USSR, the mantra of the existence of 52 Gypsy kolkhozes in the early USSR is repeated almost everywhere in contemporary academic literature. It is not clear where this figure comes from, however, it is sure that it entered mass scholar circulation after the first publication of paragraphs from a text by Nikolay Pankov, devoted to Ivan Tokmakov (LANB, f. Николай Панков; Друц & Гесслер, 1990, p. 285). It is hardly possible to give an accurate and clear answer to the question of how many Gypsy kolkhozes existed in the early USSR. For some of them, there are only mentions in the press; in other cases, there have been repeated changes of names, relocations to other settlements, divisions into separate parts, mixed nationalities kolkhozes, uncertain data, etc.

In any case, in 1935–36, when the Soviet state paid serious attention to the Gypsy kolkhozes, their number in the numerous administrative reports varied between 20 and 30 (see e.g. GARF, f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 793, l. 6–8; f. P 1235, op. 130, d. 5). These reports usually lack information on Central Asian republics or they mention only Roma kolkhozes, not those of local Gypsies (collectively called *Lyuli* or *Jugi*). In general, the data for this region also varies greatly – in the reports are mentioned as many as 18 Gypsy kolkhozes only in the Uzbek SSR (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 794, p. 81) although, according to other sources, their number was much smaller throughout the whole region of Central Asia.

Given the real number of Gypsies in the early USSR, one can also evaluate how effective was the Soviet policy toward them. The Soviet archives contain a wealth of information about Gypsies with arranged employment (in Gypsy kolkhozes and artels, as well as working in various fields of production), which cannot be analysed here, so we will give as an example only the summarised data obtained as a result of a special study organised by the ON VTsIK in 1936: of the 6,220 Gypsy families living in the USSR, 1,100 were organized in the Gypsy kolkhozes, and 1,020 worked in the Gypsy artels and production (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 130, d. 5). It is striking, however, that another study, conducted at almost the same time (1936–1937) and organised by the VPK, reported different data – 1,425 families in 45 Gypsy kolkhozes, out of a total of 9,047 Gypsy families (Платунов, 1976, p. 271). Comparing these data with others (e.g. the number of Gypsy families in individual kolkhozes), as well as with the total number of Gypsies in the USSR at that time, it is clear that the share of Gypsies not covered by Soviet politics (mostly nomads) was quite high.

There are some vague moments in the information about the life of Mikhail Bezlyudskiy after he left the post of chairman of the kolkhoz *Trud Roman*. In an interview with Vladimir Ivashchenko (conducted in 1963), he said that he was chairman of the kolkhoz until 1939 (Иващенко, 2011, p. 30), and a year later, in his Autobiography (written for Nikolay Satkevich in 1964), he explained his resignation by the failure of timber supplies in 1937, after which he was assigned to work for the regional newspaper *For Stakhanovit's Labour* [‘Stakhanovit labour’ refers to labour modelled after the example of miner Alexey Stakhanov, who was known for producing more than it was required, by working harder and more efficient] in Mineralnye vody. In the newspaper’s editorial office he worked as the head of the agricultural department and for his successful work was sent as a participant in the All-Union Agriculture Exhibition (later Exhibition of Achievements of National Economy – VDNKh) in Moscow in 1939 (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Михаил Безлюдский). At the same time, Bezlyudskiy maintained correspondence with Elisaveta Muravyova, who was serving as a secretary at the Gypsy writers’ section at the SSP on publishing issues. In this correspondence, as a place of work and address for correspondence he indicated several places – Rozovskiy selsoviet, kolkhoz *New Way*; the city of Georgievsk, editorial office of the newspaper *Stalinskoe slovo* (Stalin’s Word), head of the agricultural department); and even again (in 1941) chairman of the kolkhoz *Trud*

Romen (Sharoval, 2021c; Махотина & Шаповал, 2022). He was probably reassigned as a nomenclature cadre by the local Party organisation to work in these various places. In any case, it is certain that he had not lost the trust of the Party, on the contrary, in 1941, after 19 (sic!) years as a candidate member of the VKP(b), he was accepted as a member of the Party (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Михаил Безлюдский).

On April 7, 1941, two weeks before Germany's attack on the USSR, Kraykom of VKP(b) sent Mikhail Bezlyudskiy as responsible editor (i.e., this was a career advancement) of a large newspaper published in one of the biggest grain farms in the Naursky district (Махотина & Шаповал, 2022). Thus, Bezlyudskiy had a chance to be on the territory (now part of the Chechen Republic of the Russian Federation), which was not occupied by the German army during the war. Mikhail Bezlyudskiy worked as the editor of the Naursky's district newspaper *Leninskiy put* (Lenin's Way) until 1947 when a new turn took place in his life. According to him:

In 1947, the TsK VKP(b) commission arrived at Naursky's rayon to check the accomplishment of the TsK VKP(b) decree on the safety of collective farm property. The commission found a gross violation of this Resolution by the leadership of the rayon. All the rayon's leaders, including myself, were dismissed from their jobs and expelled from the party. Some of them were put on trial, and I did not escape this fate. And all my fault was that in the kolkhozes of the rayon I bought food at a cheap price, not at a market price. I was charged for buying 15 kg of flour, 2 litres of vegetable oil and 4 kg of meat. I was sentenced by a people court to 3 years [corrective labour]. (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Михаил Безлюдский).

Mikhail Bezlyudskiy served the punishment in the agricultural open colony in the former village of Ostashkovo, now part of the city of Omsk. From the very first day there he worked as a trainer of the prisoners and had the right to freely go to the city. In 1950 he returned to his family in the village of Naurskaya, where he started working in the Naursky cotton farm as secretary of the directorate of the sovkhov, which means that despite his conviction, he retained his lower nomenclature positions. In the light of these positions, his further career became clear. In 1952, he moved to the Rostov oblast to work at the Volga-Don cotton state farm which was newly created on the virgin land. He worked there as a personnel inspector until 1956. In 1956, the Rostov sovkhov trust sent him to work in the city of Krasniy Sulin in the Construction and Installation Directorate as a senior inspector of the human resources department. Here he worked in this position until 1961 when he retired because of old age (Ibid.).

Mikhail Bezlyudskiy retired as the lowest nomenclature cadre with a pension of 30 rubles, thus in order to increase his subsistence, he started working at an augmented concrete products plant as a gatekeeper at the checkpoint, with a salary of 40 rubles per month (Ibid.). He died in Krasny Sulin in 1970.

In the last years of his life, Mikhail Bezlyudskiy made his life balance, which he reflected in his Autobiography:

Thanks to the Soviet government, which made me, a former nomadic Gypsy, a citizen of the country [...] – I tried to give everything to my Gypsy people. (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Михаил Безлюдский).

It hardly makes sense to add anything more to his words, because they best characterise his life.

Georgiy Lebedev

Elena Marushiakova, Vesselin Popov and Viktor Shapoval

Georgiy Pavlovich Lebedev (1900–1969), known also diminutively as Genya or Gesha, was one of the interesting figures of Roma activism, whose fate at certain points was unfavourably different from the life of other activists. Nevertheless, or perhaps because of this, it is important to present his portrait, since he had his own vision of Roma activism reflected in his many-sided activities and artistic creativity.

Unfortunately, we have no information about the family, place of birth and education of Georgiy Lebedev. One can only rely on incomplete data from Valdemar Kalinin (Калинин, 2005, p. 205), which gives those years of his life. Ivan Rom-Lebedev indicated that Georgiy Lebedev worked in the choir conducted by Yegor Polyakov (Ром-Лебедев, 1990, p. 165). From this point, we can conclude that he belonged to the extensive and ramified Lebedev family or clan, who worked in the Moscow Gypsy choirs located in Petrovskiy Park.

Georgiy Lebedev was married to Maria Yegorovna Polyakova (1904–1976), the daughter of Yegor Polyakov. The marriage of Georgiy and Maria was also a creative union of two poets and writers. Georgiy's wife Maria Polyakova began to publish her literary works (including even the first Gypsy comics) at the same time as him (Полякова, 1930ab; 1931; Романы зоря, 1929b, p. 49; 1930e, p. 63). It seems that this couple had the lucky opportunity to discuss the problems of strengthening the new written Romani language and mutually support each other in their efforts as writers. This is evidenced by the common distinctive features of the specific dialect they used. For example, they had a unanimous position regarding the Romani term for the genre of the written story *ракирибэн*, later authors use *роспхэныбэн* (Шаповал, 2020c, pp. 232–233).

Georgiy Lebedev's career was initially facilitated by several factors that depended little on him. He belonged to the Moscow Gypsy choir family, educated and intelligent enough to write poems, and familiar on a first-hand basis with the gambling life in the capital city. He was a son-in-law of a most influential leader of one of the Gypsy choirs in Petrovskiy Park, Yegor Alekseevich Polyakov (1871–193?), who was a wise and pragmatic man, who understood in time that a return to the old order was no longer possible, and thus made the decision to look for their place in the new state structure.

However, the personal traits of our hero shouldn't be underestimated either. He was not an ordinary "dancer and guitarist", as Ivan Rom-Lebedev mentioned in his book (Ром-Лебедев, 1990, p. 160), he was not just an energetic, initiative and ambitious youth, but he was also ready to take risks in order to comprehend and achieve new things, and he had a good eye to see them.

Already at the early stages of his social and artistic activities Georgiy Lebedev gained very quickly a reputation of an important Gypsy activist and was involved in multiple activities. The state archives seem to have kept a relatively small amount of exact information about his activities. Unfortunately, Georgiy Lebedev's social and literary activity was very short-lived and ended in 1931.

Despite this, we can document that Georgiy Lebedev was involved in almost all projects related to the social integration and civil emancipation of Gypsies in the USSR from the mid-1920s. As already said, according to Ivan Rom-Lebedev's autobiographical book (Ром-Лебедев, 1990, p. 160) the involvement of Georgiy Lebedev in the organisational life started in 1923 with his participation in the newly created Moscow Communist Youth League (Komsomol) cell. The archival documents, however, show that, for the first time, the name of Georgiy Lebedev appears in materials reflecting the activities of the VSTs only after its official registration, when at the plenum of Central leadership of the Union conducted at the end of 1925, he (already as a member of Komsomol) was elected into the Union's Presidium as candidate-member (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 120, d. 27, l. 83) and was appointed head of the Production Department (with Deputy Yakov Dombrovskiy), to which two sub-departments were created: 1. Production. 2. Fundraising (Ibid., l. 84). In this way, Georgiy Lebedev gained the opportunity to manage all the financial and economic activities of the Union. During these inspections, the Union leadership tried to maintain its economic activities. For this purpose, the Presidium of the VSTs decided to create a new organisation (among the founders of which was also Georgiy Lebedev), the *Society for the Attraction of Gypsies in Labour*, which would develop all these activities and make regular contributions to a certain percentage of revenues for organisational, cultural, and educational, etc. activities of the Union. However, this idea was not approved by the Soviet authorities (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763). Georgiy Lebedev's name is hardly mentioned in any of these inspections although, due to his position in the VSTs, he should bear much of the responsibility for the numerous violations committed in the Union's economic activities. In all probability, this is because as a result of the reports to various Soviet institutions by Mikhail Bezlyudskiy, as early as 1926 he (along with Sergey Polyakov) they were removed from the leadership of the VSTs and expelled from the Komsomol (Ibid.), and when by a decree of the NKVD of 13 February 1928 the VSTs was officially closed (GARF, f. A 2306, op. 69, d. 1357, l. 9-906), he did not receive a punishment (unlike the leaders of the VSTs Andrey Taranov and Ivan Rom-Lebedev).

An interesting description of Georgiy Lebedev during this period of his life (the 1920s and 1930s) is given by Ivan Rom-Lebedev from the distance of time, who knew him well

from their joint work in the choir of Yegor Polyakov, and then in the VSTs and Theatre *Romen*:

He is a young, novice poet, undoubtedly gifted. Songs on his words were sung and are sung now in Gypsy ensembles. Possessing enviable energy, organisational skills, overflowing with all sorts of ideas, Genya liked to organise – what? It does not matter! Horse-drawn cargo transport artel, Gypsy bathhouse, theatre – all the same. He was fascinated by the very process of organising, so as soon as something started to work out, he immediately disappeared and organised something else on the fly. (Ром-Лебедев, 1990, p. 165).

In general, the visions of Georgiy Lebedev in the field of Roma civic emancipation did not differ much from one of all other Gypsy activists in the USSR of the time, which were aligned with the common Soviet national policy in the condition of the overall modernisation and socialistic transformation of the USSR. However, he was also the person who raised original ideas or introduced new topics in the debate about how to facilitate the inclusion of Roma in the new socialistic way of life, ideas and topics which are presented in his publicistic works.

One of his original ideas was the one on the creation of a Gypsy centre. This proposal was included in the article, co-authored with Alexander German, entitled *What to Do with the Gypsies?*, published in the newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda* (Komsomol Truth) (Комсомольская правда, 1929, p. 4). It envisaged the establishment of an institution of Gypsy plenipotentiaries at kolkhozes, artels and even in nomadic camps and its following centralisation at the highest possible level so that all Gypsy related issues could be solved in a smooth and timely manner, without spraying them across various institutions. In the author's point of view, this would lead to the creation of a Gypsy centre that would coordinate the work with nomadic and sedentary Gypsies and would be of "support of their sovietisation" (for more details see Marushiakova & Popov, 2021b, p. 781). The proposal was presented as a replacement of the liquidated VSTs, but the centre's envisaged role and functions were much wider and the status much higher. It is worth noting that the public impact of this article in the central press too. After its publication, the Editorial Board of the influential newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda* convened a special extended Consultation meeting on Gypsy question, which was attended by representatives of various Soviet institutions, leading newspapers, and many Gypsy activists from Moscow and where the ideas and messages of the authors were discussed (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 121, d. 31, l. 334–348).

In what concerned the future of Gypsy nomadism Georgiy Lebedev's vision did not differ from that of other Gypsy activists of the time. Like his colleagues, he was also convinced that the future development of Gypsies, their equal inclusion in the Soviet society and solving the hardship of their life was not possible with the simultaneous continuation of nomadism. He regularly wrote notes on various issues connected to this. For example, his article *How Gypsies Can Move to a New Life* discuss the pathway of settlement and argued for the advantages of collective farming, stating that the best way for

Gypsies who settled in cities to make their living was to create production artels as a transition form on the way to work in factories, which should help to overcome their “national closeness” (*национально замкнутость*) (Нэво дром, 1930f, p. 5).

In his other essay, entitled *About the Political-Educational Work*, published in the Gypsy journal *Romany zorya*, Georgiy Lebedev introduced the idea of the existence of class enemies (kulaks) among Gypsies (Романы зоря, 1930c, pp. 3–5). It is difficult to state whether this idea was first formulated by him, but it looks as if he was among the first ones to articulate it clearly and in written form in Romani language. Under the label ‘kulaks’, uniting the class enemies were summarised and declared as such all the leaders of nomad Gypsy tabors as well as the heads of former Gypsy choirs (for more details see Marushiakova & Popov, 2021b, p. 831). Maybe it was this article that was in the background of the conflicts that Georgiy Lebedev had within the ranks of the Gypsies (see above).

Georgiy Lebedev actively participated in the Gypsy journals *Romany zorya* and *Nevo drom*, claiming to be an expert in public and political matters. He wrote about a number of issues underlining the importance of the printed Romani word characterising newspapers, journals, books as “mirrors of Gypsy life” (*зльндало саво ськавэла джиинэ*) (Нэво дром, 1930f, p. 3). He was convinced that the written word could help to solve specific issues, as can be seen in his article about the problems in Gypsy kolkhozes (Романы зоря, 1930c, pp. 3–5). Among them, in 1932, he sent a letter (co-authored with Mikhail Bezlyudskiy) to Soviet institutions indicating specific “gross political mistakes” of the journal *Nevo drom* which had largely failed to meet the task of “organising the thoughts and class consciousness of the Gypsy working masses”, concluding that the “journal needs to be redesigned” (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 27, l. 243–247). However, Georgiy Lebedev supported the request made by Andrey Taranov, the editor-in-chief of the journal *Nevo drom*, on October 20, 1933, of converting it into a Romani language newspaper, which would be published three times a month (Ibid., l. 260–265). Several letters from Gypsy activists had been sent to Soviet Institutions in support of this transformation.

Georgiy Lebedev was perhaps the only Rom in the USSR who pondered the question of the naming of his community, which was in line with the spirit of the time. The Soviet authorities paid a lot of attention to a competent and effective national policy designed to attract national minorities to its side. One of the tools for neutralising the consequences of Tzarist discrimination in the past was the renaming of large and small nationalities based on their self-appellations. So, Little Russians began to be officially called Ukrainians, Ostyaks – Khanty, Voguls – Mansi, etc. At the same time, new designations of ethnic units were often administratively allocated according to scholars’ analyses and recommendations. As for the Roma in the USSR, they did not receive a new official designation, and this issue was discussed in the early 1930s only by two persons, Daniil Nikolaevich Savvov (?-1938) and Georgiy Lebedev, on the pages of the two Gypsy journals. The first was a non-Gypsy, an expert in Narkompros, author of textbooks on the Russian language for both Mordovian-Erzya and Mordovian-Moksha schools, as well as

for Karakalpak and Greek children. We assume that Georgiy Lebedev and Daniil Savvov probably met at the Central Mordovian club, since Gypsy cultural initiatives in Moscow often coexisted with Mordovian ones and took place in the same building and, in 1931, even one of the Gypsy schools had a classroom at the Central Mordovian club (Нэво дром, 1931а, р. 26). This club was in Maryina Roshcha, one of the traditional Gypsy settlements near/in Moscow (then: 56, Sheremetevskaya street), and was the real centre of many different activities of and among diverse nationalities.

The proposal for the official use of the name 'Roma' (in form of 'Indo-Rom') instead of 'цыгане' (Gypsies) was made by Daniil Savvov in an article published in journal *Romany zorya*, in 1930, where he wrote: "You have your own name – 'Rom', the history tells that Roma come from India. It would be good to call yourselves 'Indo-Rom', but you call yourself 'tsygan' [Gypsy]" (Романы зоря, 1930f, р. 9). In the same issue of the journal was published a poem *A Call from the Kolkhoz* by Georgiy Lebedev signed with the pseudonym 'Indo-Rom' (Романы зоря, 1930b, р. 46). It is difficult to guess who of the two was the author of the term. In any case, it is clear that both shared the same idea. This proposal, however, found little resonance among other Gypsy activists, who did not perceive the public denomination 'цыгане' (Gypsies), opposed to negative 'фараоны' (Pharaohs), as insulting (Нэво дром, 1930h, р. 1), and apparently did not want to change it in Russian.

The only reverberation to the proposal for a new community name in public ('Indo-Rom') reappears at the time of creation of the Theatre *Romen*, when possible variants of its title were discussed. Among the proposals, one can find also a version connected with the term 'Indo-Rom', such as *Indo-Romskiy* or *Indo-Romenskiy* (i.e. Indian-Romani) Theatre (Бессонов, 2013, р. 454). The term 'Indo-Rom' was also included in the public announcement for recruiting artists in the newly created "Indo-Romen (Gypsy) theatre" (Вечерняя Москва, 1930, р. 4), as well as in the declared aims of the theatre – "full readiness to participate in the merciless cleaning of Indo-Romen Art" from the so-called *tsyganshchina* (O'Keeffe, 2013, р. 217). As for the term 'tsyganshchina' (цыганщина), in this context, it does not have any negative connotations regarding the Gypsies as a community. The very concept of *tsyganshchina* came into widespread public use in the 1920s and, for a long time, there was a massive public campaign in the press against this phenomenon, which was considered to be a kind of Gypsy art degenerated by the bourgeoisie (see Штейнпресс, 1934; Щербанова, 1984) and an inauthentic pseudo-art (cf. Lemon, 2000, р. 141). This campaign, however, was not aimed against Gypsy music in general, but specifically against the *tsyganshchina* phenomenon; in contrast to it, and in order to present the 'true' Gypsy art, the Soviet state created the Gypsy Theatre *Romen* – cf. article with the indicative title *From a Night Pub to a Proletarian Theatre: Gypsies Declare a Fight against Tsyganshchina* (Рабочий и искусство, 1930, р. 4).

The name of the Theatre *Romen* (grammatically this is a form of belonging, *Romen* means 'belonging to Roma', thus 'Theatre of the Roma') is also associated with the name of Georgiy Lebedev. No one else has proposed or promoted such a naming. As for the name of the new theatre, as said, in January 1931, the name Theatre-Studio *Romen* was

used (RGALI, f. 2928, op. 1, d. 3, l. 5) and, from 1933, it was replaced by the approved name State Gypsy Theatre *Romen* (Ibid., f. 2928, op. 1, d. 6, l. 11). There is no evidence that the Soviet institutions had any influence in this direction, and it can be securely assumed that this was a decision of the artists from the Theatre *Romen* and its leadership. This decision is completely understandable, as for the general public the name 'Indo-Roma Theatre' would be completely unknown and incomprehensible, while the name 'Gypsy Theatre' is not only understandable for everybody but is a direct reference to Gypsy music, which was extremely popular brand since the days of Russian Empire.

It seems that, because of the friendship and cooperation between Georgiy Lebedev and Daniil Savvov, the authors' views on the tasks and prospects of the civic emancipation of the Gypsies were mutually enriched (Комсомольская правда, 1930b, p. 3). It is very characteristic of that time that both considered political education among the necessary vehicles for Gypsy emancipation. The system of political education (*политпросвет*) was the most important concern of the ideological remaking of the masses of the workers. Its aim was to enrich every worker with the ideas of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and later Stalin, in order to make him/her a conscious fighter, a participant in the class battles of the future. For many years, the department of political education in the Narkompros was headed by Lenin's widow, Nadezhda Krupskaya. This indicates the important role of this part of the educational system. It can even be said that this experience of mass education in Soviet Russia was the forerunner of the modern concept of lifelong education for adults. It looks like formerly it had been an instrument of the 'class struggle', and in the period in question it was re-thought as an instrument of the 'class reconciliation'. In the USSR, special teaching handbooks were created for evening political literacy (*политграмота*) classes outside of working hours. During the time of periodical "purges", inactivity or ignorance of political studies could be a reason for dismissal from a leading or responsible position, so people attended these lessons, as they had previously attended Sunday church services.

Such an educational book was also planned for Gypsies. In 1930, the journal *Romany zorya* reported in the book announcement that Georgiy Lebedev and Daniil Savvov are writing a political grammar for Gypsies (Романы зоря, 1930h, p. 62). The beginning of this work is obviously evidenced by the article written by Georgiy Lebedev concerning the goals of political education of Gypsies, where several new Romani terms in the field of political concepts were successfully applied (Романы зоря, 1930c, pp. 3–5). The result of this intention of the two authors is unknown. The planned handbook on political literacy was probably not finished (Шаповал, 2019a, p. 323).

Political education is also associated with the desire of Georgiy Lebedev to include Gypsies in the so-called *всеобуч* (Vseobuch – the common defence education) in Soviet Russia. Vseobuch was a system for teaching the entire population the basics of military skills. Old women workers learned to shoot, schoolchildren knew how to use a gas mask, teenagers dreamed of parachuting, and so on. This institution regularly published brochures on various issues of defence and participation in war actions. A very popular

defence series included a number of 'libraries' (sets of books), namely a series of titles with the same design and often consisting of numbered positions. The library *On the Guard of the USSR* was published since 1925. In this direction, in 1929, Georgiy Lebedev had started his writer's career having translated a book titled *How the Population Will Help the Red Army during the War* (Стерлин, 1929, pp. 1–31). That was the first book, although a small one, a pocket-size brochure of only about 30 pages, entirely translated into the freshly baked Soviet Romani language. It was a very important achievement for strengthening the translator's social and political status as the brochure was one of the above-mentioned popular defence series for the large audience, a very important part of propaganda at that time. In this spirit of political education and propaganda was published also one small book authored by Georgiy Lebedev in Romani language – *Ваши комсомоло* (About the Komsomol) (Лебедев, 1931).

The turbulent life of Georgiy Lebedev was inseparable from the Theatre *Romen*. He was among its founders, was its chair, and was the convenor of significant changes.

In January 1931, Georgiy Lebedev wrote about the objectives of the emerging theatre, emphasising both its function as a promoter of a new working way of life and as a unifier of all diverse groups of Roma. In his article *About the Gypsy Theatre* he wrote:

In former years, we could not even dream of this which today is being implemented by the Soviet power. A new Gypsy cultural centre is being created. It is the Gypsy national theatre. Not all Gypsies know about this great holiday for Gypsies yet, but this small part of the working Gypsies, who are taking part in the creation of this theatre, well understood what a great bright cultural path the Gypsy theatre opens up. But the joy of this holiday should reach all the Gypsies, because it cannot be considered that this theatre is created only for Moscow Roma, this is created for the entire Roma ethnic group, that is why it is called the Gypsy National Theatre. And in its work [the theatre] will show the whole Gypsy life. Using the theatre, Gypsies will tell other nations about their old and new way of life, on the other hand, the theatre will show the Roma the way to a new life. Therefore, whoever knows or learns about the creation of the theatre must widely spread this message among the Gypsies. Gypsy kolkhozes, artels, clubs, red corners and other Gypsy organisations should organise meetings and declare their wishes. Let Gypsies send letters to their local newspapers, send greetings, demands to our journal. (Нэво дром, 1931b, p. 25).

It was quite typical for that time: a direct appeal to the masses with a request for their *nakazy* (opinions, tips or recommendations) regarding the directions of future work. This form of dialogue with the 'ordinary' people was regarded as an instrument of direct folk democracy. By the beginning of the 1930s, an obvious ritualisation of such collective sincerity had already been achieved, therefore Georgiy Lebedev initiated this "impulse" of the lower classes, asking them to regularly express their opinion on the results of the activities of the Gypsy Theatre.

Georgiy Lebedev, being the first chair of the Theatre-Studio *Romen*, proudly wrote about its first performance, which took place at the end of April 1931, in the journal *Nevo drom*. In this article, which demonstrated the highest rhetorical canon of the Soviet

Romani language for discussing new political issues, we can see his vision about the theatre's mission not only for the sovietisation of Gypsies, but its impact on the Gypsies of the USSR, then on other Soviet peoples, and further on Gypsies throughout the capitalist world, which it was a small, specific contribution to the world revolution, as is underlined by the author. The author's concluding remarks are worth quoting:

For the first time, Gypsies spoke their theatrical language, and this is the peculiarity of the Gypsy theatre. For the first time, people of other languages, together with Roma themselves, heard the Romani language. On April 30 the theatre showed its three-month work to the Soviet public – it [was] a scene play. We still cannot call [it] very good, but nevertheless, after this performance the theatre was able to get from the public the words – Did the theatre choose the right path? – and the public responded – “right”. This is the theatre's great victory. To our great regret, the theatre has not yet been able to show this performance to many working Gypsies even in Moscow, where the theatre is located. Not all Roma have seen it, but the warmth with which the Roma public reacted to the performance, suggests that all Gypsy workers will react to our work positively. The theatre in three months was able to stage though a small, but good, complete, and necessary [to us] piece. This play hits the *kulaks* and other persons who put a spoke in the wheels of the new Gypsies. On the other hand, it shows our new [Gypsy] people who, together with other peoples, are fighting for the cause of socialism.

I will not say that the theatre could be born only in our country, only thanks to the party politics, but I will move on to what the theatre is. First of all, in its work, the theatre, on the one hand, showed that it really teaches how new Gypsies should live their new lives. On the other hand, the theatre tells other peoples how Roma lived in former years and how they live now. The theatre shows the way for Gypsies, how to get out of the darkness in which many more Gypsies still are. The theatre tells the working Gypsies how to deal with the old way of life, its undesirable aspects (fortune-telling, divination, and so on). [...]

The theatre will show its play in all places where Roma live, and above all in Gypsy *kolkhozes*. The theatre will also serve those field spots where Gypsies used to camp, in order to call them for work, for the working life. Roma from all countries will learn about the theatre born in our Soviet country, and for them, this will be [a source of] faith in liberation from their own capitalists. The Gypsy Theatre sends its warm words to all working Gypsies and promises that together with all working people it will fight for a good and happy life of working Gypsies. (Нэво драм, 1931к, р. 10).

In this article, one can also see an appraisal that Georgiy Lebedev gives to the usage of Romani language in the theatre scene. During his leadership of the theatre, however, the transition from the Romani language to Russian in its performances also began, which predetermined its future. This is a topic around which many biased interpretations and even mystifications have accumulated over the last few decades. In general, this language issue is usually placed entirely in the discourse of the changes in the national policy of the USSR in the 1930s, and the leading (and de facto almost the only) tendency is to present this change (explicitly or indirectly) as a manifestation of anti-Gypsyism of the Soviet policy towards the Gypsies, the suppression of the public manifestations of their identity and even the striving for their assimilation (Друц & Гесслер, 1990; Деметер et al. 2000; Lemon, 2000; O'Keeffe, 2013; 2019). This interpretation of events is completely incorrect.

First, there is no documented ban on the use of the Romani language in the theatre (or at least no one has found such a ban in the archives of the Soviet state administration and the theatre itself). Secondly, in practice, such a ban did not exist, and in the performances of the theatre, Romani language was used in individual words and phrases that were familiar to the public. Furthermore, the numerous songs in the Romani language were an important part of each performance. These facts make the very idea of imposed assimilation meaningless because Gypsy songs and dances were (and are) one of the main markers of Gypsy identity in the USSR, thus the theatre supported maintaining and developing this identity. And, most importantly, the preserved historical sources reveal a completely different picture of the process of replacing the Romani language with Russian in the performances of Theatre *Romen*.

The question about the language of performances in the Theatre *Romen* was raised for the first time at the time of its founding. At one of the meetings of the Organising Committee, held on January 10, 1931, Andrey Andreev (theatre administrator, non-Rom), who was a candidate for chair of the new theatre, proposed that most of the performances be performed in Russian to be understandable to the audience. However, the proposal provoked a stormy reaction from the Gypsy activists present – Andrey Taranov, Georgiy Lebedev, Alexander German, Mikhail Bezlyudskiy – and was categorically and unanimously rejected (RGALI, f. 2928, op. 1, d. 1, l. 4), and subsequently, Georgiy Lebedev became the chair of the theatre. The reasons for this decision are probably rooted in the fact that the Romani language was the only area in which Gypsy activists saw their advantage and thus wanted to maintain their leading positions in the theatre (Бессонов, 2013, p. 454).

Soon, however, life forced Gypsy activists to radically change their positions, and they found the necessary arguments for this. The topic of the use of the Russian language as the only way to save the theatre from its stagnation and isolation from the public through the domination of the Romani language was the subject of many debates in the theatre itself, and especially active in this direction was the art director Moisey Goldblatt (O’Keeffe, 2013, p. 217, 224–234; Ром-Лебедев, 1990, p. 167). Gradually, this important problem was faced by the Gypsy activists. At the meeting of the Creative Art Council of the theatre, held on January 23, 1933, the chair Georgiy Lebedev adopted a compromising position: “Given the immense importance of winning the sympathy of non-Roma workers [...], this helps to eradicate anti-tsiganism” (RGALI, f. 2928, op. 1, d. 6, l. 12). At the next meeting of the Council, held on February 11, 1933, he was even more insistent:

The theatre should not be isolated and work only for the Gypsies. The theatre cannot enclose itself in a narrowly national shell. In any case, the question of language in our theatre is debatable and deeply fundamental. Today this issue cannot be resolved, but the council should work on it. (RGALI, f. 2928, op. 1, d. 7, l. 15–28).

All speakers supported the use of Russian in performances, and a compromise resolution was adopted (Ibid.), which opened the door to a gradual change in the language

of performances. Initially, it remained Romani, accompanied by printing flyers with Russian-language librettos, which were distributed to the audience; later Russian-language prologues and epilogues began to appear in the presented stage plays and, from 1937, with the inauguration of the new art director Mikhail Yanshin, Russian became the main language in the performances of the Theatre *Romen* (Бессонов, 2013, p. 455).

Ivan Rom-Lebedev described Georgiy Lebedev as a very active person full of hardly implemented or completed ideas (Ром-Лебедев, 1990, p. 165; for more details see above). A parcel of envy shines through this statement. At the time, they were two full namesakes, two partners and two competitors, and Georgiy Lebedev was luckier in many aspects. It is worth saying that his poems were the first to be published in Russian translation in popular publications, in the journal *Magazine for Everyone* (Журнал для всех, 1929, pp. 25–26). Soon after, also two of his poems of more serious political content were translated and published (Комсомольская правда, 1930a, p. 3). It seems that in the early 1930s Georgiy Lebedev had a handful of trump cards. His future looked bright and triumphing for a couple of years on.

Georgiy Lebedev did not enjoy the glory of the leader of the Gypsy Theatre and of a leading Gypsy poet for a long time. Being in the position of chair of a Gypsy Theatre-Studio, he became a target of criticism. In 1931, came the first stab in his back. Someone, hidden under the letter 'П' (may be Nikolay Pankov), presented the following sad picture:

Classes for political education were not organised in the Studio, the Russian language was not taught more than two times for the entire time, the Romani language classes were only visited by those actors who did not speak it. Who is guilty of all these defects? Chair Georgiy Lebedev. [...] The students split into conflicting groups; intrigues were growing, [...] Drunkenness and other outrages regularly happened. The students run away. So, Bezlyudsko, Soldatenkova, Dulkevich and others left the Studio. (Нэво дром, 1931r, p. 22).

However, the picture was more complicated and the Chair of a Gypsy Theatre-Studio *Romen* was not always able to deal with difficulties encountered by the theatre's students. The life of non-resident actors in Moscow was not easy, especially at first (until they received a home) as illustrated even by the press: "the actors in this Soviet Gypsy theatre, which keeps pace with all the working community, and which campaigns among the Gypsies for settled life and work – live in tents themselves" (Нэво дром, 1931t, p. 24). These were the first signals of a campaign of personal criticism directed against Georgiy Lebedev and supported by almost all activists. A few months later, a Gypsy girl (probably Voinova-Masalsko), hidden under the pen name *Studyka* (a girl student at the Theatre-Studio *Romen*), also criticised the atmosphere of inner conflicts and lack of elementary discipline at the stage during performances (Нэво дром, 1931o, p. 22).

It seems that Alexander Germano and the editor of his books Nikolay Pankov were sincerely outraged by the unattractive actions and destructive and corrupting style of the theatre management practised by Georgiy Lebedev. However, there is another aspect to this conflict. At that time, in the article *Are There Gypsy Kulaks in Moscow*, under the

pseudonym 'Feldytko' (the Nomad, or the Field Dweller), Yegor Polyakov was indicated as the last and the most dangerous 'kulak' from the ranks of Moscow Gypsies (Нэво дром, 1931g, pp. 14–15). According to Valdemar Kalinin, Yegor Polyakov died in 1931 (Калинин, 2005, p. 214), but according to the memoirs of Ivan Rom-Lebedev, this happened around 1938 (Ром-Лебедев, 1990, p. 158). In any case, it is likely that by 1931 the influence and capabilities of Yegor Polyakov became insufficient to support his not always cautious and reasonable son-in-law.

Thus, soon after that, Georgiy Lebefev was attacked from all sides. His poetical work suddenly began to be criticised for ideological errors, even his poem *Gilori* (Song). The author, hidden under a pseudonym 'New Critic', in the rough manner of that time categorically, wrote the following:

Let's look at the poems that Lebedev has collected in his book *Neve glosya* (New Voices). On the first page stands *Gilori*, in which the poet said: "Years will pass, the Rom will throw away // His old life, // but he will never forget, [the refrain] "Ne-ne-ne-ne", // as he will never forget the meal". One considers, according to Lebedev, songs will be a source of joy for new Gypsies. We know that their joy will be the whole building of socialism, and not only just one song. What did he say in this poem? Nothing! The song is food for Gypsies and nothing else. What is the social demand in this song? (Нэво дром, 1932b, p. 19).

This criticism looks quite exaggerated even in the context of the time. Noteworthy is that a very similar poem *Атася и ададывэс* (Yesterday and Today) by Alexander Germano, where the recognisable Romani refrain "ne-ne-ne" is also repeated but evaluated positively as a sign of the ethnic optimism (Германо, 1935b, p. 23; 1938, p. 30), has never been a target of criticism.

Georgiy Lebedev did try to repel the attack. At the end of 1931, he wrote a letter to Andrey Taranov, the executive editor of the journal *Nevo drom*, in which he tried to weaken the possible damage from criticism and refuses the authorship of another poem by him, *Dead Blood* (Романы зоря, 1930a, pp. 43–44), with following words:

Comrade editor!

I have published the poem *Dead Blood* in the journal *Romany zorya*, No.No. 3–4. This poem belongs to the period when I was just starting to write poetry. This poem expresses a random mood that is not needed – neither for me nor for us, the new Gypsies. Therefore, I ask you not to admit this poem to any new edition, and point out my mistake to our young poets, showing how not to write. I personally believe that this poem has a good form, but its content is worthless, the unhappy former Gypsies' life is changing for a better and new one. When joy comes to Gypsy kolkhozes and raises our children and us, writing about our tearful experiences and looking for some good sides in the former days is great harm, both to the one who writes this and to the one who will read it. I condemn this poem and renounce it. G. Lebedev. (Нэво дром, 1931u, p. 24).

However, this case is significant for a better understanding of the circumstances of the time, as this is a typical example of formal self-criticism expressed in written form. The

genre of self-flagellation was very popular back then and sometimes it helped to save one's life at the expense of dignity. But in this case, such a minimalised volume of self-criticism was assessed as insufficient. The anonymous article by 'New Critic', gave heavy blows on the entire poetic work of Georgiy Lebedev and his prose. The article was not seeking for notably skilful argumentation but adding to the numerous political errors discovered by a very questionable analysis a hypocritical accusation of eroticism and finishing with an expression of formal hope that the young talented poet still had a chance of self-correction (Нэво дром, 1932с, р. 20).

In the poems of Georgiy Lebedev, there are quite a few unpolished pieces. When his work became the target of widespread criticism, these controversial pieces also came under additional attack. Alexander Germano satirically portrayed Genya giving him the nickname Gudgeon (hero of a tale of Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin, a symbol of a person who evades public activities for fear of punishment). Germano's hint was based on this literary image, and his main idea was that Genya has been nothing but a person who was pretending to be an activist, only seeking his own comfort and privileges. A. Germano emphasised the fact that all Georgiy's merits were critically reassessed: *И кай бы на бэстя Пускарё / Одой ачякюрдя ёв шпэра дошалы* (And wherever Gudgeon served / He left his criminal trial there) (Германо, 1934f, р. 17).

The accusations against Georgiy Lebedev made up a long list, which was presented in poetic form in the verses of Alexander Germano, where he called him a braggart and a deceiver (Ibid., р. 14) who made a career fraudulently: "Here he's stolen four coupons for buying clothes / There he caused a deceptive rumour, / Here he was put on trial / For financial affairs" (Ibid., р. 18). The satire attacks of Alexander Germano were not limited to this poem. In the poem *Something About the Theatre* he directly said that Geshka (Georgiy Lebedev) was frustrating the theatre life (Ibid., р. 33).

To better understand the reasons for the criticism of Georgiy Lebedev by the other Gypsy activists it is needed to have a look at their public perception by the majority. The quotation from the book of Ivan Solonevich could be a good illustration of this:

In the fall of either 1929 or 1930, Gypsies of a somewhat unusual appearance were seen on the Moscow streets. They, as usual, wore some kind of dazzling red trousers, piercing green caftans, blue-black beards – everything as it should be. But, in addition, they were armed with brand new briefcases and automatic pens, and they drove around not on their ragged carts, but on Soviet automobiles. They looked business-like and preoccupied. [...] In this institution, a buffet was founded, as in any other. Then someone more resourceful than me organized an amateur choir at the cultural and educational department of the Central Council. Then in the buffet, or more precisely, from under the buffet vodka began to be sold [illegally]. Then, due to the enormity of the tasks and the shortness of the deadlines, a night shift was established. The new [restaurant] *Yar* began to strangely resemble the old one. Gypsy choirs of the cultural and educational department performed in separate offices of senior officials, and the portraits of Marx-Lenin-Stalin gazed in amazement at the restoration of old social relations. (Солоневич, 1951, pp. 136–138).

This text by Solonevich reflected common prejudices about the ability of Gypsies to organise themselves responsibly and be productive in society. It seems that the other Gypsy activists (and especially Alexander Germano and Nikolay Pankov) were outraged by the fact that Georgiy Lebedev confirmed these fears and the worst expectations of the public opinion based on such prejudices, and their harsh criticism of Georgiy Lebedev was based on attempts to oblige the Gypsy elite to combat the former restaurant image of the Gypsies, and for them, any signs of a return to the past were signals of defeat. The danger of getting the label of a ‘restaurant Gypsy’ had always been perceived by the activists as a risk of failure. This led them to sincerely strive to be an example of revolutionary asceticism. Ivan Rom-Lebedev wrote about a rather harsh and direct ban on the artists of the barely created Theatre *Romen* to earn money in restaurant choirs (Ром-Лебедев, 1990, p. 170). Alexander Germano too connected the permanent banquet criticised by him in the VSTs with the traditions of the past choirs: “We sang up our / Young years in the capital with the richmen” (Германо, 1934f, p. 28). The highest standard of revolutionary behaviour was sometimes like the Christian austerity. Germano criticised in the same way also Andrey Taranov for his good appetite: “And you’re eating all day” (Ibid., p. 24). Thus, the activists were convinced to have reason to consider Georgiy Lebedev’s misdeeds as betrayal and internal sabotage, which led even to the creation of a new term ‘Lebedevshchina’ [created similarly to tsyganishchina which came to signify “booze, moral decay and lack of discipline”] (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 28, l. 182).

All these critics to Georgiy Lebedev naturally led him to bitter resentment, both from the Gypsy activists who competed with him and from the Gypsy traditional leaders (there has probably been criticism also from them within the community). A hint towards the fact that he was aware of the danger of not being understood by the community is found expressed in his poetry. So, already in 1930, in the time of his poetical glory and on the eve of the avalanche of criticism, he published twice a poem firstly entitled *For the Luck of Roma* (Романы зоря, 1930d, p. 35–36), and then with a modified first line and entitled *To the Old Roma* (Нэво дром, 1930e, p. 17). This poem reveals the assessment of the conflict situation from the viewpoint of the poet himself:

In the struggle for the luck of the Roma
 The best years I offered.
 And from the great Roma minds,
 Brothers! what did I see?
 Not a warm word, not a brotherly hand
 Those Roma didn’t give me.
 After all, not from me, but from our new way
 They turned away showing their backs. (Ibid.).

Public criticism of Georgiy Lebedev had negative results for his image and literature career, and he succeeded to publish only one book with his poems and stories – *Нэво глоса: Гиля и ракирибэна* (New Voices: Poems and Stories) (Лебедево, 1931). After 1931,

neither he nor his wife published a single book either as author or as translator. However, over time, the attitudes towards his poetry started to change slightly and, for example, in 1940, when he was already in GULAG, he was again mentioned as one of the early career brilliant Gypsy poets (Литературная газета, 1940, p. 6).

The end of Georgiy Lebedev's public career in the field of Roma civic emancipation came in 1933. Before that, young actors from the Theatre *Romen* were arrested for petty crimes, which, however, were interpreted in a political light. Georgiy Lebedev was removed as chair of the theatre but, after a few months, he was reinstated (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 28, l. 98). However, a few months later, on April 23, 1933, a meeting of the "functionaries of the Moscow Gypsies" was held. The Minutes of this meeting were summarised by Ivan Rom-Lebedev in his position of Chairman of the Theatre's Trade Union Committee in a letter sent to the Soviet institutions – Department of Council of Nationalities at the TsIK SSSR, Council of Nationalities at the TsIK SSSR, etc. In this summarisation is written:

Rom-Lebedev said that once removed due to unsatisfactory political leadership and returned to the theatre a few months later by the political director, G. P. Lebedev did not justify his return at all, but specifically: 1. He did not carry out any political work, he was also inactive as an administrator. 2. He committed many acts [of several financial violations – authors note] that compromise him as a candidate for membership in the VKP(b) [...] (Ibid., l. 98–99).

On December 3, 1933, at the initiative of the Commission on Nationalities of the Moscow City Executive Committee, a new meeting of the "functionaries of the Moscow Gypsies" (30 people) was convened. All speakers (including Nikolay Pankov) criticised the work of the theatre (especially the staging of the play *Carmen* by Prosper Merimee for its ideologically incorrect interpretation) and denounced Georgiy Lebedev as the main culprit for the many problems of different nature in the work of the Theatre *Romen* (Ibid., l. 183–186). As a result of this meeting, it was found that the "cultural and political and educational work among the artists is very weak ... there is no live connection with the Gypsy activists and the Moscow club" and the following decisions were taken:

1. Asks the Cultural Department at the Moscow City Committee at the VKP(b) to provide the Gypsy theatre with party leadership cadres.
2. To ask the Arts Sector of the People's Commissariat for Education, in connection with the latest incident (arrest of actors for anti-Soviet performance), to cleanse the theatre of alien class and decayed elements). [...]
4. To recognise it as necessary to revise the play "Carmen" as soon as possible [...] with the involvement of the Roma community. (Ibid., l. 180–181).

In fact, the financial situation at the Theatre *Romen* was much more difficult than can be seen from the documents concerning these discussions. According to the recollections of contemporaries of the events preserved in the oral history of Roma from Moscow, the

theatre was in fact in a state of bankruptcy. Gypsy activists sent a letter on this occasion to Vyacheslav Molotov (then Chairman of the SNK), and he replied that on some issues of political importance, financial revenues were not the most important, and in this case, it was precisely such an issue, and as the end-result, the financial crisis was overcome. Although (at least for now) no documentary evidence has been found in support of this narrative, its historical reality is very likely because it fully complied with the guiding principles of Soviet national policy of the time.

It is difficult to judge to what extent Georgiy Lebedev himself was to blame for the financial crisis in Theatre *Romen*, but although he (as in the time of the VSTs) was undoubtedly responsible for a number of financial issues, he is hardly the only one to blame. So, in fact, he turned out to be the scapegoat and was sentenced to 10 years in prison. Some clarifications are needed in connection with this sentence.

It is very strange that despite the serious political accusations against Georgiy Lebedev, he was convicted not of political but of criminal offences (financial violations), and the maximum term of 10 years provided for such crimes was considered relatively light in the context of that time. The case of Georgiy Lebedev was extremely unusual for the USSR in the 1930s, when in the conditions of mass repressions, the widespread practice was exactly the opposite – criminals were supposed to receive much heavier sentences on political charges (e.g. theft of horses from a kolkhoz qualified as theft of socialist property, sabotage, counter-revolution, etc.). In the same way, the already mentioned young Gypsies, artists at the Theatre *Romen*, were also convicted of criminal offences, although they were also charged with political crimes in the theatre.

The assumption that the conviction of Georgiy Lebedev in 1933 may have even been a chance for him is not unfounded, because during the so-called Great Terror (1937–1938) he could have received a much harsher sentence. Of course, this is only a hypothesis, but it should be borne in mind that his friend Daniil Savvov was sentenced to death in 1938 (RGASPI, f. 17, op. 171, d. 415, l. 4).

Data on the last years of Georgiy Lebedev's life are rather poor. However, we have a verbal portrait of him, which was left by the writer, poet and translator Lev Ginzburg (1921–1980). This remarkable sketch allows us to imagine what Lebedev looked like and what impression he made at the end of his life:

Georgiy Pavlovich Lebedev, a small, bearded old Gypsy, also visited me. He always came a little drunk, goggle-eyed, the bulging whites of his eyes were red-streaked. As usual, he brought some papers with him, slipped me old posters, notes, then sat for a long time, smoked, and kept repeating: "Ah, Gypsies, Gypsies! This is such purity; these are such children!". In the Theatre *Romen*, Georgiy Pavlovich was something like a curator of an impromptu museum. (Гинзбург, 1985, p. 351–352).

Georgiy Lebedev died in 1969, being a collector and curator of materials in the unofficial museum at the Theatre *Romen*, that was the theatre that he, among others, had once created in the past and with which he felt deeply emotionally connected.

Georgiy Lebedev's life was very controversial. A pioneering poet and a weak leader who had finally lost almost everything. However, along with his mistakes, he had notable achievements that should not be crossed out. Of course, almost all his pioneering initiatives had certain traits of immaturity and were not, as a rule, completed, but as a first attempt, each of them is still interesting even from the viewpoint of the causes and sources of his failure.

The case of Georgiy Lebedev is important also as an illustration of the fact that the active promoters of the Roma civic emancipation were not totally united in their vision about their aims and the ways of achieving them. Each had their own point of view, which they were ready to defend in all possible ways. In this competition, Georgiy Lebedev lost, but to what extent the other Gypsy activists from the early Soviet era, with whom he had so many conflicts, could ultimately be considered winners, remains an ambiguous question.

Ilya and Trofim Gerasimovs

Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov

In this section, the biographical portraits of two Roma activists will be presented – Ilya Yakovlevich Gerasimov (1898 – after 1965) and Trofim Yakovlevich Gerasimov (? – ?). Their father's and family's names are the same, and both come from the Smolensk region of the Western oblast (now Smolensk Oblast). It can be assumed, although there is no documentary evidence, that the two are brothers. Unfortunately, the available historical sources for the both Gerasimovs are relatively few, but they nevertheless allow us to outline (at least in general terms) the most significant highlights in their biographies and especially their activities in the field of Roma civic emancipation in the early USSR.

Ilya Yakovlevich Gerasimov

From the brief biographical information about Ilya Gerasimov, recorded by Nikolay Satkevich (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Илья Герасимов), it is clear that he was born in 1898 in a village whose name is not specified, in the Smolensk region. Based on some additional information, it can be assumed that this was the village of Korenevshchina, village council Mikhnevo (Marushiakova & Попов, 2021b, p. 951). Ilya Gerasimov's family had 10 children. The family was in a transitional stage, moving from a nomadic to a sedentary way of life. Such a process was widespread among Roma living throughout the region of Northwest Russia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Marushiakova & Попов, 2003). Ilya Gerasimov himself recollected how during his childhood the whole family slept at night in the forest, how he roamed with his mother, who was a fortune teller, people's houses, and at the same time how for three years in a row he grazed horses in the village, where they lived (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Илья

Герасимов). In one of his short Autobiographies from 1932, he defined himself as “low literate” (GASO, f. P 2360, op. 1, sv. 181, d. 2068, p. 25), i.e. he probably studied for a few years at the local village school.

According to Ilya Gerasimov himself, in 1925 he was elected chairman of the Rural Poverty in his native village (Ibid.). But there is some ambiguity in this account. The Rural Poverty Committees were a body of Soviet power during the so-called Military Communism (1918–1919), which were replaced by local village councils, so we can only assume that Gerasimov carried the old name to a later time.

At that time, Ilya Gerasimov contacted the *All-Russian Union of the Gypsies* (VSTs) established in Moscow, from where he received a certificate as responsible for the Smolensk and Bryansk governorates (Ibid.). The preserved documents show that on October 20, 1927, a general meeting of the wandering Gypsies from Smolensk uyezd was held, which was attended by 10 families (50 people). At this meeting, as an authorised representative of VSTs for the governorate, Ilya Gerasimov explained to those present the goals, objectives and significance of VSTs, as well as what is a labour artel with collective land cultivation (the prototype of future kolkhozes). After his speech, the assembly unanimously decided to occupy the estates of the former *pomeshchiks* (Landlords) and on their former lands to be organised such Gypsy agricultural labour artels, for which they will apply to the land authorities for permission, as Comrade Gerasimov will be representing them. At the same time, it was decided to send all children from the age of 7 to school (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 27, l. 25–26).

Apparently, Ilya Gerasimov's petitions to the Soviet authorities were successful, because with their support in 1928 the Gypsy kolkhoz *Oktyabr* was established in the Smolensk region, Mikhnevskiy selsoviet (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, д. Илья Герасимов; RGAЕ, f. 7446, op. 13, d. 83; f. 5675, op. 1, d. 144; Рабочий путь, 1932, p. 3; Бугай, 2015, p. 51). In the same year, two more Gypsy kolkhozes were established, *Svoboda* (Freedom) in the Kardymovskiy rayon, Yartsevskiy selsoviet, and *Krasniy Gorodok* (Red small town) in the Dukhovshchinskiy rayon, Polovitinokskiy selsoviet (Ibid.).

Ilya Gerasimov himself in 1929 was elected chairman of the kolkhoz *Oktyabr*, and at the end of the same year, he was elected chairman of the Mikhnevskiy selsoviet (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, д. Илья Герасимов). The last post should especially be noted because this village council was not defined as one of the nationalities, which means that Ilya Gerasimov became chairman of a selsoviet, populated mainly by Russians, where only a few Gypsies lived. This marks the beginning of his “meteoric career” in the words of Brigit O’Keeffe (2008, p. 329). In all likelihood, at that time he was accepted as a member of the VKP(b) because such a career in the system of the Soviet nomenklatura without Party membership was practically impossible.

In 1931, Ilya Gerasimov was a student at the Smolensk Rabfak (i.e. Workers Faculty – an educational institution that prepared workers for higher education), and received the following description “a worker activist from national minorities (a Gypsy)”:

Comrade Gerasimov, being a student of the Smolensk Workers' Faculty, was active both on the instructions of the Gorsoviet (City Council) and the Oblispolkom (Regional Executive Committee) and on his own initiative. Comrade Gerasimov is the chairman of the Gypsy section of the Smolensk club on the National minorities [at] the House of Culture from 1929 to 1931. During his summer vacations, Comrade Gerasimov did a great job of involving Gypsies nomads in kolkhozes and, to a large extent, through his efforts, two Gypsy kolkhozes were created. (GASO, f. P 2360, op. 1, d. 14, l. 82)

In February 1932, Ilya Gerasimov wrote a statement to the Oblispolkom in Smolensk, in which as a member of the VKP(b) he reported that at the end of 1931 he was appointed instructor in the Smolensk Rayon Kolkhozsoyuz, where he was authorised to be responsible for milk supplies from the region. This job was new to him and did not satisfy him, and he stated:

I don't want to be an instructor at Rayon Kolkhozsoyuz, but I ask that I will be sent to study [...] in agriculture or industry, and if you don't accept my position, I intend to drop everything and go to the Gypsies, I will work among them to transfer them from the nomadic to a sedentary way of life because no one pays attention to this because this nation is of the Stone Age, but thanks to Soviet power there are impulses in them to move to a sedentary lifestyle, to kolkhozes. As a Gypsy, I have a love for this job. Comrade Shelehes, before sending me to study, take me to work for you at the Oblispolkom national sector. (GASO, f. P 2360, op. 1, sv. 130, d. 1482).

Ilya Gerasimov's wish was granted and in the same year he already actively worked as an instructor at the Smolensk Oblispolkom. In this new position, he inspected the Gypsy kolkhozes in the area and helped solve problems with local authorities or their management (GASO, f. P 2360, op. 1, sv. 130, d. 1479; f. P 2360, op. 1, sv. 181, d. 2067; f. P 2360, op. 1, sv. 181, d. 2068; f. P 2360, op. 1, sv. 181, d. 2069). In the same year, he was sent to study at a one-year party school in Vyazma, Western oblast, and then, in 1933, he was again sent to study, this time in Moscow, in the two-year Higher Courses of Soviet Construction at the Presidium VTsIK and TsIK SSSR (this was one of the institutions where the qualification of the management nomenclature was to be boosted). After graduation, he returned to his previous job (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, д. Илья Герасимов). Thus, Ilya Gerasimov turned out to be the only Gypsy activist with relevant training and stable positions in the Soviet nomenklatura in the province (apart from Ivan Tokmakov in the VTsIK apparatus).

Throughout this period (the 1920s – 1930s) Ilya Gerasimov devoted much effort to the creation and development of Gypsy kolkhozes in the Western Oblast. In her book, Brigit O'Keeffe (2013, pp. 171–177), based on a rich documentary source, described in detail all his activities in this direction, and therefore it is not necessary to repeat it here. It will be enough to note that the results of his activities became visible in the mid-1930s when the Western Oblast with its centre Smolensk became the undisputed sole leader between the various regions in the USSR in terms of the Gypsy kolkhozes. This state of affairs

in the development of the Gypsy kolkhozes in the Oblast has been noted many times in the various inspections and assessments of the Gypsy kolkhozes by the central Soviet institutions, e.g. in the Memorandum on the results of the inspection of the implementation of the Resolution of the Presidium of the VTsIK *On the State of Work in Servicing Toiling Gypsies*, dated 25 February 1935, signed by the Deputy Head of Department of Nationalities at the VTsIK Presidium Simon Takoiev (1876–1938), which explicitly notes that “the work on the sedentarisation of the Gypsies in the Western region is well organised”, in which at that time there were 6 Gypsy kolkhozes (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 130, d. 5, l. 47). Similar conclusions were reached in another Report of 1936, which explicitly states that “of all oblasts, krays and republics in the employment of Gypsies, the Western Oblast and the North Caucasian Kray are the most successful” (Ibid, pp. 232).

More than once in the historical testimonies the special place of the kolkhoz *Oktyabr* (one of the founders of which is Ilya Gerasimov) was emphasised as the best among the Gypsy kolkhozes in the region (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 27; f. P 1235, op. 130, d. 5; f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 794; RGAE, f. 7446, op. 13, d. 83). The collective farm not only stands out among other Gypsy kolkhozes, but even concluded contracts for socialist competitions with other, non-Gypsy kolkhozes and wins them, for which it has been awarded – e.g. in 1932 with a radio loudspeaker and a sum of money of 500 rubles, and in 1933 with potato harvester and a sum of money 350 rubles (GASO, f. P 2360, op. 1, sv. 130, d. 1478; GARF, f. P 3316, op. 64, d. 1637, l. 3). At the same time, as Ilya Gerasimov himself noted in an article in the local press:

The situation is much worse with the work of other Gypsy kolkhozes in Yartsevskiy, Dukhovshchinskiy and Pustoshkinskiy districts. These kolkhozes cannot cope with economic and political campaigns. They do not have proper guidance and assistance from rayon organisations and selsoviets. (Западная область, 1932, p. 3).

Kolkhoz *Oktyabr*'s leading position vis-à-vis other Gypsy kolkhozes in the area was maintained over the years, at least until the late 1930s (Колхозник Стахановец, 1937, p. 3).

Directly related to the development of the kolkhoz *Oktyabr* was the unsuccessful attempt to establish a Gypsy selsoviet in the village of Mikhnevo, on whose territory the kolkhoz was located. In the materials of the Department for National Minorities at the Smolensk Oblispolkom from 1934, it was planned creation of two national selsoviets – Latvian and Gypsy (GASO, f. P 2360, op. 2, sv. 50, d. 432, p. 25). Undoubtedly, this was an initiative of Ilya Gerasimov, who worked in this Department, and the kolkhoz *Oktyabr* was favoured by him. Some real steps had been taken to implement this decision. In a letter from the same Department dated October 16, 1934, to ON VTsIK, it was stated that “we have outlined the organisation of a Gypsy selsoviet on the territory of the Smolensk rayon of the Western Oblast”, and asked to be sent for help in this direction Ivan Tokmakov, the instructor from ON VTsIK (Мозгунова, 1994, No. 213). On November 9, 1934, a special meeting was convened on this issue, which was attended by Ivan Tokmakov. At the

meeting it was decided to start preparatory work – topographic measurement of the village land, then to hand over 500 hectares of land to kolkhoz *Oktyabr*, on which the future Gypsy selsoviet will have to be built (Ibid., pp. 108–110). However, there is no more data for any development in this direction, in all probability, the project for a Gypsy selsoviet was no longer discussed, i.e. it was not rejected, but set aside without further work. This is understandable given the reluctance of individual village councils to set aside land for Gypsy kolkhozes, which was a major problem in the Western Oblast.

The overall development of the Gypsy kolkhozes in the Western Oblast was not without problems, on the contrary. Some of these kolkhozes turned out to be unstable and quickly ceased to exist, so in 1932 there were 9 Gypsy kolkhozes in the area, in 1933 these kolkhozes were 7, in 1935 they were 6 (according to other sources 5), and in 1936 only 4 kolkhozes remained (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 27; f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 28; f. P 1235, op. 130, d. 5; f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 793; f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 794). However, these data should not be interpreted as a decline in the development of the kolkhoz movement among Gypsies in the area but, on the contrary, as its strengthening. The data show that the number of families in stable Gypsy kolkhozes was rapidly increasing, as was their economic status (Ibid.), and the campaign-created kolkhozes were disappearing.

Another problem that Gypsy kolkhozes in the area often faced was the internal struggles between the Gypsies themselves in their leadership. These struggles, according to Stalin's famous thesis of intensifying the class struggle in strengthening the socialist state, are described in documents in the spirit of the time as a class struggle against the "kulaks" who entered the leadership of the Gypsy kolkhozes. We have already mentioned above the article in the journal *Nevo drom* about the "kulaks" from the Tumashevich family in the management of the kolkhoz *Svoboda* (Нэво дром, 1930г, pp. 9–10); along with this in many documents from various inspections, "kulaks" and "wreckers" Fedor Zhuchkov, Yakov Zhuchkov, Alexey Kambovich (or Kombovich), Ivan Vasilkov and others have been exposed in various types of misuse of kolkhoz's funds and resources (RGAE, f. 7446, op. 13, d. 83; GASO, f. P 2360, op. 1, sv. 130, d. 1478; f. P 2360, op. 1, sv. 181, d. 2067; f. P 2360, op. 1, sv. 181, d. 2069). As a result of all these purges of the "class enemies", in the leadership of the Gypsy kolkhozes in the Western Oblast more and more people with the family name Gerasimov are present (Ibid.), probably representatives of a large clan to which Ilya Gerasimov himself belonged.

The leading position of the Western Oblast in the field of Roma civic emancipation found its expression not only in the sphere of the Gypsy kolkhozes but also in other fields, e.g. in the establishment of Gypsy national schools. Primary schools were open in the kolkhozes *Oktyabr* and *Svoboda*; in the village of Serebryanka, Smolensk region, a Children home (boarding school) was established with education up to 7th grade, headed by Nikolay Mikholazhin (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 127, d. 8; f. P 1235, op. 130, d. 5; GASO, f. P 2360, op. 1, sv. 181, d. 2068; f. P 2360, op. 1, s. 181, d. 2069).

At the same time, hard work was being done to train qualified personnel, and in many cases, Gypsies enjoyed special preferences, e.g. when in 1930 OblONO referred for

enrollment to Smolensk Rabfak the graduate of Gypsy Children home Murachkovskiy, his documents were not accepted because he was not 18 years old. On this occasion, OblONO wrote a letter stating that the Gypsies were “the only culturally backward nationality in the Western oblast”, and on this basis insisted that an exception to the general rules be made in this case (GASO, f. P 2350, op. 2, d. 46, l. 119). Eventually, thanks to this intervention, 4 places for Gypsies were reserved in the Smolensk Rabfak, and in the Pedagogical College in the town of Vyazma 2 places (*Ibid.*, l. 121). In 1931, the Gypsy branch of the Pedagogical School was opened in Dorogobuzh with two sections – training of educators and teachers at Gypsy schools – where 28 people studied (Безлюдско, 1932c, p. 54; see also GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 27; GASO, f. P 2360, op. 1, sv. 181, d. 2068). In 1934 a Gypsy group was established at the Smolensk Medical Rabfak with 32 students, 20 men and 12 women; respectively 12 come from the kolkhozes, 12 from the tabors, 8 were alumni of the Children home (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 28; f. P 1235, op. 127, d. 8). Ilya Gerasimov himself was actively involved in all these processes, and his contribution to their success is undoubted.

The following statistics are very indicative of the level of educated (or at least literate) Roma in the Western Oblast. In 1932, at the opening of the Gypsy Department at the Pedagogical College of the Krasno Presnenskiy District named after Timiryazev, which in 1935–1936 transformed into an independent Gypsy Pedagogical College, 25 students (13 men and 12 women) were enrolled, of whom 15 (*sic!*) were from the Western region, 4 from Moscow, 1 from the Moscow oblast, 1 from the Tula oblast, 1 from the Stalingrad oblast, 1 from the Bashkir ASSR, and 2 from the Ukrainian SSR (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 127, d. 8). The leading position of the Western oblast (in comparison with other regions of the USSR) in this list is clearly visible and beyond any doubt.

The explanation for the special position of the Western Oblast in the field of Roma civic emancipation can be sought in different ways. On the one hand, as has already been said, the voluntary settlement of Gypsy nomads in this region dates back to the end of the 19th century, and this way of life presupposed the achievement of a higher degree of social integration and thus receiving at least minimal education for most of their children. On the other hand, the affirmative national policy of the Soviet state here, among other things, the inclusion of Gypsy activists in the soviet administrative apparatus (Ilya Gerasimov was not the only case), even at a relatively low level, proved to be a particularly important factor. All this, of course, in no way diminishes the personal merits of Ilya Gerasimov for the successful course of the processes, on the contrary, it allows highlighting his role and significance for the rapid course of the processes in this field. Especially in the discourse of Roma civic emancipation in the early USSR, we are particularly interested in Ilya Gerasimov’s vision of the need to create a national Gypsy territorial-administrative unit (in the future Gypsy Autonomous Soviet Republic), expressed in his letters to various Soviet institutions.

The epistolary legacy of the early-Soviet Gypsy activists includes numerous letters addressed to the Soviet party and state institutions. Many of these letters (as well as many

of the event speeches conducted by Soviet institutions) were on specific topics; they highlighted successes and report on existing problems (this is the established pattern of all such presentations). The specific problems were mainly related to land management, Gypsy *kolkhozes*, *artels*, housing problems, etc.

Some of these letters, e.g. that of Nikolay Bizev (Biz-Labza), is a rather specific curiosity. In this letter, the author, a local Gypsy activist from Ukraine with a complicated fate (Marushiakova & Popov, 2021b, p. 732), sent to the Head of the Main Directorate of the Workers and Peasants Red Army at the People's Commissariat for Military and Naval Affairs, proposed the creation of a Gypsy Cavalry Division (*sic!*) in the Red Army (Ibid., pp. 481–482). From another perspective, however, it is an important testimony of the spirit of the era, as a time of great dreams and hopes, as well as grandiose plans, all of which were also reflected among Gypsy activists. From a present-day perspective, it is clear that it was entirely unrealistic to discuss the possibility of creating a Gypsy Cavalry Division; nevertheless, the letter apparently was taken very seriously by the Soviet institutions, and the reply was signed by a representative of the top party leadership of the Red Army.

Particularly indicative from the perspective of Gypsy activists' visions of the future of their community is one specific type of letter, namely the very popular genre of the time: the so-called 'Letter to the Leader'. This form of addressing the highest authorities was repeating the model of the *chelobytnaya* (a specific kind of Supplication) from Medieval Russia, which was imposed in Soviet society after the pyramid of Communist rule was finally established. At the same time, it became clear to all who the real 'Supreme Leader' of the Soviet state was – namely, the Secretary-General of Communist Party, Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin. Although from a formally legal point of view the head of the state was Mikhail Kalinin (the Chairman of the TsIK USSR), to whom many letters were also sent. Nevertheless, the latter was primarily taking the form of petitions for solving personal problems. The fact that Gypsy activists addressed their letters mainly to Stalin, and much less frequently to Kalinin, shows that they carefully assessed the situation in the governing structures, therefore, sought support and expected the intervention of the highest authorities.

The letters of Gypsy activists to Stalin were not from the standard and mass type of thousands of thank-you-letters such as "Thank you, Comrade Stalin, for our happy childhood". The only discovered letter from this type is from the graduates of the Gypsy Children's home with school in Serebryanka, Smolensk rayon (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 793, l. 132–133; Marushiakova & Popov, 2021b, pp. 858–859). In all other letters were placed existing problems of Gypsies and on their basis, specific requests and recommendations were made. Most of these letters to the 'Supreme Leader' were united around two basic, related ideas about the state policy towards the Gypsies for which assistance was requested – the termination of the nomadic way of life and the creation of a Gypsy territorial-administrative unit – which were leading also in Ilya Gerasimov's letters to the Soviet institutions.

As already mentioned above, the idea to sedentarise a large number of Gypsy nomads in a certain territory in Southern Russia was first proposed in 1926 by the leadership of the VSTs (in particular by Andrey Taranov and Ivan Rom-Lebedev), but it did not meet with support from the Soviet authorities and quickly faded away. However, this idea did not disappear among Gypsy activists, and in the 1930s it gained new life. A strong impetus in this direction was given by the Decree of VTsIK of April 1, 1932, On the State of Work for Servicing the Toiler Gypsies, in which as Point 1 it was written that the Presidium of VTsIK would propose to Narkomzem to “develop and submit to SNK RSFSR a specific land allocation plan for the compact settlement of toiling Gypsies” (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 45, d. 41, l. 24-2506). In his letters to the top Soviet institutions (more precisely to their leaders) Ilya Gerasimov gave new life to the old idea, which originated among the Gypsy activists, and unlike them, he sees the place of such a Gypsy national territorial-administrative unit in his native Western Oblast and actively lobbied in this direction.

For the first time, Ilya Gerasimov developed this proposal in his letter to Mikhail Kalinin, Chairman of the TsIK USSR, in a letter dated November 9, 1934 (at that time he was studying at the VKSS in Moscow). In that letter, he relied on his experience as an instructor in the Oblispolkom of the Western Oblast, based on which he concluded, that “the regional executive committees, selsoviets and the existing Gypsy kolkhozes in the localities are not in a position to satisfy the requirements of the Gypsies who are traveling and working various seasonal work, and who want to move to a sedentary way of life”. From here comes the conclusion:

Now, it is utterly necessary for an administrative-territorial unit to be allocated for the Gypsies, at least in the fashion of a small rayon, and this national rayon to be supported with the necessary cadres. In the end, among us, the Gypsies, there are many Communists, Komsomol members, in addition to this, there are many Gypsies who study in secondary schools and in high education. All these cadres could provide the management of the separate regions. [...]

I ask you to bring up the matter of the sedentarisation of the nomadic Gypsies, having in mind dedicating a special Gypsy territory in the form of rayon, as well as issuing a Gypsy language newspaper. (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 28, l. 368–369; Marushiakova & Popov, 2021b, pp. 842–845).

Already in this first letter, Ilya Gerasimov formulated the main points of reference and arguments for his proposal to create a Gypsy national rayon, to which he constantly adhered. The idea of the kolkhoz *Oktyabr* being the centre of the future rayon is not explicitly expressed, but it follows logically from the text, which reveals in detail the successes achieved by this Gypsy kolkhoz. In this key was the speech of Ilya Gerasimov at the Meeting at the Department of Nationalities at TsIK USSR *On the Questions of the Employment of Toiling Nomadic Gypsies and Their Cultural and Economic Services*, which took place on January 4 and 5, 1936 in Moscow. In his speech at this meeting, he was relatively restrained and spoke mainly about the problems of Gypsy nomads in the Western Oblast, who want to settle, but there are no suitable conditions, as well as about the

successes achieved by Gypsy kolkhozes in the area. However, at the end of his speech, he carefully formulated his most important message in the following proposal:

We need to think of allocating the territory for the Gypsies at least in a form of the small rayon. In our oblast, about 60 Communists and Komsomol members could be found, who will be able, by the assistance of the Communist Party and the government, to provide the management of this rayon. (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 794, l. 90).

At the same time, however, Ilya Gerasimov took an unexpected move, for which it is not clear whether (and if so, to what extent) it was consulted with the higher Soviet institutions (the meeting was organised by the Council of Nationalities at the VTsIK and chaired by its Secretary, Alexander Khatskevich). Gerasimov prepared and sent an address entitled “To the Great Teacher, the Genius Leader of the Working People from all over the World, To the Great Leader of our Communist Party VKP(b), Comrade Stalin”, which is dated the same day, January 4, 1936. The address was on behalf of the Delegates of Western Oblast at the First Union Consultative Meeting on the Issue of Cultural and Economic Service to the Working Gypsies from the Whole [Soviet] Union and was signed by Ilya Gerasimov himself, Nikolay P. Mikholazhin (Director of Primary and Semi-Secondary School and Children home) and Roman I. Gorbunov (Chairman of the Kolkhoz *Oktyabr*) (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 793, l. 13-1306). This letter repeated the main messages from the previous letter and the speech of Ilya Gerasimov at the Meeting, emphasising the problems and achievements of the kolkhoz movement among the Gypsies in the Western Oblast, and stated:

Being at a meeting attended by delegates from other areas of the [Soviet] Union from Gypsy kolkhozes and schools, we realised that thanks to the right Leninist-Stalinist national policy, part of our nation, the most forgotten, the most uncultured, oppressed during Tsarist's time, has now been able to join on an equal footing the workers of the [Soviet] Union in the construction of socialism and are building their happy, joyful and prosperous life in a new way. [...]

We are asking on behalf of the Gypsies to allocate a territory, at least in the form of rayon, for the compact settlement of the toiling Gypsies. Among us, there are many Communist Gypsies, Komsomol members, youth that study, [and] many cadres that have emerged from among the Gypsies which would be able to provide leadership in the given territory. Dear comrade Stalin! We wish that at the end of the second five-year plan there would be no family who does not have a working life. (Ibid.; Marushiakova & Popov, 2021b, pp. 859–861).

It is not clear whether this Address reached Stalin himself at all (in any case, his answer is unknown). However, Ilya Gerasimov continued his campaign, and on October 12, 1936, he sent a new letter to Stalin, addressing him as head of the Constitutional Commission, which was to draft the new Constitution of the USSR (adopted on December 5, 1936). In this letter, signed by Gerasimov in his capacity as the instructor in Oblispolkom of the Western oblast, he referred to the numerous discussions he held on the draft of the new Constitution with Gypsy kolkhos workers and nomads:

The nomadic population asks the Constitution's Commission, under the leadership of J. V. STALIN, and the Government to allocate a rayon in the Union for the compact settlement of the Gypsies and to provide them with support in getting employment. There is now a particularly great attraction to sedentarisation, [...] there is a class struggle everywhere. I consider it necessary to dedicate a rayon in the Soviet Union for the purpose of setting up Gypsy kolkhozes, village councils, to provide them with help in getting employment. The Gypsy population of the whole Soviet Union will be as numerous as 100,000 people, of whom there are already many Communist and Komsomol members, who will be able to help the Party's Soviet authorities in the management of the rayon. (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 27, l. 141–14106.; Marushiakova & Popov, 2021b, pp. 861–863).

An abridged version of this letter was also published in the official *Izvestiya TsIK SSSR* under the heading 'Proposals', in which it was also introduced in the framework of the so-called nationwide discussion of the draft of the new Constitution of the USSR, entitled *About the Gypsy National Rayon* (*Известия*, 1936, p. 3; Marushiakova & Popov, 2021b, pp. 909–910). Along with his epistolary activity, Ilya Gerasimov tried to lobby in the Soviet institutions for the determination of the Western Oblast as a region within which the future Gypsy national rayon should be created. In an undated Report to the SN TsIK of the USSR from 1936 he gave many detailed data on the state of the Gypsy kolkhozes in the area, and elaborated his concept in more detail:

I believe that now is the time to think about the choice of territory for compact settlement by Gypsy toiling people who are settling down. Here it will be possible to create national Gypsy soviets as well. For this work, it is necessary to oblige Komzets, with the help of the Gypsy community, to conduct an explanatory campaign on the settling of nomadic Gypsies. Provide the future national rayon with appropriate personnel. Indeed, among us – Gypsies, there are many communists, Komsomol members, and besides this, there are many Gypsy students in secondary and higher educational institutions. All these cadres may well provide leadership in the allotted territory. (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 794, l. 123).

Further in the text, Gerasimov gives numerical data on the availability of trained management staff among the Gypsy population of the Western oblast, which is impressive:

All Gypsies working in kolkhozes and their children are enrolled in school; in addition, 60 people study in secondary and higher educational institutions (medical and pedagogical rabfaks, Communist universities and others). About 80 Gypsies work in the Soviet, cooperative, and economic apparatuses, of whom 30 are members and candidates of the VKP(b), and 20 are members of the Komsomol. (*Ibid.*).

Special mention should be made of the Committee on the Land Allocation for the toiling Jews under the Presidium of the TsIK SSSR (Komzet). As a result of the active work of this Soviet institution in 1934 in the Far East, was established the Autonomous Jewish National Oblast (now the Jewish Autonomous Oblast) with the capital Birobidzhan. In

this way, a precedent arose – the creation of a national territorial-administrative unit of a previously scattered diasporic nationality on a new, until then almost uninhabited territory. It is this precedent that Ilya Gerasimov (and other Gypsy activists) wanted to use for the successful realisation of the idea of a Gypsy national rayon.

The Council of Nationalities at the TsIK SSSR used Ilya Gerasimov's letters to the higher Soviet institutions as a justification for promoting the idea of a Gypsy national territorial-administrative unit, e.g. a letter to the NKVD Resettlement Department dated October 19, 1936, signed by Alexander Khatskevich, proposed "to take into account the desire of many toiling Gypsies and outline some area where a more or less compact mass of Gypsies could be settled in the next 2–3 years" (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 794; RGAE, f. 5675, op. 1, d. 145). However, when it comes to the specific preparatory work for the creation of such a territorial-administrative unit (for more details, see below), things were very different. The Western Oblast stayed away from this process, and the echelons of timber from the GULAG for the construction of farm outbuildings and houses in the Gypsy kolkhozes did not reach them. The reasons for dropping out of the Western Oblast from the plans of the Soviet institutions involved in these preparatory activities (and in the first place the NKVD) were probably based on the geographical location of the district. At that time, the Western region was in fact a border region, and Soviet national policy preferred not to create unnecessary national formations on the border with the hostile West. Exceptions were made only in cases where these entities (Karelian ASSR, Moldovan ASSR) can be used as a kind of Piedmont for foreign territories (Martin, 2001, pp. 8–9).

The turn in the national policy of the USSR in the second half of the 1930s did not affect Ilya Gerasimov's official career and he remained working as an instructor in the Oblispolkom of the Western Oblast. During the Second World War, he was evacuated due to his official position, but after the end of the occupation of the region by the German army, in 1944 he was transferred to work in Bryansk (the neighbouring regional centre) in the Gorispolkom for the economic and household services for the evacuated population (i.e. he was promoted in the nomenklatura hierarchy). In 1961, Ilya Gerasimov retired receiving a personal republican pension (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, д. Илья Герасимов), i.e. this means the second, higher type of personal pension in comparison with Andrey Taranov. Despite his retirement, Gerasimov still worked on a freelanced contract as head of the organisational department of the Soviet district of the city of Bryansk (i.e. in a lower administrative position).

The exact year of Ilya Gerasimov's death is unknown. The latest information about him dates back to 1965, when he met with Nikolay Satkevich and at his farewell wished him "whatever happened" not to stop his work on establishing a Gypsy school and Gypsy music and dance amateur ensemble (Ibid.), i.e. despite all the historical vicissitudes, Ilya Gerasimov remained faithful to the ideals of his youth until the end of his life.

Trofim Gerasimov

The information available about the life of Trofim Gerasimov is very limited. Neither the year nor the place of his birth is clear, in all probability it was Smolensk uyezd, and nothing is known about the early years of his life either. In his Memorandum to Stalin in 1935 (see below), he wrote about it in general terms, using the mass phraseology that prevailed at the time:

Who was I before? A Gypsy nomad, I used to wander with the tabor from place to place. After that, I worked as an agricultural serf for three years and after that a Komsomol, school, Party ... (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 64, d. 1637, l. 2).

The first historical document in which the name of Trofim Gerasimov appears is from 1926. It was a Letter sent to the Gypsy Union (VSTs) at the TsIK USSR (as written on the letter, although VSTs was not attached to TsIK, but was an independent organisation). The letter was written "On behalf of the 52 souls of the poorest people of the toiling peasantry of Gypsy nationalities, who have been cultivating the land with their own labour for many decades", from the now non-existent village of Gribany (or Gribanovo – in the documents it is written in both ways), Dosugovskoy volost, Smolenskiy uyezd (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 120, d. 27, l. 28). It states:

From the very beginning of 1923 [...] we have been unsuccessfully fussing before our volost, uyezd and provincial land institutions about the land management of our transition to khutors. [...] Our situation is completely hopeless [...] we are completely deprived of the opportunity to conduct [...] peasant households. [...] Given all of the above, on behalf of the population of the Gypsy nationality in our village, we ask for your immediate and energetic intervention [...] and our land management on the khutor. [...] For submitting this application and to apply, we trust the energetic worker among the provincial Gypsy population, a member of the VKP(b), Party card No. 0386456, Comrade Trofim Yakovlevich Gerasimov. We undersigned this, the Gribanovsk Gypsy population, namely, 8 householders in the village of Gribany [...]. July 14, 1926. (Ibid., l. 27–28).

As can be seen from this letter, the Gypsies who signed it were not nomads, but lived sedentarily and earned a living from hired agricultural labour. As said already, the settlement of the nomadic Gypsies in the Smolensk region began as early as the last decades of the 19th century, and their desire to receive their own land for cultivation was a completely logical consequence. It should be noted that the letter is dated July 14, 1926, while the Decree *On Measures to Facilitate the Transition of Nomadic Gypsies to the Working Sedentary Lifestyle* of TsIK SSSR and SNK SSSR was issued on October 1, 1926, i.e. the desire to create their own, Gypsy cooperative agricultural associations already existed due to the general historical context, and was not generated by the policy of the Soviet state towards the Gypsies. Among the signatories of this letter is the name of Yakov Gerasimov. Whether this was Trofim Gerasimov's father or not remains unclear, but in any case, there is reason to believe that Gribany (Gribanovo) was his home village.

It is also noteworthy that at that time Trofim Gerasimov was already a member of the VKP(b). He stated in his Memorandum to Stalin that he had been a member of the VKP(b) since 1927 (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 64, d. 1637, l. 2), but in this case, it was in all probability a question of a typing mistake. In any case, membership in the Party presupposes at least a few years of membership in the Komsomol, as well as active socially engaged activity. Therefore, it is natural that in pursuance of the policy of creating a new Soviet ruling elite of “correct” class origin, soon after the delivery of the letter from the Gypsies from the village of Gribany, and after the completion of Smolensk Rabfak, Trofim Gerasimov was sent to study in Moscow (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 120, d. 27, l. 3).

It is not possible to say with complete certainty where exactly Trofim Gerasimov was sent to study, nor which university he graduated from. In his letters to various Soviet institutions, written in December 1927, he indicated as his address the dormitory of the Mendeleev Institute (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763, l. 3; f. P 1235, op. 120, d. 27, l. 101). This should mean that at that time Trofim Gerasimov was a student at the Moscow Mendeleev Institute of Chemical Technology (now D. Mendeleev University of Chemical Technology of Russia), but there is a contradiction with other information. In his Memorandum to Stalin, describing his career, he wrote that he had previously worked at the Car Factory named after Stalin (now Likhachov Plant) in Moscow, from where in 1935 he was sent to work at the Train Carriage Factory Named after Newspaper ‘Pravda’ at the station Zaporozhye-Kamenskoye, Dneprodzerzhinsk (now Kamenskoe), Dnipropetrovsk (now Dnipro) Oblast in Ukraine, where he worked as an engineer in the Blacksmith’s workshop (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 64, d. 1637, l. 2–14). Before that, Trofim Gerasimov wrote a textbook entitled *Blacksmithery in Kolkhozes and Sovkhozes*, published in Romani language (Герасимово, 1933), which also shows exactly what his professional speciality was, so it can be assumed that he graduated from Moscow Higher Technical School, renamed in 1930 to the Moscow Mechanical Engineering School (now the prestigious Bauman Moscow State Technical University). The fact that he lived in a student dormitory at another university can be explained in two ways – either he first studied at one university and then transferred to another, or (which is more likely) that the dormitory was used by students from both universities. In any case, Trofim Gerasimov is in all probability the first Gypsy in the USSR to receive a “real” university education (the Communist University of the Toilers of the East, which Andrey Taranov previously graduated from, is rather a specialized higher party school than a “regular” university).

During his studies in Moscow, Trofim Gerasimov continued to be active in the field of Gypsy activism. On December 30, 1927, he sent a long Report to the NKVD (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 120, d. 27), in which he wrote that he had already sent similar letters to ON VTsIK (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763), as well as to TsK VKP(b) and MK VKP(b) (the latter two are not found in the archives yet). In these Reports, he recounts his first impressions of the “great initiators in their own words and the workers in leadership of the Gypsy Union” Ivan [Rom-] Lebedev, Andrey Taranov, Sergey Polyakov and Georgiy Lebedev, and

complains, “despite all my attempts, I could not find any work in the above union.” Along with this, he reports that:

I have big disputes with the board of the Gypsy Union, for which I was recognised as a petty proprietor and for anarchist actions against the intended system; I argued that their system was not suitable for the [illegible] Gypsy masses. (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763).

The following is an extensive presentation of the existing irregularities in the work of VSTs, as well as proposals for its expansion in certain priorities, and more effective coordination with local authorities. The recommendation he made to the Soviet institutions deserves special attention:

The [Gypsy] Union should not be closed, but reorganised, clearing it of weeds. To liquidate workshops and artels, which exist at VSTs, and to engage exclusively in [...] organisational work. (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763; f. P 1235, op. 120, d. 27).

In fact, in this way, Trofim Gerasimov repeated the basic demands that the Soviet government directed to the Union for more than one year, and which the leadership of the VSTs strived in every way not to fulfil in practice (and which ultimately turns out to be the most important reason, as well as the specific purpose for its liquidation).

It is not clear when exactly Trofim Gerasimov completed his higher education, but the available historical evidence shows that in the early 1930s he was hesitant about which path to take in his life. In March 1932, he was at the disposal of Oblispolkom in Smolensk and participated in a commission that investigated the economic conditions of the Gypsy kolkhoz *Svoboda* in Kardimovsky selsoviet Yartsevskiy rayon and the readiness for the spring sowing campaign, where at a meeting of kolkhoz workers he made a presentation on the importance of the Paris Commune (GASO, f. P 2360, op. 1, sv. 181, d. 2067). According to the results of the kolkhoz *Svoboda* investigation, the kolkhoz was characterised as economically weak, and among the collective farmers there were “15% of idlers who do not want to work at all, visit bazaars, engage in fortune-telling, healings, sometimes pocket unloading (women [...]); they consider themselves to be old collective farmers, they occupy good living premisses in the centre [of the village]” (Мозгунова, 1994, No. 165). The investigation ended with a stormy Kolkhoz General Assembly, at which numerous accusations were made against the kolkhoz leadership, after which the Assembly decided that the chairman of the kolkhoz, Comrade Yakov Zhuchkov, “could not lead the kolkhoz and the state would not entrust such a leader”; the old chairman to be handed over to the judicial authorities for the embezzlement of kolkhoz money of 453 rubles 46 kopecks received from the sale of the kolkhoz bull, which was not reported in the treasury of kolkhoz. Comrade Mudrachenkov was unanimously elected the new chairman of the kolkhoz, and Comrade S. M. Murachkovskaya, seconded for the sowing campaign by the head organisation *Tsygkhimprom* (Gypsy Chemical Industry)

in Moscow, was unanimously elected and attached to the kolkhoz as a new secretary (GASO, f. P 2360, op. 1, sv. 181, d. 2067, l. 10–11; f. P 2360, op. 1, sv. 181, d. 2069, l. 78).

Of particular interest is the introductory speech of Trofim Gerasimov, with which he opened this General Assembly, and in which he presented his authorised and expanded version of the dominant historical narrative of the Gypsies in the early USSR:

Before proceeding directly to the statement of the formulations of the national Gypsy kolkhozes, I would like to say, although indirectly, who the Gypsies are and where the latter came from. Few of us know the history of the origin of our nation. Only historical archives prove that the Gypsies originated from the Indian caste. With the fall of the Mediterranean basin, the Gypsy kingdom fell, which existed at that time as a separate kingdom, as a separate cultural unit. I will not dwell much on historical notices, because I am limited to 20 minutes, and therefore I will resort to separate stages of Gypsy history. In Europe, Gypsies were considered heretics and sorcerers, cutting, beating and burning often at the stake by families and clans and even tribes. Tsarist Russia did not differ in the least from the cruelty of the oppressed nationalities. They, like all capitalist countries, quarrelled among small nationalities to provide life for the nobility and the bourgeoisie. And so the white bones of vampires and spiders grew fat and inactive on the bones of the workers. The Gypsies, as such, were not considered human. In the opinion of the majority of the “civilised” caste, the Gypsies were not people, but animals, resembling the likeness of people. In their opinion, these are people capable only of cheering a fat bourgeois in restaurants, pubs with a guitar in their hands. Great October broke the age-old chains of slavery, oppression and violence. Only in October did all nationalities feel an equal life, with great benefits for the latter. (GASO, f. P 2360, op. 1, sv. 181, d. 2067, l. 10).

Trofim Gerasimov’s stay in Smolensk turned out to be short. In all likelihood, some problems have arisen in his relations with his superiors. In his Memorandum to Stalin, he devoted much space to the successes and achievements of the Western Oblast in pursuing state policy towards the Gypsies, but at the same time, he made some critical remarks in this regard, such as insufficient care for Gypsy nomads who wished to transfer to a sedentary way of life, as well as the failure of local authorities to provide additional land for the expansion of existing Gypsy kolkhozes (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 64, d. 1637, l. 4–5). Eventually, in May 1933, the National Department of Oblispolkom in Smolensk, where he worked as an instructor, decided to grant the request of the Regional Agricultural Administration and to reassign Trofim Gerasimov to work as an instructor with them (GASO, f. P 2360, op. 1, sv. 130, d. 1482, l. 108–111). This change of job was de facto a downgrading in his career. Dissatisfied with this, he left Smolensk and went to work in Moscow.

Trofim Gerasimov started working as an inspector in the Moscow Regional Agricultural Department. Taking up his new post, he actively intervened in the case of the mass deportation of “foreign Gypsies” from the vicinity of Moscow in the period from June 28 to July 9, 1933, for which we have to say a few more words.

The term ‘foreign Gypsies’ was widely used in the 1920s and the first half of the 1930s. It summarised the Roma, subjects of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Romania, Serbia, Greece, etc., who entered the borders of the Russian Empire for the most part in the

last decades of the nineteenth and especially in the early twentieth century (before the First World War). They led a semi-nomadic way of life, but in modernised forms – they travelled (often using rail transport) to the larger cities of the empire, looking for orders to make or repair copper vessels, or other temporary work. They used their documents of foreign nationals, which were to be certified once a year to be able to use several tax preferences (practically they did not pay any taxes for their work). For the most part, these Roma were *Kelderari* from various family-related communities, and there were also *Lovari*.

After the October Revolution, these so-called foreign Gypsies remained living in the USSR without changing their status of foreign nationals (the ‘foreigners’ category was even included in the 1926 All-Union census). Moreover, in 1917 the system of internal passports was abolished and in practice in the 1920s, personal documents of various kinds were used. The situation changed radically with the adoption of the Resolution of the TsIK and SNK of the USSR of December 27, 1932, on the Establishment of a Unified Passport System for the USSR and the Mandatory Registration of Passports. Passports were issued only to limited categories (residents of working-class settlements, new buildings, state farms, etc.), and large numbers of Gypsies (who were without a residence permit and led a nomadic lifestyle) were deprived of the opportunity to obtain identity documents and remain of indeterminate civil status.

The situation was further complicated by the beginning of mass collectivisation and the shortage of food, which led to the introduction of bread cards in 1929 and the All-Union card system in 1931, which virtually excluded large sections of the population (including the predominant part of the Gypsies) outside the state food supply system. Along with this, in 1932 the division into “open” and “closed” cities was introduced, and the second category includes Moscow, Leningrad, Minsk, Kiev, Odesa, Kharkov, Rostov-on-Don, Vladivostok, etc., which were privileged in terms of food supply.

In this general historical context, it became clear why in the summer of 1933 dozens of Gypsy tabors were concentrated in the vicinity of Moscow in search of food in the big city. Their deportation to Siberia has been repeatedly described in the academic literature, and its detailed description can be found in the Soviet archives (GARF, f. P 9479, op. 1, d. 19, l. 7), and has also been published repeatedly. This deportation was not a special anti-Gypsy action of the Soviet state, but part of the general action of the authorities to cleanse the capital of the so-called “declassified elements” through the system at the OGPU under the Resolution of the SNK of the USSR *On the Organisation of Labour Settlements* of the OGPU of April 20, 1933 (ГАРФ, ф. Р 5446, оп. 57, д. 24, л. 2–12). However, the enlisting of the deported Gypsies to this category was not based on nationality’s reasons, but on other criteria, in particular the presence of a residence permit and personal identity documents. According to these criteria, it turned out that “foreign Gypsies” (mainly *Kelderari*), who had lived in Moscow for a long time, where they established their own artels, were not subject to deportation, but the Gypsies who were nomadic at that time and who were not “foreign nationals” were determined for deportation. According

to the memories preserved in the oral history of the Gypsies, these were Gypsies from different groups – *Kishiniovtsi, Servi, Vlaxi, Krimi*, etc. (Бессонов, 2002a).

For what reasons in the OGPU documents they were defined as “foreign Gypsies” is not clear. In the period from June 28 to July 9, 1932, 1,008 Gypsy families (or a total of 5,470 people) were sent to the city of Tomsk, in the then West Siberian region, with five special trains. The Gypsies had to be resettled there in separate Gypsy national settlements. The deportees took with them all their belongings, including 338 horses and 2 cows; on the way, they were provided with hot food, medical care, and fodder for the animals (GARF, f. P 9479. op. 1, d. 19, l. 7).

According to the OGPU documentation in the West Siberian Kray (GARF, f. P 3, op. 1, d. 540 A, l. 51–53), from the spring of 1933 to August 7 of the same year, a total of 119,426 people were deported as “*trudposelentsy*” (i.e. Labour settlers – this was the officially used term, which has changed many times over the years). The predominant part of all these deportees were the victims of the mass collectivisation of agriculture (“*kulaks*”), except for those who were separated as “recidivists and declassed elements” (20,940 people in total) and Gypsies (5,222 people in total, i.e. 248 people – less of those deported from Moscow, apparently, some of them escaped on the way – if the missing have died, this must be confirmed by the relevant documents). In particular, it should be emphasised that the OGPU documentation clearly distinguishes between two separate categories of the *trudposelentsy* – the ‘recidivists and declassified elements’ and ‘Gypsies’ – and they do not overlap, i.e. Gypsies were not treated as ‘recidivists and declassified elements’. This clarification is important because in *The Black Book of Communism* these two categories are not only not clearly separated from each other, and the paragraph beginning with the deportation of the Gypsies from Moscow and ends with the so-called Nazino tragedy (Courtois et al., 1999; for Nazino tragedy see in more detail also Werth, 2007), which leaves the door open for some wrong interpretations.

Even before the beginning of the mass deportations, as well as during their course, the local authorities repeatedly signalled to the central authorities in Moscow that they were not well enough provided (materially, financially, and as human resources) for the reception, resettlement and arrangement of such a large number of settlers. However, the emergency measures taken proved to be insufficient, resulting in many problems of the most varied nature, including the well-known case, publicly defined as the ‘Nazinskaya tragedy’, in which more than 6,000 ‘recidivists and declassified elements’ were settled without any prior preparation on an uninhabited island on the Ob River, where more than a third of them die of starvation and cold within a few months (Красильников, 2002). In this general historical context, the fate of the deported Gypsies also became clear.

The case of the deportation of the Gypsies from Moscow is also interesting from the point of view of the possibility of cross-checking and verifying the data from the archival sources and the oral history, which (at least in this case) does not contradict but also complement each other. In this way, as with the involvement of other historical sources,

a relatively comprehensive, albeit quite contradictory, picture of this deportation can be obtained.

The echelons with the deported Gypsies from Moscow were transported by rail line to the city of Tomsk (the trip lasted between two and three weeks), and from there on local roads and by barge, were moved to their designated settlement. This settlement, which no longer exists today, was located in the Pyshkino-Troitskiy (today Pervomaiskiy) rayon of today's Tomsk oblast, located on the banks of the river Chichka-Yul (in the memories of the Gypsies it is remembered as Chikayul), somewhere around its confluence in the river Chulym, and it was called Yevstigneevka (За советскую науку, 1991, p. 3; Неволин, 2014). Living conditions were very difficult. The local authorities failed to prepare housing for the new settlers, and they lived in dugouts (several barracks were subsequently built). The Gypsies did not show much enthusiasm for their settlement, in clearing the taiga they rather imitated labour activity, and the seeds they were given for sowing were eaten, roasted on the fire, and soon they scattered (despite the bans) in the surrounding villages to beg, tell fortune, etc. (Ibid). The regime imposed by the authorities was not very strict (or more likely for various reasons they closed their eyes to breaches of rules), and in the words of Victor Zemskov:

As early as the autumn of 1933, this contingent of labour settlers virtually ceased to exist, as almost all Gypsies fled. The documents do not contain any instructions on the measures taken to return them to the places of deportation. (Земсков, 2014).

Sneaking through the taiga and leaving the deads on the road (for which memories are preserved in oral history to this day), the fugitives reached the European parts of the USSR. According to other historical evidence, after the mass exodus of Gypsies in the autumn of 1933, the Gypsy settlement of Yevstigneevka continued to exist for at least a few more years, with about 400 people living there, and living conditions continued to be extremely difficult and the escapes continued (За советскую науку, 1991, p. 3; Неволин, 2014). It is unknown when exactly this settlement ceased to exist, but in all probability, it was finally abandoned before the beginning of the Second World War.

Trofim Gerasimov prepared several memoranda on the issue of the deportation of Gypsy nomads from the vicinity of Moscow urging to resolve the issue of the numerous tabors of nomadic Gypsies around Moscow. The memoranda were sent not only to his immediate superiors in MOZO but also to other higher institutions – TsK VKP(b), ON VTsIK, Moscow Committee VKP(b), MOIK, Narkomzem RSFSR and others (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 28, pp. 143–146, 158–170, 189–196). It is worth quoting some of these Reports, reflecting the attitude of Trofim Gerasimov to these events:

MOZO until now has not been involved in organising Gypsy kolkhozes, despite the orders of the Narkomzem RSFSR, which were 3, despite the 2 meetings of the Narkomze collegium of the RSFSR, despite the Decree of the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of April 1, 1932, and 2 meetings of the VTsIK Department of Nationalities,

and in the 1933 year, even though 2 Gypsy kolkhozes had already been chosen: *Krasnaya Kuznitsa* and *Krasnaya Zvezda*, the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Belarus, due to [illigible] underestimation of the national question, did not resettle the Gypsies to the place of the allotted site and the Government was forced to administratively clear the Gypsies from the tabors, within the radius of Moscow 45 km, there were encompassed even two Gypsy kolkhozes (Ibid., l. 194). [...]

Thanks to the absence of a party and a Soviet eye, exploitation, which has reached the point of arbitrariness, is rampant in the Gypsy camps. The Gypsy bourgeoisie and the kulaks, kicked out of kolkhozes and productions, have grouped together in the camps of the Moscow region, and this kulak is trying with all its might to keep the camp and exploit the poor. In some tabors, there are elements of the kulaks of various stripes, even of other nationalities. Exploitation is so rampant in the camps of foreign Gypsies that they even arrange their own courts. The judges of these Gypsies are people with a large property qualification. The poor are being sued for non-payment of debts and interest. Courts go to the point of death, and neither the MOIK National Sector nor the MOZO notices all this. These kulaks obtained documents of authorization from the All-Russian Union of Gypsies, with which they are profiteering in the old fashioned way around the region. Strangely, the All-Russian Union of Gypsies was closed in 1928, but the stamps and seals still appear, giving the right to profiteering on the Gypsies. (Ibid., l. 196).

Trofim Gerasimov also talks about these events in his Memorandum to Stalin. According to his interpretation, in their desire to move to a sedentary lifestyle, "Gypsy camps were forced to come to Moscow with a petition to the central land authorities", they created the two Gypsy kolkhozes mentioned above, but "due to the inertia of the MOZO and underestimation of the national question, the work was not completed", and "the administrative authorities were forced to [...] evict the Gypsies from the Moscow zone" (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 64, d. 1637, l. 5–6). To what extent this interpretation of the events is accurate and correct becomes a debatable question, but the high degree of Gerasimov's involvement in them can be seen.

In his Memoranda to the Supreme Soviet Institutions, Trofim Gerasimov sharply criticised the leadership of his institution and the Moscow party and administrative authorities for their activities (or rather inaction) towards the Gypsies in Moscow:

During the 16 years of Soviet rule, neither MOZO nor Natsmen MIK dealt with the Gypsy issue. [...] During the period 1932–33, a group of Gypsy teachers was formed at the Institute for Advanced Training, and it turned out that 98 per cent of teachers from the Western Oblast and 2% from Ukraine attended these courses, and there were no teachers from the Moscow region. The Moscow region does not have a single communist from the Gypsy nation. [...] If the Gypsy issue in the Moscow region had been raised, according to the Bolsheviks' norms, the leaders of the dead artels before and after the closure would have worked on this issue in all Gypsy artels, focusing on the class enemy and this method would have served to mobilize Gypsy workers' masses. Consequently, 18 Gypsy artels were buried due to the inaction of the MOIK national sector. (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 28, l. 189).

Naturally, his direct superiors did not like this harsh criticism, and soon after Trofim Gerasimov found his new field of life, left the Soviet administration (it is not clear

whether this was done voluntarily or he was fired), and began working at Car Factory named after Stalin, from where in 1935 he was sent to work in the Train Carriage Factory in Zaporozhye-Kamenskoye (see above). There, at the beginning of July 1935, he wrote the Memorandum to Stalin, repeatedly mentioned here (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 64, d. 1637, l. 2–14; Marushiakova & Popov, 2021b, pp. 846–858), which deserves more attention.

This Memorandum to Stalin, written by Trofim Gerasimov, differs significantly from other Letter to the Leader-style letters written by Gypsy activists, not only in size (13 type-written pages) but also in content. Trofim Gerasimov was, in fact, the first Gypsy activist to openly discuss the need to create a Gypsy National Autonomous Republic. There can be little doubt that Andrey Taranov and Ivan Rom-Lebedev in the 1920s, as well as Ilya Gerasimov and Ivan Tomakov in the 1930s, also had in mind (as a closer or more distant perspective) the same thing when they proposed the creation of a Gypsy National Rayon, but it was Trofim Gerasimov who not only voiced but also justified this idea (of course, in the spirit and through the phraseology of the dominant state policy):

[...] a very important issue, this is the issue of the allocation of the Gypsy rayon at the beginning, which should expand and turn into the Autonomous Gypsy Republic. In my opinion, this question is so urgent today that I personally do not find another way out that would serve faster than this question, to build the National Socialist Republic. The question for today has matured to the extreme, about the need for a compact settlement of Gypsies. [...] In the area where the Gypsies will be settled, it is possible to educate people in all socialist sections. Here, to condense the whole culture with highly colourful content. [...] The kolkhozes which are already established with a great desire will go to the designated area, and this will make it possible to liquidate the Gypsy tabors. [...]

Based on the elimination of the Gypsy camps, the Gypsy bourgeoisie and kulaks, who exploit the toiling Gypsies in tabors, where there is no Party and Soviet eye, would be eliminated. Today, tens of thousands of people, thanks to their tabor life, are not helpers in the implementation of our five-year plan. This army is not yet working on our common cause, the cause of building socialism. With the organisation of rayon, which will quickly turn into the Autonomous Gypsy Republic, this army of Gypsy toiling people will become a direct conductor of socialist construction – our direct and main task. (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 64, d. 1637, l. 7–8).

To reveal additional arguments for the need to create a Gypsy National Soviet Republic, Trofim Gerasimov also points to the possibility of achieving an international effect through its creation, because “the final settlement of the Gypsy nation is of great importance in the world political context” (Ibid., l. 8). In this regard, he cites the words of an Englishman (who cannot be identified with certainty), who visited the Gypsy Club in Moscow in 1934: “No one in England would believe that the Gypsies had a written language, theatre, technical school, etc.; here in England this wild tribe is considered incapable of showing even initial culture” (Ibid., l. 8–9).

In his Memorandum, Trofim Gerasimov (in the same way as Ilya Gerasimov before him) repeatedly pointed out the successes of the Western Oblast in building Gypsy kolkhozes (of course, the examples are from the *Oktyabr* kolkhoz), Gypsy schools, etc.

Moreover, among the examples he cites, there are those from 1934 and 1935, when he had already left the area, i.e. this is a hint that the two Gerasimovs continued to keep in touch with each other (and this is completely understandable, especially if they are close relatives). This emphasis on the special place of the Western Oblast can be interpreted as indirect lobbying for its choice as the place of the future Gypsy National Republic, although at the same time Trofim Gerasimov notes that “in my opinion, it is expedient to create this rayon in the North Caucasus” (Ibid., l. 7), i.e. he is familiar with both the earlier preferences of the VSTs leadership for the creation of a Gypsy area and the ongoing processes.

The place of Western Oblast and kolkhoz *Oktyabr* is highlighted especially when Trofim Gerasimov raised the issue of staffing of the future Gypsy republic:

Do we have our own national cadres? Yes, there are also a sufficient number of different qualifications, these cadres have a specific weight in the party percentage, so from this point of view, it is possible to go without any risk to organise a Gypsy region. (Ibid.).

In confirmation of the availability of such trained staff, he again gave the example of kolkhoz *Oktyabr*, where illiteracy was completely eliminated, all children and young people studied in the local school (up to 7th grade), and in addition from the kolkhoz were sent to study 18 students in medical Rabfak, 3 in the Pedagogical Institute, 2 in the Higher Communist Agricultural School, and 1 in the Courses of Soviet Construction at VTsIK (Ibid., l. 4).

In his Memorandum to Stalin, Trofim Gerasimov allowed himself to do something that no Gypsy activist in the early USSR had done before (and after) – to assess the work of the highest Soviet institutions concerning the Gypsies, as well as to give recommendations on how to do the work more efficiently and effectively. Here he was a little more careful and avoided direct criticism but his assessment nevertheless become clear enough:

The VTsIK Department of Nationalities has nothing concrete on the Gypsy issue. He has not yet taken up seriously the Gypsy issue, as it should be today [...] except for trips, acquaintance and coordination of some issues. Passing by [...] the Department of Nationalities, there are questions of the dynamic content of the aspirations of the Gypsies to settle down. In this case, [...] the Department of Nationalities not only could not, by influencing local organisations, rather settle for working Gypsies to settle but [...] did not have this area of activity. (Ibid., l. 6).

In the same way, according to Trofim Gerasimov, ON VtsIK was responsible for the lack of a Gypsy newspaper, which was especially important and necessary at the moment:

The newspaper would be a signal, a mouthpiece, a direct channel of communication between all Gypsy kolkhozes, artels, clubs, Gypsy schools, and thanks to which all the best experiences of the best works would be passed on to each other, eliminating all the

shortcomings, not to mention the fact that kolkhozes, clubs, artels would know each other. The issue with the newspaper has been smouldering (not resolved) for two years now, while it is still needed often, every minute. (Ibid., l. 6–7).

According to Trofim Gerasimov, ON VtsIK also did not make enough efforts to train staff to take over the organisation and management of the future Gypsy republic:

This issue is being discussed in the Department of Nationalities of VtsIK, for a long time, in my opinion, it has been glimmering with indecision in raising this issue so important on the agenda and petitioning the relevant organisations. (Ibid., l. 8).

Trofim Gerasimov did not make any specific assessment of Ivan Tokmakov, who worked as an instructor at ON VtsIK, he only briefly mentioned him, noting that he had been a member of VKP(b) since 1925 (Ibid.). However, as will be discussed later, Ivan Tokmakov had been a member of the VKP(b) since 1919. In the existing party hierarchy, the year of admission to the Party was a criterion of particular importance, i.e. writing in this way his prestige was reduced. This is a clear mistake on the part of Trofim Gerasimov, but it is not clear whether it was deliberately made or not.

After pointing out the shortcomings of the work of ON VtsIK, the final chord of the Memorandum of Trofim Gerasimov logically follows: “Dear Joseph Vissarionovich! I wrote you a memo with the intention that you push this matter off the ground.” (Ibid., l. 9).

An interesting point in Trofim Gerasimov’s Memorandum to Stalin is that after concluding with the question of the need for the Gypsy National Republic, he devoted a few more pages to a long passage, which described in detail the irregularities in the activity of the workshop and the factory where Trofim Gerasimov himself works, whereby all “wreckers” are branded, emphasising their “wrong” class origin (Ibid., l. 9–13). Fortunately, the NKVD apparently did not take these accusations seriously, because the names of these “class enemies” were not found in the lists of those repressed in the 1930s in Dneprodzerzhinsk (Слоневский, 2010).

Trofim Gerasimov’s memorandum did not reach Stalin himself, to whom it was addressed. From TsK VKP(b) it was sent for opinion to TsIK SSSR, and from there it was transferred to ON VTsIK (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 64, d. 1637). In his reply of August 29, 1935 the Head of the Department, Nygmet Nurmakov, is unusually sharp for this type of official documentation:

Comrade Khatskevich. I am returning the memorandum of citizen Gerasimov, which you sent to me with the resolution “Please take urgent measures”. A lot of work has been done in the arrangement of the Gypsies in the last 2–3 years; this work was done by the local Soviet and Party bodies under the day-to-day control and management of VTsIK without any involvement of Gerasimov and others like him, who limit their concern for the Gypsies to writing annually such notes. To arrange for the Gypsies is not an easy task, it does not

require urgent measures, but persistent and patient work, in particular, work among the Gypsies themselves, which is what we are doing all the time. Currently, we are preparing a question, [illegible] statements to government bodies, about resettlement and land management of nomadic Gypsies in compact masses in several rayons. This issue also cannot be "urgently" resolved. As for the creation of a Gypsy republic, I consider this issue to be idle at this time, therefore I do not intend to deal with it. (Ibid., l. 15).

As a result of the scandalous reputation before the Soviet authorities, which Trofim Gerasimov had already established, including with his Memorandum, he was not invited to attend the Meeting at the Department of Nationalities at TsIK USSR *On the Questions of Employment of Toiling Nomadic Gypsies and Their Cultural and Economic Services*, which took place on January 4 and 5, 1936 in Moscow, where the issues raised by him were discussed.

This exhausts the available historical evidence for Trofim Gerasimov. From here on, only assumptions and hypotheses can be made about his further fate.

Based on the conflicting nature and maximalism of Trofim Gerasimov, who was not afraid to criticise the top Soviet authorities for the existing shortcomings of their activities towards the Gypsies, the most logical assumption is that he became a victim of mass political repression in the second half of the 1930s. Despite a thorough check in the various existing databases on the victims of political terror in the USSR, however, we were unable to find his name anywhere, i.e. this version must be rejected.

Similarly, the version that Trofim Gerasimov died fighting in the Soviet Army during the Second World War must be rejected because his name does not appear in the various existing databases of the war victims. Moreover, by virtue of his official position (engineer in a strategically important plant), he should have been released from mobilisation and evacuated (along with the plant) far to the East.

The Train Carriage Factory in Zaporozhye-Kamenskoye together with all the working staff was evacuated due to the approach of the front line in the autumn of 1941 to the village of Chesnokovka (now the city of Novoaltaysk in Altai Kray). The plant was active during the war (mainly in military production), and in 1943, after the liberation of Dneprozerzhinsk, it returned to its old place. However, part of the working capacity (and personnel) remains in Novoaltaysk, which lays the foundations of the new Altai Carriage Plant.

There are two options for the fate of Trofim Gerasimov. Firstly, he could have returned to his old job and stayed there for the rest of his life. In this case, however, there is no explanation why he did not maintain contact with his old colleagues, and in the first place with Ilya Gerasimov and Mikhail Bezlyudskiy, with whom (probably due to their maximalism and uncompromising characters) they had close friendly relations (or at least Gerasimov and Bezlyudskiy do not mention anything in their memories about him). Second, he could have stayed at work in Altai Kray and ended his life there, without trying to restore his old family and friendships.

Of course, there is no confirmation for any of these hypotheses, so the fate until the end of his life of Trofim Gerasimov remains unknown. Nevertheless, Trofim Gerasimov has his rightful place in the history of Roma civic emancipation in the early USSR.

Ivan Tokmakov

Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov

The development of the processes of Roma civic emancipation in the USSR in the 1930s is inextricably linked with the personality of Ivan Petrovich Tokmakov (1888–1942 ?). Moreover, it would not be an exaggeration to say that, under his leadership, the Gypsy civic activism moved to a new, higher stage of its development, which, however, was followed by a catastrophic collapse.

We know only very little about the life (and even about the death) of Ivan Tokmakov, except for the period during which he was an instructor in ON VTsIK (1931–1938). Additional information in this regard discloses his personal data form filled in for the All-Union Party Census of VKP(b) in 1926, which is stored in the Party archive (RGASPI, f. 17, op. 9, d. 3642, l. 37–38). According to this form, Ivan Tokmakov was born in 1888. His birthplace is not specified, but in all probability it is Yekaterinburg. His close friend Nikolay Pankov, in his biographical essay *In Memory of Ivan Petrovich Tokmakov* (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, д. Иван Токмаков; Marushiakova & Попов, 2021b, pp. 971–978) emphasised that his parents were Gypsies (“he was Gypsy by father – and mother side”). Ivan Tokmakov himself in his personal data form noted as his nationality ‘Gypsy’ (*цыган*), while as his native language he initially wrote – Russian, but then crossed it out and also corrected it to ‘Gypsy’ (RGASPI, f. 17, op. 9, d. 3642, l. 37–38).

Nikolay Pankov also noted for Ivan Tokmakov’s parents that “they lived in the former Yekaterinburg, where Gypsies at that time hardly got by their own choice” (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, д. Иван Токмаков). With this Nikolay Pankov made a hint that perhaps the parents of Ivan Tokmakov were exiled to Siberia (criminal punishment in the Russian Empire). The residence in Yekaterinburg is, however, not enough as evidence for such an assumption. Of course, there were not a few cases of Gypsies who, together with their families, were sent to exile in Siberia (Shaidurov, 2018). In the second half of the 19th century, however, such places of exile were already regions far east of Ekaterinburg. Moreover, the Gypsy nomads at this time independently acquired new territories in Siberia and the Far East. We found even a curious historical testimony about Gypsies settled in the Bering Strait in the second half of the 19th century, as hired labourer to hunt seals, walruses, and whales (Бойцов, 1934, p. 137).

Ivan Tokmakov was orphaned at an early age. According to Nikolay Pankov, Tokmakov’s parents “perished” (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, д. Иван Токмаков). However, he did not give more details, so we can suppose it was an accident (if this had happened

through the fault of the Tsarist authorities, Pankov would not have missed this moment). Ivan Tokmakov was raised by his sister Elena, who lived in Kamyshlov, which is located near Yekaterinburg, and where he spent his childhood and his young years (Ibid.). In Kamyshlov, he studied for only one year at a parochial school, and from the age of 8 became a wage labourer (starting a job at such a young age was not uncommon in the Russian Empire). Before the October Revolution, he worked for 6 years as a *konopatchik* [a worker who is plugging cracks in the wooden surfaces] (RGASPI, f. 17, op. 9, d. 3642, l. 37). After the revolution of 1918, the life and career of Ivan Tokmakov are a typical example of the social elevators created by the Soviet state for the proletariat. From March 1918 until November 1919, he worked at the Kamyshlov railway station arranging the railway track wood and as a charcoal-burner, and from 1919, as a clerk in the railroad (Ibid.). In November 1919, he became a member of the VKP(b), without having previously been accepted as a candidate member of the Party (Ibid.), which was a relatively rare case in the practice of the time.

From that moment Ivan Tokmakov's nomenclature career started. In 1921 he completed a three-month training course at the local Soviet Party School and was promoted to a Party Secretary of the collective of Kamyshlov railway station, where he had worked until then, on which post he spent two years (Ibid.). In January 1924, he was sent for two and a half years to study at the Ural-Siberian Communist University in Yekaterinburg. After completing the study in 1926 he was promoted again and appointed Party Secretary for the whole Ural Agricultural Machinery Plant in the city of Votkinsk (now in the Udmurt Republic of the Russian Federation) (Ibid.).

This career development seems very fast at first glance, but it must be borne in mind that at that time the Soviet state was in dire need of a qualified party governing apparatus composed of people of the "correct" class (i.e. proletarian) origin, and their nationality was irrelevant. A natural stage in this development was the sending, in 1930, of Ivan Tokmakov to study as an aspirant (a designation of persons prepared for academic and teaching positions) at the Institute of Postgraduate Students at Sverdlovsk Communist University, established by the Soviet state to train for senior Party leadership. However, admission to this Institute is not at all simple and easy. Initially, a certain number of seats were allocated for each territorial-administrative unit, and for the Nizhny Novgorod region (at that time, in addition to today's Nizhniy Novgorod oblast, today's Chuvash AO, Mari AO and Udmurt AO, then Votkaya AO) were allocated places for 20 students. (Правила, 1930, p. 5). After the local party leadership had determined the future students who had to study for three years, those among them who wished to enter the Postgraduate Institute needed to take an additional entrance exam. At this exam, candidates had to submit a written text on a topic of their choice and pass an oral exam, then were enrolled in one of the following departments at the Institute – History of the VKP(b), Political Economy, Economic Policy, Leninism, History of the West, History of Russia, Dialectical Materialism, Natural Science (Chemistry, Physics, Biology) and Economic Geography (Ibid., pp. 7–8).

It is not known which of these University departments Ivan Tokmakov chose, but at the beginning of 1931, he already worked as an instructor at the ON VTsIK, where he prepared a proposal for a Gypsy newspaper. This newspaper was to be published in Moscow, in Romani language, on four pages, in a circulation of 2,000 copies, and would perform the following tasks:

At this stage, the newspaper in the Gypsy language can play a dominant role in the cultural uplift of the backward Gypsy masses and promote the transition to a toiling lifestyle of the Gypsies. The newspaper could play the role of organiser of the identification of existing Gypsy cadres to involve them in the work of the Gypsy sedentarisation and would play a positive role in promoting awareness of the decisions of the Party and the government. (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 121, d. 31, l. 266).

However, Ivan Tokmakov's training at Sverdlov Communist University did not last long. In November 1932, in a letter from ON VTsIK to the Department for Agitation and Propaganda at TsK of VKP(b) was announced: "In connection with the planned reorganisation of the Gypsy journal *Nevo drom* into a newspaper, ON VTsIK considers it possible to recommend Comrade Tokmakov, a Gypsy by nationality, a worker by social status and a party member since 1919, for a managerial job in the newspaper" (Ibid., l. 61). This letter also notes that Ivan Tokmakov has so far been a graduate student at Sverdlov Communist University, but "in connection with the reorganisation of this university", he is "at the disposal" of the APO TsK VKP(b). This letter shows that metaphorically speaking, Tokmakov stopped his education and moved from the common one to the Gypsy track (which itself is a nationally separated part of the common). Of course, in the Soviet state, such a career transition was impossible without the consent and blessing of the highest Party bodies, at whose disposal Ivan Tokmakov was.

Ironically, the creation of a Gypsy newspaper, which is the formal reason for this transition, has failed in practice. The journal *Nevo drom* indeed stopped in 1932 (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 28, l. 269), despite the considerable efforts Ivan Tokmakov made in his new position, to implement the decision to publish a Gypsy newspaper. In a note to Nygmet Nurmakov, Deputy Secretary of the VTsIK, in 1933, he justified the need to publish a Gypsy newspaper with the following words:

At present, in connection with the VTsIK Decree of April 1, 1932 [On the state of work] on serving Gypsy workers and the growth of Gypsy kolkhoz and handicraft artels, as well as the enormous urge of the Gypsy population to move from nomadic to a settled way of life, a need for Gypsy newspaper similar to the Tatar and Chuvash newspapers under *Izvestia TsIK* and VTsIK [...] has long been ripe. (Ibid.).

Ivan Tokmakov's proposal to publish a Gypsy newspaper had the support of his colleagues from ON VTsIK, and they often included it in the documents they published, e.g. in the Memorandum on the results of the verification of the execution of the decision of the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee On the State of

Work in Servicing the Toiling Gypsies of 25 February 1935, signed by the Deputy Head of ON VTsIK Simon Takoiev (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 130, d. 5). Ivan Tokmakov himself submitted two more memoranda in the same year, which again included this proposal (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 793, l. 61; f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 794, l. 90–91). This led to the preparation on January 2, 1936, of the project of the Draft Resolution of the Presidium of the Council of Nationalities at the TsIK of the USSR *On the Organisation, Economic and Cultural Services of Gypsy Workers*, which included a proposal for publishing of a Gypsy newspaper by SN TsIK USSR with the regularity of appearance – every five days (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 793, l. 50).

This project was discussed at the meeting at the Council of Nationalities at the TsIK USSR devoted to The Questions of the Employment of Toiling Nomadic Gypsies and Their Cultural and Economic Services, held on January 4 and 5, 1936, and the participants in it expressed their support for this idea. (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 794, l.l. 77–125). Shortly after this discussion, a new Draft Decree of the Presidium of VTsIK was prepared, beginning with the words “Having heard the report of the instructor of the Council of Nationalities at the VTsIK, comrade Tokmakov”, and which also states “to organise a newspaper in Gypsy language at the Department of Nationalities at TsIK USSR ” (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 793, l. 4–5). Ivan Tokmakov arranged a decision in this sense, but it was dropped in the edited final version (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 121, d. 31, l. 47–50), the project was not accepted, and instead of the Decree of the Presidium of VTsIK USSR from April 7, 1936, *On Measures on the Employment of Nomads and the Improvement of Economic and Cultural Services for Toiler Gypsies* was accepted (Постановление, 1936, p. 87). The issue of the Gypsy newspaper continued to shift between the various institutions for years and, in the end, a final decision was never reached. In the meantime, the year 1938 arrived, when a turning point in the national policy of the USSR occurred, and the issue of a Romani language newspaper became obsolete.

Ivan Tokmakov's admission into the position of instructor at the Central Executive Committee in 1931 has an important symbolic meaning. For the first time, a Gypsy took an official (and not as before, only consultative) position in the highest structures of the Soviet state (albeit in a relatively low administrative position), i.e. becomes part of the higher central nomenclature. Even more important are the practical dimensions of this appointment. As the only representative of the Gypsies in the central Soviet administration, Ivan Tokmakov was receiving a large part of the official correspondence of the Soviet institutions concerning the Gypsies, as well as all letters from Soviet citizens related to this issue. In this way, he found himself not only at the centre of Soviet policy towards the Gypsies but also had the opportunity to intervene and influence decision-making on specific issues, and more generally to offer his ideas and proposals for the formation of the leading directions and dimensions of the Gypsy policy of the Soviet state. Of course, his opportunities to impact the policy were not endless and, in practice, were limited by the Soviet institutional and administrative framework and especially by the leading tendencies in the general political processes, but still, they should not be

underestimated. Moreover (and more importantly), by virtue of his position and capabilities, Ivan Tokmakov de facto became the informal (and undisputed) leader of Gypsy activism, i.e. the leading and defining figure in the process of Roma civic emancipation in the early USSR in the 1930s. At the same time, there is no doubt that his capabilities in this regard, as well as his ability to influence the general Soviet Gypsy policy and its specific manifestations, were much greater than that of the leadership of the former VSTs in the 1920s.

In the early 1930s, many Gypsy kolkhozes and artels were established, and Gypsy schools were opened (including a teacher training high school); Gypsy journals and newspapers were published; more than 250 books have been printed in the Romani language (textbooks and various other publications, including works by Gypsy poets, writers, and playwrights); the famous Gypsy Theatre *Romen* was created, as well as other Gypsy music and dance groups, etc. Gypsy activists even after the failure of VSTs did not stay away from the implementation of this state policy towards Gypsies. On the contrary, they continued to be active participants in it. As said, Ivan Tokmakov became the central figure of Roma activism and through him, all Gypsy policies were implemented and controlled, and the other activists continued to be engaged with. In other words, Gypsy activism, and the movement for Roma civic emancipation in general, continued to develop, but in new forms.

Numerous documents related to the various activities of Ivan Tokmakov are preserved in the archives of VTsIK. There is no point in presenting them in detail here, it is enough to note the various areas in the field of Roma civic emancipation in which he was actively engaged and whose successful development he supported. A large part of Ivan Tokmakov's official correspondence was about the establishment and development of the Gypsy collective farms. This issue is generally related to the sedentarisation of the Gypsies because apart from those who lived in the cities, the vast majority in the USSR at that time were nomads. This close connection is clearly visible in the only known (so far) article by Ivan Tokmakov, *Амарэ дорэсэибена* (Our Achievements), in which he revealed the achievements and raised the problems of the transition of nomadic Gypsies to a sedentary lifestyle and the creation of Gypsy national kolkhozes (Сталинцо, 1935, pp. 2–3). Especially indicative is how he justified this transition – “the Communist party and the Soviet government set the task in the second five-year plan to transfer all nomads to settled life” (Ibid., p. 4). However, among the aims of the Second Five-Year Plan for the Development of the National Economy of the USSR (1933–1937), such a task is missing, i.e. Ivan Tomakov expressed here his wish, presented as a requirement of the Soviet state. This once again shows that Gypsy activists in the early USSR were not relentless executors of the Party and State directives but sought to realise their visions of desires for Roma civic emancipation in the general discourse of Soviet national policy, even as shows this case by resorting to light manipulations (how successful they were in these attempts is a separate issue).

As already said, the topic of the need to eradicate the nomadic lifestyle of the Gypsies, and the unavoidability for effective state action in this regard, has been raised more

than once by the Gypsy activists, including through articles published in the national press. Indicative in this regard are some of the titles of these articles, e.g. *From Nomadism to Sedentarisation* (Известия, 1927, p. 6), *Cast Aside the Nomadic Past: We Will Include Gypsies in the Active Construction of Socialism* (Комсомольская правда, 1930с, p. 3). Many similar articles in this regard have also been published in the Gypsy journals of *Romany zorya* and *Nevo drom*, as well as in the Romani-language newspapers, *Palo bolshevistsko kolkhozo* and *Stalintso*, which were distributed also among Gypsy nomads.

In their letters to the top Soviet institutions (see above), Gypsy activists also raised this issue, e.g. in the letter by Ilya Gerasimov to Mikhail Kalinin, as one of the most important problems facing the Gypsies in the USSR is stated the need for the publishing of a newspaper in the Romani language, which should be “a mobilising body in their transition from a nomadic lifestyle to a settled one”. (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 28, l. 368–369). The same problem is elaborated in detail in the Memorandum of Trofim Gerasimov to Stalin. Ivan Tokmakov also used this argument before the Soviet institutions, citing the need for propaganda concerning the sedentarisation of nomadic Gypsies as one of the main tasks of such a newspaper (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 121, d. 31, l. 61; f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 28, l. 208; f. P 1235, op. 130, d. 5, l. 103). Although the institutions have expressed support for this idea (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 793, l. 5, 51–52), in the end, it was not realised. Not the least reason for this was probably the lack of clarity in how this newspaper would be distributed among nomadic Gypsies as well as doubts about the effect such propaganda would have among an almost entirely illiterate audience.

In all their texts (both in official documents and publications), Gypsy activists constantly use the mantra of a strong desire for a sedentary life among nomadic Gypsies. To what extent such a craving existed and to what extent it is about an acceptance of what is desired for reality (hope for a self-fulfilling prophecy) is very difficult to assess from today’s point of view. However, it can be said that there was a desire to settle at least among some Gypsy nomads. There are preserve several primary sources (written by the nomadic Gypsies themselves) evidencing this. However, the desire to settle was not always connected with a desire to build a Gypsy kolkhoz. This is clear for example from the collective Statement addressed to Ivan Tokmakov by a group of Gypsies settled in Moscow (according to the surnames of signatories – from the group of *Krimurya*), from 1933:

There are fifteen of us Gypsy families, who previously roamed the Soviet Union, expressed their full consent to quit nomadic life and join with a new life. Of our 15 families, there are 40 people able to work. Of this number, 18 are blacksmiths with working experience of 5 to 25 years. We worked in kolkhozes and sovkhoses to repair agricultural machinery and stocks, many of us have positive references from kolkhozes about the quality of work. Taking into account the demand for labour and the upcoming spring agricultural campaign (where our work as blacksmiths will be very useful, we ask you to send us 15 families to one from sovkhoses, where, in addition to Gypsy blacksmiths, other able-bodied family members could be used at work. Having no means of transportation, as well as because of the material insecurity of our families, we ask you to provide us with great assistance for travel expenses and food. (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 28, l. 69).

Ivan Tokmakov's activities for creating and supporting the development of the Gypsy national collective farms are many and varied. Dozens of letters from various Gypsy kolkhozes were sent to him personally or to ON VTsIK, asking for urgent solutions to specific problems (most often a lack of enough land and loans). Such are, for example, the letters from the Gypsy kolkhozes *Krasniy Oktyabr* (Red October) in the Voronezh oblast and *Trud Romen* in the North Caucasus kray in 1933 (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 28, l. 305, 397), from the kolkhoz *Krasniy Vostok* (Red East) in the Sverdlovsk oblast in 1934 (Ibid., l. 367), etc. It is noteworthy that the leaders of the Gypsy collective farms were already well versed in the Soviet administrative-bureaucratic system and played by its rules, e.g. a telegram to Ivan Tokmakov from Ivanov, the chairman of the kolkhoz *Nevi baxt* (New Happiness) in the Sarapul district (now in the Udmurt Autonomous Region) was copied to Stalin himself (Ibid., l. 140), which is a guarantee that there will be a quick reaction to posing problems. In general, Ivan Tokmakov in most cases easily managed to solve the problems due to the authority of the institution in which he worked (the VTsIK).

Moreover, in some cases he visited different regions personally and solved problems on the spot, e.g. during his inspection in the Western Oblast in 1932, he not only inspected the condition of the Gypsy kolkhozes (GASO, f. P 2360, op. 1, sv. 181, d. 2068; f. P 2360, op. 1, sv. 181, d. 2069) but drew attention to other problems with the Gypsies in the area such as the condition of the Gypsy boarding school (GASO, f. P 2360, op. 1, sv. 181, d. 2068), the creation of Gypsy branch with a stable at the artel *Red Transporter* (GASO, f. P 2360, op. 2, sv. 50, d. 432), etc.

Ivan Tokmakov's work on the establishment and strengthening of the Gypsy national kolkhozes was significantly supported by the VTsIK Decree adopted on April 1, 1932, *On the Status of Work on the Service of Gypsy Toilers* (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 130, d. 5, l. 38–39). It is not clear what exactly his contribution was to the preparation of this Decree, but at that time he was already working for VTsIK and no doubt had to express his attitude towards its content. The situation with the Gypsy kolkhozes at that time had already changed. As is clear from the Minutes of the meeting of the Board of the Kolkhoztentre USSR on the collectivisation of toiling Gypsies on January 3, 1931, in the course of mass collectivisation most of the Gypsy kolkhozes established in the 1920s disintegrated and are now being rebuilt (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 121, d. 31). With the active participation of Ivan Tomakov, who prepared several reports on the state and existing problems for the development of the Gypsy kolkhozes (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 130, d. 5; f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 793), this process was rapidly evolving. As he writes in one such Report from 1935, "if 9 kolkhozes were organised in the period 1929–31, 16 kolkhozes were organized in the period 1932–35" (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 793), and this period turned out to be the highest stage reached in the development of the Gypsy national kolkhozes.

Another area to which Ivan Tokmakov also pays special attention was the Gypsy production artels. The situation in the 1930s was different from that in the 1920s. Of the old production cooperatives, only *Tsygkhimprom* (Gypsy Chemical Industry) and

Tsygpishcheprom (Gypsy Food Industry) have survived. The important-sounding titles should not mislead the reader; these were in fact small workshops for unskilled labour, in which the workers (mainly women, in majority non-Gypsies), cut up and packed and re-packed basic household products (dyes, laundry detergents, salt, tea, coffee, etc.). These two artels were run by representatives of the *Ruska Roma*; they successfully implemented their plans and had the constant support of central and local authorities (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 130, d. 5).

In 1930, there were 4 Gypsy artels in Moscow, but the following year they numbered 28, with 1,351 Gypsy members (Попова & Бриль, 1932, p. 134). The development of the Gypsy production artels was strongly influenced by the Decree of VTsIK *On the State of Work on Servicing Toiling Gypsies* of April 1, 1932, which provided special preferences for their strengthening, as well as their purification from “class-foreign elements” (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 130, d. 5, l. 38–39). As a result of this, ironically, the new Gypsy artels proved to be unstable, and often self-dissolved or closed for economic and financial violations; consequently, in 1932 there were the following 15 artels in Moscow: *Tsygpishcheprom*, *Tsygkhimprom*, *Military Transport*, *Romanian Foreigner*, *First Serbo-Romanian [Artel]*, *Red Transbaikalian*, *Greco-Romanian [Artel]*, *Serbo-Romanian [Artel] named after Stalin*, *Romanian [Artel] ‘New Life’*, *Black Sea Emigrant*, *Red October*, *International*, *2nd Serbo-Romanian [Artel]*, *Tiflis Thinsmith*, *Ukrainian Thinsmith* (Нэво дром, 1931q, p. 32; Безлюдско & Германо, 1933, pp. 205–206). The predominant part of the Gypsy artels is concentrated in Moscow, but such artels are also created in the countryside, e.g. in Leningrad, Smolensk, Yaroslavl, Kirov, Yoshkar-Ola, Perm, Sverdlovsk, Novosibirsk, Chelyabinsk, Kharkov, Dnepropetrovsk, Berdichev, Kiev, Oryol, etc. (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 793; f.1235, op. 123, d. 27; f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 28; f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 29; RGAE, f. 5675, op. 1, d. 142; f. 5675, op. 1, d. 145; GASO, f. P 2360, op. 1, cv. 181, d. 2068; f. P 2360, op. 2, sv. 50, d. 432; DAMK, f. P-1, op. 1, spr. 10715; Рогги, 1934; Друц & Гецслер, 1990, p. 292; Chernykh, 2020, pp. 358–366), including even two *Lingurari* artels in the Vinnytsia region, in the Ukrainian SSR, for the production of wooden spoons (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 794; RGAE, f. 5675, op. 1, d. 158).

The new Gypsy artels were mostly created by representatives of the *Kelderari* group. In their books, both Alaina Lemon (2000) and Brigid O’Keeffe (2013) use the term *Vlax Roma* to refer to this group, which is used in the USA and which is not wrong in principle, but in this case, is not precise enough. The term *Vlax Roma* (or *Vlax Rom*) in Europe refers to the entire language community of the so-called North *Vlax* (or *New-Vlax*) dialects of the Romani language; in the former USSR there were several Roma groups who spoke dialects from this dialectal group, and the *Kelderari* were just one of them (Черенков, 1985, pp. 5–15).

Ivan Tokmakov was actively involved in the problems of the Gypsy artels, not only in Moscow but also in the countryside, e.g. in Smolensk (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 28). At the same time, he saw the existing problems, which he constantly detailed in his Reports:

Gypsy artels are not created on the periphery, 16 of the 20 artels in Moscow have been liquidated, and by February 1, 1935, only 4 Gypsy artels remained; 4 Gypsy artels remained in the RSFSR in Moscow, 1 in Rostov, and 1 in the Voronezh region; only 3 Gypsy artels remain in Moscow. (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 793).

As “all the liquidated artels were engaged in the manufacture and tinning of cauldron” (i.e. they were *Kelderari*), he shifted the responsibility for this to the Moscow institutions, which did not take into account the successful experience of the two artels, *Tsygkhimprom* and *Tsygpishcheprom*, “that grew, strengthened and successfully implemented their annual plans with respectively 3 and 8 million rubles financial turnover” (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 130, d. 5). Moreover, Ivan Tokmakov managed to initiate the establishment of the Interdepartmental Commission with the Resolution of the VTsIK Presidium of July 1, 1935, which was to outline measures for the organisational and economic strengthening of the existing Gypsy production artels (Ibid.).

However, Ivan Tokmakov’s efforts to preserve and develop the Gypsy artels ultimately proved unsuccessful. He was hardly so naive as not to see the real reasons for the liquidation of most of these artels. The official version is clearly expressed in a letter to Ivan Tokmakov from K. E. Matyushenko, written in 1934:

The most intense work is done among the Gypsies. [...] This is especially true among the tinsmith Gypsies, who still have strong family ties and camp habits. Here the class enemy managed to disintegrate 15 out of 18 artels in four years, but even in these three remaining artels, a fierce class struggle continues. [...] To establish work and identify the class enemy, to cleanse the artel from it, me, as a Gypsy and as a member of the VKP(b) Party, I was sent as chairman to the artel of Yugo-Slavia... In this struggle from the side of the class enemy, the Kaminsky brothers are leading, [...] [who] [...] have a systematic connection with class enemies and the world of thieves. (ГАРФ, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 28).

Ivan Tokmakov surely was aware that the liquidation of the Gypsy artels was carried out by the NKVD, and the main reason for it was different. At that time, the majority of *Kelderari* in the USSR were included in the category of “foreign Gypsies”, and formally speaking, they were citizens of Romania, Yugoslavia, Greece, etc. (this can be seen from the names of their artels), and even of the already non-existent Austro-Hungary. As foreign nationals during the period of mass political repression, the most commonly used accusations against them were espionage for foreign intelligence, as absurd as it may sound from today’s point of view, and these accusations were often combined with accusations of economic crimes. In this way, the vast majority of Gypsy artels were liquidated in the 1930s (Бессонов, 2002a, p. 5), and a large proportion of Gypsies, victims of political repression, were *Kelderari*.

In his work, Ivan Tokmakov paid special attention to the Gypsy schools and especially to his favourite child – the Gypsy Pedagogical College in Moscow – where teachers were trained for these schools. As he wrote in a February 1935 Report, in the RSFSR at that time there were 12 1st level Gypsy schools (i.e. the first four grades) and 18 Gypsy groups

at mainstream schools, as well as one boarding school up to 7th grade near Smolensk (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 793). On September 1, 1933, a Gypsy Department was opened in Moscow at the Pedagogical College of the Krasno Presnensky District named after Timiryazev with five years of training, including a preparatory course (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 130, d. 5). Candidates for training in the Gypsy course wrote applications to Ivan Tokmakov, who made great efforts to provide dormitories for them (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 28). As soon as the training started, he organised regular meetings with the students, where their current problems, related to their study, and everyday life, were discussed (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 127, d. 8). In 1935 Ivan Tokmakov managed to get Narkompros to separate the Gypsy Department and elevate it into an independent Gypsy Pedagogical College, which existed until 1938 (Ibid.).

Of special interest is the initiative of Ivan Tokmakov for the secondment of the students. In 1934 he sent a proposal to Narkomzem to send for a month during the summer vacation 15 students from the Gypsy Department of the Pedagogical College “for cultural and mass and educational work in Gypsy kolkhozes by sending them to places” (Ibid.). The selected Gypsy kolkhozes were: *Nevo džüben* (New Live) in Shakhun rayon, Gorky kray; *Trud Romen* in Mineralnovodsk rayon, Stavropol kray; *Nevo drom* in Novo-Velichkovsky rayon, Krasnodar kray; *Krasniy Vostok* in Chernushinsky rayon, Perm kray; *Nevi baxt* in Sarapul rayon, then Kirov Oblast. This initiative was implemented, although not in full, and the seconded students present detailed reports on the condition and problems of the visited Gypsy kolkhozes (Ibid.). In fact, Ivan Tokmakov’s strategic idea was for Gypsy Pedagogical College to become a Higher School for the training of Gypsy activists, who would become the main driving force in the processes of Roma civic emancipation. This is confirmed by a letter to him from a group of students (Ermakov, Bogdanova, Andreev, Karpetskaya and others), who declared: “We are the first in the USSR especially [trained] Gypsy cadres to re-educate our backward generation” (Ibid.). However, the plans of Ivan Tokmakov failed to materialize due to the turn in Soviet national policy in the second half of the 1930s.

Ivan Tokmakov’s activities as the sole representative of the Gypsy movement and, in fact, his informal leader, in the 1930s in the top Soviet institutions also included his active support in solving problems of the Central Gypsy Club *Лолы чергэн* (Red Star) in Moscow, in strengthening and development of the Gypsy Theatre *Romen*, to support the publication and distribution of Romani literature, his participation in the Editorial Boards of the newspapers *Пало большевистско колхозо* (About the Bolshevik’s Kolkhoz), and *Сталиниço* (Stalinist) (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 793; f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 28; f. P 1235, op. 127, d. 8; f. P 1235, op. 130, d. 5). Moreover, in his Report from February 1935, Ivan Tokmakov summarised the achievements of the Soviet affirmative action towards the Gypsies, revealed the existing problems, and outlined the future goals and tasks for the near future (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 28, pp. 793, pp. 55–61). Titles on separate sections in this Report (General remarks; What the Soviet government gave to the Gypsies; On the allocation of areas for settlement by the Gypsies; On the Gypsy production artels;

On cadres preparation; The provision of general education for school-age children and *likbez* for the adults; The issue of printed publications [in the Romani language]; About the newspaper in the Gypsy language) clearly show what the main priorities of Ivan Tokmakov were in the field of Roma civic emancipation.

The biggest, visionary goal set by Ivan Tokmakov, for the achievement of which he put a lot of effort, was the creation of a Gypsy national territorial-administrative unit, which would serve as a basis for a future Gypsy Soviet Autonomous Republic. To this end, more attention should be paid to this attempt, because this is the pinnacle of the processes of Roma civic emancipation in the early USSR. In fact, the creation of one's own nation-state (or at least autonomy) was the ultimate goal of all nationalisms in the modern era in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe, and the Roma were no exception (Marushiakova & Popov, 2021b). The fact that Gypsy activists in the early USSR preferred not to fully express their aspirations, and to limit themselves to proposals to the authorities to create a Gypsy territorial-administrative unit (usually a region), does not change the essence of their visions for the future of their community. In fact, their logic is quite clear – to start with something smaller and real, which in the long run will develop into its own autonomous republic.

The idea of creating a Gypsy territorial-administrative unit first arose among Gypsy activists and they were its most ardent supporters. In fact, they were also the main driving force, having tried for years to engage the Soviet institutions in its fulfilment. The reasons for the emergence of this idea are easy to understand. It is apparent also why the very notion of a Gypsy territorial-administrative unit was considered one of the pillars on which the future of the Gypsies as a Soviet nationality must be built. In forging a new multinational state (i.e. the USSR), different nationalities received not only a right but also a real opportunity (with some exceptions related to political reasons) to create their very own national-territorial administrative units of a different order: namely, a national Union or Autonomous Republics and oblasts as higher-level autonomous administrative entities. At a lower administrative level were the national rayons and selsoviets (for sources and literature on the subject, see Кайкова, 2007). In this newly constructed national-administrative hierarchy of the 1920s, Gypsies were completely absent. Of course, they are by no means the only exception to this regard and, in this case, one cannot speak of any kind of discriminatory treatment specifically targeting them. A population census in the Russian Empire in 1895 recorded 140 peoples (Алфавитный список народов, 2005); at the USSR Census in 1926 their number was already over 160 (Всесоюзная перепись населения, 1926). However, the number of existing separate national territorial-administrative units in the Soviet Union was much smaller than that of the peoples. The reasons for the absence of Gypsies in this national-administrative hierarchy are the existing realities: in the USSR, they lived as a large diaspora in vast territories, with the vast majority of them being nomads (about three-quarters); in cases in which they were settled, their relative share in individual settlements was always insignificant (hardly in any settlement exceeding even a few per cent).

In this situation, it is only natural for Gypsy activists to strive for equal treatment with other nationalities and to campaign for their own territorial-administrative unit. Equally important is the fact that the existence of such an administrative unit guaranteed the budget financing of their community-development activities, which, as seen above, was a major problem for Gypsy activism in the 1920s. At the same time, Gypsy activists were taking into account the existing realities, so their calls to the Soviet state for the creation of a Gypsy national rayon were directly linked to the need for sedentarisation of nomads, who would inhabit such a rayon. Resettlement of sedentary Gypsies was unrealistic, or at least difficult to accomplish, while the state-supported transfer of nomads on free territory and their settling there seemed much more realistic and easier to accomplish. This is actually the main reason for the repeated calls for sedentarisation of nomadic Gypsies, which was perceived by the activists as the first mandatory step needed in order to achieve the creation of a national Gypsy rayon. As already said, the Gypsy activists in the 1920s, united by the VSTs, had even already chosen the geographical location of this rayon, namely the southern part of Russia. The choice is not accidental. In Southern Russia, one could find the most developed agricultural regions, with good climate conditions and comparatively more Gypsy nomads, could also be found there. The presidium of VSTs determined also the minimum number needed to establish a national Gypsy area, namely 100,000 people. The latter seems rather strange given the fact that the Census of 1926 reported a total of 61,234 Gypsies living throughout the USSR (Ibid.). However, VSTs, in its paperwork, repeatedly emphasized that this was not the real number of Gypsies and proposed different figures – from 200,000 to a very fantastic 1,000,000. The Union's action plan set the number of 500 000 (in another version 600 000) Gypsies, and this was taken as a base in the planning of the activities (and in their requests for funding). Unfortunately for the VSTs, these figures were accepted not only in the planning but also in the auditing of the activities (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763, l. 7–8).

Attempts to achieve at least some result along the way of the establishment of a Gypsy territorial-administrative unit in the 1920s have been fruitless. The blame for this does not solely lie with the Soviet institutions, which, in principle, did not reject the idea itself, but rather were cautious and took no practical actions in this regard. It is interesting to note that “the Racing Reporter” Egon Erwin Kisch, who visited the USSR in 1925–1926 and paid special attention to the place of the Gypsies in the new Soviet state, managed to formulate already then the main issue facing the Gypsy nomads and the Soviet state. In his famous book *Tzars, Pops, Bolsheviks*, he writes that from an economic point of view, the sedentarisation of Gypsy nomads was inevitable, and for this, there were two opposing visions. The first one provided for their sedentarisation in the regions where they lived, but it was difficult to implement because either the Gypsies themselves were unaware of the possibility of obtaining land for free, or because local villagers did not include them in land allocation. The second vision envisages the creation of a legally protected territory (i.e. a national administrative unit) uniting the Gypsies; this vision can be

called *Zionism of the Gypsies*, who would be the majority in the future colonial rule, but it would be even more difficult than with the Jews (Kisch, 1992, pp. 117–118).

Things changed radically in 1932 when Ivan Tokmakov was appointed instructor at ON VTsIK. His position was one of the lowest in the department's hierarchy, but this does not appear to have been an obstacle in the significant advancement towards the realisation of the idea of a Gypsy national territorial-administrative unit. The decisive factor here was the possibility for a Gypsy activist not to stand outside the party-administrative system, but to act 'from within', as part of that system. This enabled him to use its resources and mechanisms, which significantly changed things.

Ivan Tokmakov, like other Gypsy activists (Andrey Taranov, Ivan Rom-Lebedev, Ilya and Trofim Gerasimovs), who were making proposals to the authorities to create a Gypsy national rayon, used as the main argument the urgent need for sedentarization of Gypsy nomads and the creation of Gypsy national kolkhozes. In this regard, he used the testimonies from the field – letters from nomadic Gypsies sent to Soviet institutions with requests in this regard, e.g. The petition to ON VTsIK of July 29, 1935 "from the camp of nomadic Gypsies near the city of Ivanovo, that includes 20 families":

We know that our nomadic life does not give us anything good. [...] We, the nomadic Gypsies, have realised that only the socialist labour gives a right to be an honest citizen of the Soviet Union, and so we ask to be allocated a territory, to give settlements to all national minority – nomadic Gypsies. (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 130, d. 5, l. 85–86).

The letter from the region of Ivanovo is not the only one. In another such letter dated August 10, 1935, sent to ON VTsIK by Gypsies who roamed the Udmurt ASSR, they strongly insisted:

[...] to combat the nomadism of Gypsies, it is necessary to expand the work of a broader and more decisive nature, as in the south, north, east, and west of our [Soviet] Union. And for the Gypsies to preserve their nationality, as such, and to create interest among the rest of the Gypsies, [...], to allocate a piece of land for the territory of the Gypsy republic, oblast, or, at least, an okrug. (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 130, d. 5, l. 80–81).

The appointment of Ivan Tokmakov to the new post was followed by the issuing of the Decree of the Presidium of VTsIK from April 1, 1932, *On Status of Service Work for Toiling Gypsies* (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 130, d. 5, l. 38–39). This Decree marks the true beginning of the Soviet Union's purposeful and structured policy towards the Gypsies. Here, for the first time, the idea of creating a separate Gypsy national territorial-administrative unit has crept into the official texts, though carefully worded: "1. To propose to the Narkomzem of the RSFSR to develop and submit to the SNK of the RSFSR a concrete plan for the land management of Gypsy workers for their compact settlement ..." (Ibid.).

In the same year, 1932, the first concrete step in this direction took place. A national Gypsy selsoviet was established in the village of Kangly, rayon Mineralnye vody, Stavropol

Kray. In this way, Gypsies were ranked among the nationalities that had their own national territorial-administrative units. Dozens of other nationalities in the USSR have been deprived of this opportunity. Although this Gypsy unit was at the lowest possible administrative level, the very fact was already a significant achievement in the desired direction. As chairman of the new Gypsy selsoviet was appointed Mikhail Bezlyudskiy, who was specifically sent to this mission by ON VTsIK. Bezlyudskiy also became chairman of the restructured Gypsy kolkhoz *Trud Romen*, which very soon became a model example of a successful Gypsy kolkhoz in the public space (see above).

At the beginning of 1935, Ivan Tokmakov prepared the Memorandum, in which he substantiated the need for the establishment of a Gypsy national territorial-administrative unit:

1. The intention of Gypsies to settle on the land is retained by the absence of a plan of compact settlement of Gypsies, by weak funding, and in this connection, there is a spontaneous settling of small groups in small areas where there is no possibility of further additional settlement of Gypsy nomads.
2. The solution to the issue of the settlement of Gypsies on the land at this stage of work waits for the allocation of a special district for the settlement of Gypsies.
3. The compactness of the Gypsy settlement will make it easier to concentrate all forces and means on a certain area, where it will be possible to concentrate material means and cultural forces. (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 793, l. 9).

On the basis of a Report, the SN at TsIK USSR prepared a document dated February 25, 1935, in which Ivan Tokmakov reformulated and enriched (probably by himself) this argument:

1. The Gypsies' craving to settle on the land sticks on the absence of a plan for a compact settlement of Gypsies; in connection with this, there is a spontaneous sedentarisation in small groups on small tracts, where there is no possibility of further additional settling of the Gypsy nomads; therefore, the resolution of the issue of sedentarisation of Gypsies on the land requires the allocation of a special rayon for settlement. 2. The compact sedentarisation of Gypsies will facilitate all the work among them on economic and cultural construction so that it will be possible to concentrate all material resources and cultural forces in one specific rayon. (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 130, d. 5).

This justification, formulated by Ivan Tokmakov, was key in all subsequent steps of the Soviet institutions in this direction; it was also the leading one in all letters sent by Gypsy activists to the highest Soviet institutions. And, more importantly, there is no hint in any of the case files that Tokmakov was performing the tasks assigned to him by his principals. On the contrary, it is clear that it was he who initiated the process in the frame of his office duties (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 793; d. 794). So, in this case, there is every reason to speak of an initiative that came from the Gypsy elite, which received an understanding and support from the Soviet state.

In fact, the event that had the strongest impact on Gypsy activists was the creation of a Jewish Autonomous Region within the RSFSR, located in the Far East, in an almost uninhabited region with no local Jewish population. It became clear that the Soviet state was able to initiate and create territorial-administrative units for diasporic nationalities who, de facto, had no common territory of the settlement. This proved to be a model not only for Gypsies but also for other such nationalities, e.g. for Assyrians who also made steps in this direction (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 64, d. 1637).

The same logic followed Soviet institutions, engaged with this process, and especially structures of the VTsIK and the TsIK USSR. The main coordinator of this bureaucratic process, requiring coordination between different agencies, was Alexander Khatskevich, at that time Secretary of the SN TsIK USSR, who became a leading figure in the attempts to create a Gypsy territorial-administrative unit on the model of the Autonomous Jewish National Oblast. We will not go into all the details of the vastness of the file, but we will sketch the main points of the process. In 1935, a circular request was sent to the subjects of the RSFSR through the structures of the VPK at the SNK USSR with the question of whether they were able to provide vacant land for the compact settlement of Gypsy nomads, for the purpose of sedentarisation (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 130, d. 5). The answers received were diverse. Some of the local authorities (e.g. North Caucasus kray, Azov-Black Sea kray, Crimean ASSR) were adamant that they have no vacant land. Others, on the contrary, offered such lands, e.g. Gorky kray, offered land in the Mari ASSR (which belonged to it at that time), or in Omsk region (where the land offered was in the Ostyako-Vogul district, today the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug). However, these proposals were considered inappropriate due to severe climatic conditions. West Siberian Territory bound the provision of vacant land in the Chisto-Ozerskiy rayon with the need to receive additional budgetary investments; subsequently, new options were offered, all of them today in the Altay kray (Ibid.). For his part, Ilya Gerasimov proposed the Western Oblast, justifying it with the presence in the area of an already prepared primary structure – Gypsy kolkhozes, schools, and most importantly, with the availability of prepared cadres, Communists and Komsomol members with respective education, who “can fully provide management of the allotted territory” (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 794, l. 169–172). After discussing the received proposals, a commission was set up at the ON VTsIK, which included Ivan Tokmakov, whose task was to select “rayons in which it would be expedient to concentrate the toiler nomadic Gypsy population for their transition to sedentary way of life” (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 130, d. 5).

Ultimately, as most feasible was defined the proposal of the West Siberian kray. Narkomzem sent there a complex expedition to investigate several locations that were proposed by local authorities as suitable. These were in the present-day Altay kray (the Charyshsky, Soloneshskiy, Altaiskiy rayons), and the Kondomskiy, and Mrasso-Kondomskiy rayons in the Kemerovo oblast (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 130, d. 9). The correspondence between the Narkomzem and the local authorities shows that definitive decision had not been reached and evasive expressions continued to be used, such

as “the materials gathered during the research trips are insufficient”, “due to the question being put in are too general [...] no fully grounded conclusions can be drawn”, etc. (Ibid.). Due to the unclear situation, with the decision of the Presidium of the VTsIK on 10 December 1935, the All-Union Resettlement Committee was entitled to release funds for new research with the ordinance to “seek area for the settlement of toiling Gypsies in compact masses” (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 793).

An important moment in the course of the preparations for the establishment of a Gypsy national territorial-administrative unit was the Meeting at the Council of Nationalities at the TsIK USSR, held on 4 and 5 January 1936 *On the Issues of Employment of Toiling Nomadic Gypsies and Their Cultural and Economic Services* for which detailed Minutes were elaborated (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 794, l. 77–125; Сoвeщaниe, 1936, pp. 61–72; Marushiakova & Popov, 2021b, pp. 883–906). The Meeting was attended by representatives of the Presidium TsIK USSR, ON VTsIK, Narkomzem, VPK, Knigotsentr, Goslitizdat, Mossover, TASS, Central News (Pravda, Trud and others). The new Gypsy Soviet elite was almost entirely represented at the meeting (except for Andrey Taranov and Trofim Gerasimov, who were not invited). The meeting was attended by representatives of the State Gypsy Theatre *Romen*, the Gypsy Pedagogical College, the Central Gypsy Club, *Tsygkhimprom*, *Tsygpishcheprom*, Gypsy selsoviet of Mineralovodskiy rayon North Caucasus kray, selected Gypsy kolkhozes (*Nevo džüiben*, *Trud Romen*, *Nevi baxt*, and *Oktyabr*), Gypsy school with a dormitory of Serebryansky selsoviet of Smolensk rayon, representatives of local authorities from the province, etc.

The meeting was chaired by Alexander Khatskevich, Secretary of the SN TsIK USSR. In their speeches, the Gypsy activists mainly presented the achieved results and the existing problems in the field of their activities, and most of them in one form or another expressed their support for the idea of creating a Gypsy national rayon. Alexander Khatskevich himself was the most straightforward in his concluding speech:

The decree of the Presidium of the VTsIK about creating a special Gypsy Rayon should be welcomed because it makes it easier to service them in their national language and in the economy, and in a cultural and community sense it facilitates the cultivation of the cadres. This is generally the right decision, and we need to help in every way to implement it as soon as possible. [...] (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 794, l. 118–119).

The question of the location of the future Gypsy national region remained without a final decision. Khatskevich himself disapproves of the idea of West Siberian Kray (“there is enough space here as well, there is no reason to look for some rayons in Siberia”), and clearly expressed his preference for it to be Stavropol Kray (based on the Gypsy selsoviet and kolkhoz *Trud Romen*), but allows the option to create such an area also in the Western region (Ibid., l. 77–125).

Although the decisions taken at the Meeting of SN TsIK USSR were not announced in the Soviet press, a few days after it being held, a brief announcement appeared in the Western press: “An autonomous gipsy republic is to be set up in the Soviet Union, where

gypsies will be settled and develop their own culture. – Reuter” (Sunday Express, 1936, p. 2). In all likelihood, there was a press release for foreign correspondents accredited in the USSR, i.e. the Soviet state was preparing a propaganda campaign aimed for those abroad to show the achievements of Soviet national policy.

Immediately after the Meeting, ON VTsIK prepared the Draft of the Decree, which began with the words “Having heard the report of the instructor of the Department of Nationalities VTsIK, comrade Tokmakov”. In the first place, the Draft included the following decision: “To propose to SNK of RSFSR to require from the Gosplan and Narkomzem within a month to outline one of the rayons within the Russian Federation, for the compact settlement of the toiling Gypsies, supplying this plan with appropriate funds for the economic and socio-cultural development in the area” (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 793, l. 4–5). Following the discussion at the SN TsIK Presidium Meeting on February 16, 1936, it was decided after some revision to submit this Draft-Decree for approval (Президиум, 1936, pp. 89–91). During this time, Alexander Khatskevich actively lobbied the Soviet institutions for the urgent adoption of this Decree. In his letter to the TsIK Chairman Mikhail Kalinin, with a copy to the SNK USSR, he proposed that the Decree be jointly adopted by the TsIK and the SNK, which would increase its importance and accelerate its implementation. He reasoned:

It is of utmost importance to adopt this decree just at this time, when in the capitalist countries, the ‘Big suffocate the Small’, in order to emphasise this exceptional care of the great Soviet Union, the Lenin-Stalin Party in relation to the small and in the past the most backward nationalities such as the Gypsies. (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 27, l. 10).

Despite the intercession of Khatskevich the SNK USSR preferred not to engage directly with the case and, on April 7, 1936, Presidium of the TsIK USSR adopted a Decree *On Measures on the Employment of Nomads and the Improvement of Economic and Cultural Services for Toiler Gypsies* (Постановление, 1936, p. 87). In this Decree, however, some important changes had been made compared to the original project. On the one hand, it included a number of affirmative measures to support the work of Gypsy kolkhozes and artels. On the other hand, the issue of the creation of a Gypsy national rayon had been moved to a backward position.

In the adopted Decree, instead of “one of the rayons within the RSFSR for compact settlement of toiler Gypsies”, another, much more open sentence was used:

4. Approving the actions of the VTsIK on the allocation of special rayons for the development of kolkhozes of settling Gypsies, instruct the All-Union Resettlement Committee to outline the appropriate locations for settlement by nomadic Gypsies who wish to move to a settled way of life within two months, ensuring that newly created Gypsy kolkhozes receive tax relief. (Ibid.).

At first glance, the change is insignificant (instead of one ‘rayon’ there is already an unspecified number of ‘rayons’), but it is extremely important because it reflects the

existing contradictions between the positions of TsIK SSSR and NKVD on the issue of Gypsy autonomy, which find their expression in the policy pursued in this direction.

In the summer of the same year, Gypsy activists managed to publicly present the idea of creating a Gypsy national territorial-administrative unit. In one of the most popular central newspapers, *Komsomolskaya Pravda* a column 'Workers Propose' was established and workers were invited to send their proposal for the so-called nationwide discussion of the draft of the new Constitution of the USSR (adopted on December 05, 1936). There was published a proposal for the creation of a "Gypsy Autonomous Oblast within the RSFSR or the Ukrainian SSR, uniting presently scattered Gypsy kolkhozes" (*Комсомольская правда*, 1936a, p. 2). It is not clear who the authors of this proposal are, their names (Yu. Maslennikov, V. Smirnov, V. Pletnev) are not those of known Gypsy activists, and it is likely that these were ordinary Soviet citizens. A few weeks later, in the same column, a letter was published on behalf of "the group of Moscow Gypsy activists at the Central Gypsy Club and the plenipotentiaries of the once again organized Gypsy kolkhoz in Kharkiv" (27 signatures attached) declaring:

The Gypsy activists of Moscow support this proposal and believe that:

1. The establishment of the Gypsy Autonomous Oblast will contribute to the rapid settlement of toiling Gypsies on the allocated territory.
2. A periodic printed organ should be issued in the Gypsy language, which would contribute to the cultural growth of the Gypsy people. (*Комсомольская правда*, 1936b, p. 2).

At that time, the head of NKVD became Nikolay Yezhov and the office was restructured, greatly expanding its functions, including assuming those of OGPU and of other administrative structures. The All-Union Resettlement Committee was also transformed, and, on July 22, 1936, it became the Resettlement Department of the NKVD. Thus, in the end, the task of creating a Gypsy autonomous unit became a task that had to be realised by the NKVD. This led to some significant discrepancies in the scale and pace of work, reflecting the different positions of the TsIK USSR and NKVD, which were not strategic, but tactical. The NKVD did not object in principle to the creation of such a unit but adhered to a more realistic and pragmatic approach: to set smaller control figures for the number of sedentarised Gypsies, to create several Gypsy rayons in different places in order to approve the methodology, to see the results, etc. Once more, new regions for the settlement of Gypsies started to be discussed, e.g. Kuybyshev (today Samara), Gorky (today Nizhny Novgorod), Kirov krays, etc., including even the Ukrainian and Byelorussian SSR (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 27).

Formally speaking, the process of creating a Gypsy autonomy was led by TsIK USSR and VTsIK, which found its expression in the repeated insistences of the ON VTsIK to speed up the process and "to instruct the NKVD Resettlement Division to determine the territory as soon as possible and practically begin to populate it with Gypsies who are travelling in the RSFSR" (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 130, d. 5). Despite the more cautious approach, the NKVD took its task seriously. With the help of its representatives,

inspectors to the Resettlement Department, a wide range of activities were conducted in the countryside, including state inspections of the Gypsy kolkhozes, assisting the local authorities in their land allocation, etc. (RGAE, f. 5675, op. 1, d. 143; d. 144; d. 148; d. 149; d. 151; d. 152; d. 157). Attempts were even made (though unsuccessfully) to organise the creation of a new Gypsy selsoviet near the Gypsy kolkhoz, *Nevi baxt* in Kuybyshev kray (RGAE, f. 5675, op. 1, d. 146). An important aspect of the work of the NKVD was the construction of new homes for the kolkhoz members, and for this purpose, they provided special trains with timber, cut in the camps of the GULAG (RGAE, f. 5675, op. 1, d. 147; f. 5675, op. 1, d. 179), i.e. it comes down to the sinister historical irony of the NKVD was using GULAG's resources to build housing for the Gypsies.

A historical puzzle that has not yet been answered is also linked to the activities of the NKVD targeting Gypsies during this period. Today, in the post-Soviet space, among Roma there are many widespread legends about how Stalin promised the famous Gypsy artist Lyalya Chernaya that he would make a Gypsy Republic in the USSR. According to published material from the oral history of the Sikachev family (Калинин, 2005, pp. 45–47), in the winter of 1937, a large group of Gypsy nomads was deported to Siberia, from Moscow and its neighbouring regions. In Siberia, neat to the Taiga Station (today in Kemerovo Oblast), this group, together with deported Gypsies from other regions (a total of 340 families or about 1 800 people), established a Gypsy kolkhoz, headed by Alexander Sikachev (1909–1983) which by the end of the year broke down and the Gypsies shun away from. We have also heard variants of this story during our past fieldwork research in Russian Federation and Ukraine.

At first glance, everything in this story seems highly plausible. However, research and searches both in the central archives in Moscow, from where Gypsies had supposedly been deported, and in regional archives in Western Siberia (Novosibirsk, Kemerovo, Tomsk), found no documentary evidence which could verify the whole story. The other option – that all documentation of the incident had been destroyed – seems the least likely. In this instance, it is most likely a case of secondary emerged quasi-history, in which the memory of real events is reflected, such as the deportation of Gypsies from Moscow in 1933, already mentioned above. The question remains open until (possible) new evidence is found. What is sure, is that the claim made by non-historians, about proposals to create a Gypsy autonomous region that “to be called Romanestan” (Lemon, 2000, p. 133; 2001, p. 228; Klímová-Alexander, 2005a, p. 164) cannot be taken seriously, as the term ‘Romanestan’ was never used in the documents and publications of the early USSR; this label was created for the first time by Ionel Rotaru and appeared in France during the 1950s.

In the late 1930s, an extremely important and significant turning point took place in the overall national policy of the USSR. On December 1, 1937, the Organising Bureau at the Central Committee of the TsK VKP(b) revised the question On the Liquidation of National Rayons and Selsoviets and found it “inappropriate to continue the existence of both special national rayons and selsoviets” (RGASPI, f. 17, op. 114, d. 633, l. 3–4);

the relevant decision of the Politburo at the TsK VKP(b) on this issue was adopted on December 17, 1937 (RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 1006, l. 39–40). In this situation, the issue of the establishment of a national Gypsy territorial-administrative unit was eliminated, and all activities in this direction were discontinued. Soon after that, the Second World War began, and after the war, in the new historical realities of the USSR, this question was never posed again.

As is clear from what has been presented above, the attempt to create a Gypsy Autonomous Republic in the USSR, initiated by Gypsy activists, ultimately failed. This failure, however, cannot be explained as a repressive measure of the Soviet state directed against the Gypsies, because all the factualities of the events show that the reasons for this end result were not the reluctance of the Soviet authorities to pursue this 'Gypsy dream'. On the contrary, the state actions in this regard were emphatically affirmative. The real reasons for this failure lie in the general historical, social, and political context, within which the creation of Gypsy autonomy was a very minor element in the context of the general problems to be solved by the Soviet state during this period. Whether the failure of the plans to create a Gypsy autonomous republic was for the good or bad of the Roma in the USSR can no longer be judged today. Similarly, the question of how the creation of a 'Gypsy state' within the USSR would influence the movement for Roma civic emancipation on a global scale can also be only a subject of alternative history, which is already a completely different genre.

In 1936 Ivan Tokmakov was fired from his job at the Central Executive Committee and was appointed director of the Theatre *Romen*. The reasons for this change in his official position are not clear – on the one hand, it seems to be an elevating in the nomenclature hierarchy, but on the other, the new job deprived him of the opportunity to influence directly the Gypsy policy and specifically the work on creating a Gypsy national rayon/rayons. It is quite possible that the Soviet authorities considered that the strengthening of the State Gypsy Theatre *Romen*, which at that time was in a severe and permanent crisis, was a most urgent task at the moment. As director of the theatre, however, he not only failed to improve the situation but got into a new scandal over the premiere of the new play *Gypsies* (based on the poem by Alexander Pushkin) and the critical reviews in the press were accompanied by squabbles in the theatre staff (Германо, 1954, pp. 98–100). Eventually, on December 28, 1936, Ivan Tokmakov was dismissed from his post (Ibid., p. 106).

It is not known where Ivan Tokmakov was reassigned to work after his dismissal from Theatre *Romen*, and there are no data on the place of his work after 1936. What is known is that in June 1941 Ivan Tokmakov was the head of a factory workshop (ЛАНВ, ф. Николай Саткевич, д. Иван Токмаков). Undoubtedly, this meant the collapse of his political career – from the upper echelons of the central Soviet governing institutions (albeit in a low position in them) he found himself at the lowest rungs of the Soviet nomenklatura. However, this should not be interpreted as a manifestation of anti-Gypsyism. On the contrary, in this case, it is needed to be said that he (like other Gypsy activists) were

lucky to avoid the mass political repression in the 1930s. In July 1938, VTsIK, where he worked from 1931 to 1936, was disbanded and most of its functions were taken over by the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR. In contrast, almost the entire political apparatus of the VTsIK (its former and current employees), including all the names mentioned so far related to the Gypsy policy of the Soviet state, were shot during the so-called Great Purge (1937–1938) or died in the GULAG camps.

Immediately after Nazi Germany attacked the USSR on June 22, 1941, Ivan Tokmakov enlisted as a volunteer in the Red Army, although he owned the so-called *броня* [literally ‘armour’, i.e. release from mobilisation]; in addition, he was already 53 years old and had health problems (Ibid.). The Soviet Army archives contain only the following brief information about him: “Ivan Petrovich Tokmakov; year of birth 1898” (Книга памяти, 2019), although he was born in 1888. If there is no typo, in this case, it means that Ivan Tokmakov managed to persuade the military administration to change his year of birth (or misled them) so that he could be accepted into military service.

The circumstances surrounding Ivan Tokmakov’s death have so far remained unclear. In the Soviet Army archives, he was declared “gone missing” on October 1, 1941 (Книга памяти, 2019). The only source for his fate after this date is the short biographical essay (unpublished) *Памяти Ивана Петровича Токмакова* (In Memory of Ivan Petrovich Tokmakov) by Nikolay Pankov (LANB, f. Nikolay Satkevich, d. Ivan Tokmakov), which is based on information obtained after the war from his comrades at the front and partisan detachment. This essay was supplemented after the death of Nikolay Pankov by his wife Yanina, who passed it on to Nikolay Satkevich.

According to this information, during the battles on the front, the military unit in which Ivan Tokmakov served came under siege. The other members of the VKP(b) buried their Party cards, but he kept his own (Ibid.), although he knew that he risked being shot on the spot if he was captured (which was a common practice). This shows that despite the vicissitudes of his life, Ivan Tokmakov remained true to his communist ideals. Shortly after these events, Ivan Tokmakov was captured, organised an escape from the POW camp and joined a partisan detachment in the German-occupied territories. He was taken captured again, and when he tried to escape from the camp, he was betrayed and died in torture, but did not betray his comrades (Ibid.). According to Nikolay Pankov, Ivan Tokmakov died in the prison of a war camp near Yelnya, Smolensk region (Ibid.), but according to other authors, this happened in a camp near Bobruisk, Mogilev region (Друц & Гесслер, 1990, p. 285; Калинин, 2005, p. 66), and today it is very difficult to determine what the truth was.

Ivan Tokmakov was the undisputed main leader of the Roma civic emancipation movement in the 1930s in the USSR. Unlike the leaders of this movement in the 1920s, he was not only a visionary who offered his ideas to the authorities and assisted in their realisation but, even more, due to his authority through the Soviet Party and state apparatus, he actively initiated and realised (at least when possible) his ideas in this field.

The fact that he failed to complete all his endeavours due to the general changes in the national policy of the USSR in the late 1930s in no way belittles his indisputable merits of the Roma civic emancipation.

Nikolay Pankov

Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov

Nikolay Alexandrovich Pankov (1895–1959) occupies a very special place in the history of the Roma civic emancipation movement in the USSR. The source data, based on which this biographical essay was prepared, is also unique in its own way, so it is worth saying a few additional words about it separately. For more than 30 years, Nikolay Pankov has been creating his own huge personal archive, which could be a worthy subject of special research. This archive includes various documents about the era, newspaper clippings, manuscripts written by Nikolay Pankov himself and by other authors, collections of linguistic and folklore materials, his personal diary from the 1950s, his correspondence with Gypsy activists and researchers in the USSR and beyond, etc., including two versions of memories about him written by his wife Yanina Stefanovna. Unfortunately, perhaps the most interesting manuscript, the memoirs of Nikolay Pankov himself, large passages of which were quoted in the book by Efim Drutz and Alexey Gessler (Друц & Гесслер, 1990), has not yet been discovered.

The fate of this archive is unusual. It has been preserved over the years thanks to his two daughters Natalia and Lyubov (Lyuba). To make this documentary wealth more accessible, Lyuba Pankova had for years distributed parts of the archive (or handwritten copies of materials made by herself) to anyone interested in it. Thus, currently, parts of this archive are kept by at least five or six people, who live in different countries and continents. In the course of our work, we had the opportunity to use most of the documentary heritage of Nikolay Pankov, preserved by the late Nikolay Bessonov and Valdemar Kalinin who kindly provided us access to the original, as well as by Ilona Makhotina (with whom we are in correspondence).

According to his Autobiography, written in 1955, Nikolay Pankov was born in St Petersburg on May 7th (20th according to the new calendar style), 1895. His father's family was sedentary for a long time; already his grand-grand father Mikhail Arkhipovich Pankov (called 'барвало Миша', i.e. the rich Mikhail) settled in Novgorod; his son Petr, Nikolay Pankov's grandfather, moved to St Petersburg with his entire extended family (PAVK; copy of the Autobiography, made by Yanina Stefanovna, preserved in LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Николай Панков).

The connection of Nikolay Pankov's clan with the Gypsy musical elite in the Russian Empire is beyond any doubt, although there are some vague points in this regard. Nikolay

Pankov himself collected and processed a lot of information about the history of his family, but most of the collected materials are not preserved and today we have only their later interpretations.

According to his daughter Lyubov Pankova, the Pankovs family is closely connected with the creation of the first Gypsy choir in the Russian Empire led by Ivan Sokolov (founder of the famous “dynasty” of Gypsy musicians) in 1774 in the estate of Count Alexey Orlov, brother of Grigoriy Orlov (one of the favourites of Catherine II) near Moscow. One of the members of this choir was Ivan Pankov (‘Ванюша Стрямкускиро чаво’, i.e. Ivan, son of Stryamku), who had the civil status of a ‘merchant of the second guild’, i.e. typical middle class (PAVK).

It is interesting to note that in this chronology of the Pankovs family, made by Lyubov Pankova, the first known ancestor of Kryoma (Stryamku’s father) was born and lived in the second half of the 17th century. This information directly corresponds to the famous quote “Цыгане суть люди в Польци, а поидоша от Немец, на татьбу и всяко зло хитры” (Gypsies are people in Poland, who come from Germany, they are master in cunning and all kinds of evil), from an *Азбуковник* (an Alphabet-book, handwritten encyclopedic dictionary) from 1697. This source is accepted as evidence of the first appearances of Gypsies in Russia which happened following the Russo-Polish War of 1654–1667, as a result of which some eastern Russian lands and Ukraine were annexed to Russia (Баранников, 1929, p. 371), i.e. Pankov’s family in Lyubov Pankova interpretation originated from the first Roma who settled on the territory of Russia.

According to Drutz and Gessler’s version of the origin of the Pankovi family, in the second half of the 19th century Grigoriy Sokolov, a descendant of the famous “dynasty” of Gypsy musicians, the Sokolovs, in search of participants for his new Gypsy choir, visited Novgorod, where he discovered the three Pankovs sisters, who married in the family of Masalskiy, and the two families, practically largely united, moved to the capital St Petersburg (Друц & Гесслер, 1990, pp. 242–243). After the death of Grigoriy Sokolov, the leadership of the new choir was taken over first by Rodion Kalabin, and later by Nikolay Shishkin (Ibid., p. 244). To the two interlinked extended families (the Pankovs and the Masalyskiys) belonged numerous renowned Gypsy musicians and singers. Some of them entered into mixed marriages with members of the highest Russian nobility.

The ties of Nikolay Pankov’s family with the high aristocracy in the Russian Empire are unquestionable. The already mentioned famous reporter Egon Erwin Kisch witnessed that, according to what Nikolay Pankov told to him, he has an aunt who lives as an immigrant in Nice in the 1920s; she was a countess, widow of General Solsky (Kisch, 1992, p. 119). Nikolay Pankov’s “great-grandaunt” (his paternal grandmother’s sister) Anna Masalskaya (not to be confused with the famous singer Anna Vasilyevna Masalskaya, married Nepokoychitskaya) had a long-term relationship with a member of the Romanov’s dynasty, His Royal Highness Prince George Yurovskiy, who was the son of Alexander II and his second, morganatic wife, Princess Yekaterina Dolgorukova (Ibid.);

in 1900 Princess Dolgorukova married her son to end his relationship with the Gypsy woman, with her he had two children. For understandable reasons, in the conditions of the Soviet state, Nikolay Pankov avoided publicising these family ties with the former Tsar dynasty (in his entire archive there is no word about this family history) and made it only in front of a foreigner (in our case Egon Erwin Kisch).

The maiden family name of Nikolay Pankov's mother, Yekaterina Ilyinichna (the father's name is palpably Russified), was Nikkanen. She was of Finnish *Kaale* origin, i.e. from a community that today live mainly in Finland. At that time, Finland was part of the Russian Empire (albeit with a special status), and *Kaale's* settlement in the capital of the Empire, St Petersburg, as well as marriages with Roma, although relatively rare, were not uncommon. The family of Nikolay Pankov's mother led a nomadic lifestyle between what is now Sweden and Finland. His mother's father settled in St Petersburg, had roaming only in the summer months in the rural areas close to the capital in present-day Finland and Estonia (ПАВК; ЛАНВ, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Николай Панков). As a young girl, Pankov's mother was taken to one of the Gypsy choirs in St Petersburg, where "she became famous not for her talent, but for her exceptional beauty". At the age of 16, she married Nikolay Pankov's father and left the choir to take care of the children and the family (Ibid.).

According to Nikolay Pankov himself, his father was a "man, engaged in buying and selling and exchanging horses". Yanina Stefanovna knew some additional details about her husband's family, which she first wrote down, but then scratched through in her memoirs, probably due to self-censorship according to the spirit of the era: "The son of a rich Petersburg Gypsy, a horse merchant and horse breeder, [...] who supplied horses for state institutions at that time and deserved respect" (Ibid.). From this it becomes clear that Nikolay Pankov's family was relatively wealthy – they had their own home in St Petersburg with a large stable, serviced by employees, they maintained a large household. The family was large, they had 14 children, but most of them died as children or at a younger age. Other relatives lived with them, including his father's sisters, who worked for him in various Gypsy choirs (Ibid.).

Nikolay Pankov wrote the following about his education:

I did not receive a systematic education. After graduating from elementary parish school, where I went on my own, without the help of my parents, [...] in 1910, I started working as a "boy" at the Main Telegraph and was persistently engaged in self-education. [...] I did not go to work in search of a livelihood but in search of a different way of life. By 1912, I had mastered the Russian language so much that I could engage in "intelligent" work and already worked in the office of one of St Petersburg's notaries. By this time, I was a reader in the library [...] and a regular buyer from the small booksellers in the book market and I did not miss a single public lecture. [...]

Soon the ground was created for a conflict between a worried father and his son, who is stepping away from the power of tradition. But in December 1913, my father died, and I continued my way of working life and intellectual development of a single self-taught. (Ibid.).

Nikolay Pankov very precisely defined himself as *самоучка* (a self-taught person) who had only two years of school education, but consciously educated himself and raised his general cultural level by reading books and attending public lectures, libraries, theatre and music performances, museums and art galleries. Moreover, Nikolay Pankov made this choice of way of life from an early age, not only in his adolescence but throughout his life (Ibid.). He was the only child in the family who enrolled in school, and he made it on his initiative without the help of his parents – at the age of 7–8, learning that his friends in children’s games enrol in school, he asked the mother of one of them to enlist also him. His parents did not object, but after two years of schooling, they decided that he is already educated enough for a Gypsy boy from a wealthy family, and they stopped him from school. Because he read a lot, his mother worried that too much reading will be bad for his health and forbade it; then he began to read at night by candlelight, by the light of street lanterns, and by the moonshine (Ibid.).

After the 1917 October Revolution, in the new Soviet state, in 1918 Nikolay Pankov began working as a clerk in various institutions, as a school teacher, as an educator at children home with a dormitory (Ibid.).

In the early 1920s, serious changes took place in the life of the large Pankovs family. Nikolay Pankov’s father died in 1913 (on the eve of the First World War) and, accordingly, the family’s income decreased significantly, as the situation became even worse after the October Revolution and following the economic destruction. According to Lyubov Pankova, the Pankovi family became homeless and “escaping from hunger”, Nikolay Pankov’s mother decided to move the whole family to the new capital Moscow in 1922 (PAVK). However, according to evidence of Olga Pankova (about her see below) preserved in family history, the Pankovs family left Leningrad earlier, and initially (in 1920) settled in Tambov gubernia, where the eldest son, Ivan (Olga’s father), found a job as a horseman in a Red Army sovkhoz. There Nikolay Pankov was mobilised in the Red Army and served for one year in the local military enlistment office, as can be seen from a form he filled out in the 1930s (Ibid.), and after Ivan’s death, the family moved to Moscow in 1922.

In Moscow, Nikolay Pankov subsisted on occasional daily earnings but continued to visit public libraries regularly. In November 1922, he met his future wife, Yanina Stefanovna (in Russified version Stepanovna), her last name is unknown, who was an ethnic Polish woman. According to the family legend (retold to us by Nadezhda Belugina who knew the family), which entered the oral history of the community, one day the library was unexpectedly closed, and at its entrance, Nikolay Pankov and Yanina, who also often visited this library, met. In April 1923, the couple got married, and their marriage turned out to be extremely successful. Yanina Stefanovna quickly learned the Romani language and fully integrated into the community, and over the years she has been a stable supporter in the life and activities of Nikolay Pankov. After his death, she continued his work and not only kept his archive but continued to maintain his numerous contacts and exchange of various materials and information on the Gypsy topic. Moreover, she establishes new

contacts, among preserved documents is her correspondence with Anatoliy Kalinin (Ibid.), author of the famous novel *The Gypsy* (repeatedly supplemented and republished), on which two feature films were made (1967, 1994), an extremely popular TV series (1979), and an equally popular its sequel (1985), and even an opera.

In the autumn of 1923, Nikolay Pankov began work in the so-called Dynamo Plant (full name Moscow Electric Machine-Building Plant named after S. M. Kirov); in 1924 his first daughter Natalia was born and in 1925 his second daughter Lyubov (Lyuba). At that time, Nikolay Pankov became actively involved in the emerging at that time movement for Roma civic emancipation in the USSR (PAVK; LANB, ф. Николай Саткевич, д. Николай Панков).

Nikolay Pankov's name first appeared in the VSTs documentation in the Minutes of the Plenum of Moscow Gypsy Delegates, held on August 6, 1925, which made it clear that he had been elected to the Presidium of the Union, comprising a total of 11 members (GARF, ф. P 1235, оп. 120, д. 27, л. 182; ф. P 393, оп. 43 А, д. 1763, л. 123). At the end of 1925, this Presidium was reformatted and took over the general leadership of the VSTs. It included the President of the Union Andrey Taranov, Vice-President Sergey Polyakov, Secretary Ivan Lebedev, Mikhail Bezlyudskiy and Nikolay Pankov (GARF, ф. P 1235, оп. 120, д. 27, л. 83–85). In this leadership, Nikolay Pankov was the head of the Cultural and Educational Department, and Egon Erwin Kisch, who met and talked to him in this capacity, described him as an “extremely well-lettered factory worker” (Kisch, 1992, p. 119). The results achieved in the Cultural and Educational field are impressive. In October 1925, in the Rogozhsko-Simonovskiy district of Moscow, a Gypsy school was opened, in which, at the personal request of Nikolay Pankov in the People's Commissariat, Nina Dudarova was appointed as a teacher (PAVK; LANB, ф. Николай Панков). Shortly afterwards, there were already three Gypsy schools in Moscow, and one of them published a wall newspaper called *Романи глос* (Gypsy voice) (Kisch, 1992, p. 119). Several adult literacy courses (likbez) began to operate regularly; several songs and music groups were formed, which performed in various workers' clubs; a children's music school was established, in which reading of notes was not taught, so as not to destroy the Gypsy ability of musicians to play by ear; there were even courses for the treatment of horses (GARF, ф. P 1235, оп. 120, д. 27; Kisch, 1992, p. 119).

One of the first tasks that VSTs set itself immediately after its official registration in July 1925 and in the implementation of which Nikolay Pankov took a leading role was the creation of an alphabet for writing in Romani. As early as the end of 1925, in a document entitled VSTs General Working Scheme, it was noted that a meeting of the VSTs Presidium had already been held on the issue of making the Gypsy Alphabet, and a commission had been set up and scientific forces had been involved (GARF, ф. P 1235, оп. 120, д. 27). The Working Plan for 1926 provided: “A) Development of the alphabet; b) Compilation of grammar and vocabulary; c) Publishing a primer, anthology; d) Posters, leaflets; e) Brochures of various kinds, as before developing the alphabet and grammar, use the Russian Alphabet and the Gypsy colloquial speech” (Ibid.).

In the description of the entire process of elaboration and approval by the Narkompros of the alphabet of the Romani language, there are larger or smaller discrepancies in the different sources and their presentation by the individual authors. According to the most widespread version, by order of Anatoliy Lunacharskiy, the head of the Narkompros of the RSFSR, the General Directorate of Scientific, Academic-Artistic and Museum Institutions (Glavnauka) at the Narkompros hold a Scientific-Consultative Meeting, where a *Committee for Creation of the Gypsy Language Alphabet* was established. According to some sources, members of this Committee were Prof. Maxim Sergievskiy from the Moscow State University, his assistant Tatyana Ventzel, and as representatives of the *All-Russian Union of the Gypsies* – Nikolay Pankov, Nina Dudarova and Nikolay Rogozhev (Друц & Гесслер, 1990, p. 295).

According to Andrey Taranov's memoirs, however, he initially turned to the famous linguist Nikolay Marr, who advised him to approach Prof. Maxim Sergievskiy (Иващенко, 2011, p. 7). Then, in his words, "with my direct participation, together with Kolya (Nikolay) Pankov, the issue of creating Gypsy writing was raised before the Ministry of Enlightenment" (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Андрей Таранов). In 1926, a commission was established, which included as representatives of VSTs Nikolay Pankov and Nina Dudarova, as well as Prof. Maxim Sergievskiy and Tatyana Ventzel (Иващенко, 2011, p. 7). In his autobiography, however, Taranov points as members of the Committee Prof. Maxim Sergievskiy, Tatyana Ventzel, Nikolay Pankov, and another Moscow State University professor whose name he does not remember (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Андрей Таранов). According to a collective letter from the leadership of the VSTs to the *Commission for Compiling a Primer and Grammars* from 1927, the members of this commission were Prof. Maxim Sergievskiy, Nikolay Rogozhev, Nina Dudarova and Nikolay Pankov (PAVK). In a short article about the creation of the Gypsy Alphabet, however, Prof. Maxim Sergievskiy points a different composition – himself with only Nikolay Pankov and Nina Dudarova as his assistants (Романы зоря, 1927g, pp. 13–14), meaning that the question about Committee members remains open. In any case, the important contribution of Nikolay Panov as one of the initiators and creators of the Gypsy Alphabet in the USSR is unquestionable, for which the best proof is the fact that his name is present in all these versions.

The *Committee for the Creation of the Gypsy Language Alphabet* was attached to the Institute for Teaching Methods and was responsible for coordinating teaching activities and publishing of works in the Romani language, including Romani literature. In pursuance of the decision of this Committee, adopted after lengthy deliberations, on May 10, 1927, the Narkom Anatoliy Lunacharskiy sent a special official letter about creating a Gypsy Alphabet to the leadership of the *All-Russian Union of the Gypsies* (LANB, f. Nikolay Pankov; a copy of this letter is also stored in OGMLT, f. 29, op. 1, d. 49, l. 33), which, according to the practice of the time, had the force of a normative document. The alphabet created in this way was the first in the world (and for many years the only one) official normative alphabet of the Romani language. Gypsy activists in the early USSR

understood very well the extreme importance and even symbolic significance of this fact in the context of Roma civic emancipation, so all of them, in dozens and dozens of cases, in various official documents and publications, invariably emphasised this. However, they did not always follow its norms, e.g. the letter 'ř', provided for in the normative alphabet, was practically not used anywhere in the publications in the Romani language.

The newly created alphabet for the Romani language was based on the variant of the Cyrillic alphabet. Interesting is the note of Egon Erwin Kisch, made even before the alphabet in the Romani language was officially confirmed, that the Narkompros is preparing such an alphabet, which will be based on the Latin alphabet so that it can reach all Gypsies in different countries around the world (Kisch, 1992, p. 117), i.e. publications in the Romani language were meant to be used for propaganda of the Soviet state abroad. However, there is no other confirmation of this information, but perhaps there was such an idea (without practical implementation) among some Soviet officials (and why not also among some Gypsy activists). In any case, when on the initiative of Anatoly Lunacharskiy (the main ideologue of Latinization) in his capacity as head of the Narkompros, a mass action for Latinization of a large part of the alphabets of different nationalities in the USSR began (Martin, 2001, pp. 182–203), which lasted until the second half of the 1930s (Latinized alphabets were created for more than 70 nationalities), Gypsies were not among them. In all likelihood, however, there were people among the Soviet authorities who realised the futility of the idea of using printed propaganda materials among Gypsies abroad, most of whom were illiterate at that time.

At the same time, the Soviet state, as part of its affirmative policy towards the Gypsies, had already begun to attract Gypsy children to school and to organise adult literacy courses, and in this context, the Cyrillic alphabet appeared as much more necessary and useful. In other words, when it comes to choosing between the needs of Gypsies as a cross-border community or as part of Soviet society, the Soviet authorities strongly preferred the latter option (and there is no evidence that some Gypsy activists disagreed with this choice, and to have pleaded for a transition to Latin alphabet).

Nikolay Pankov's participation in the activities of the VSTs management to overcome the crisis that occurred as a result of numerous inspections and attempts at reorganisation is relatively limited. As a member of the Presidium of the Union, he participated in its meetings, e.g. in May 1926, when two representatives of the Union (Andrey Taranov and Mikhail Bezlyudskiy) were elected to the Commission on Land Management of the Gypsies at the Federal Committee for Land Affairs under the VTsIK Presidium (GARF, f. P 3260, op. 6, d. 44, pp. 14). In general, however, he stayed away from the internal struggles in the leadership of the VSTs (or at least did not actively intervene in them), although he was involved in attempts to reformate the Union by replacing the VSTs Presidium with the Board of Founders, which included Andrey Taranov, Ivan Lebedev, Dmitriy Polyakov, Georgiy Lebedev, and Nikolay Pankov (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763, l. 160).

As already mentioned above, in 1927 a poster was printed on behalf of the *All-Russian Union of Gypsies Living in the Territory of the RSFSR*, entitled *To Gypsy Inhabitants*

of RSFSR (GARF, f. P 9550, op. 2, d. 2010, l. 1; Marushiakova & Popov, 2021b, pp. 712–718). The poster was bilingual, in Russian and Romani, and was signed by the leadership of VSTs (chairman Andrey Taranov, secretary Ivan Lebedev and board members Nikolay Pankov, Dmitriy Polyakov and Nina Dudarova). It can be assumed that the text in Romani was prepared by Nikolay Pankov, who was the best Romani speaker of the VSTs leadership.

Nikolay Pankov's numerous activities in the field of Roma civic emancipation took him a lot of time and energy, and at the same time, he was forced to continue working to support his family. A letter from the Council for Education of Nationalities of the Non-Russian Language at Narkompros to the Management of Dynamo Plant is preserved, in which it is explained that Nikolay Pankov is authorized by VSTs to take part in the work of the Union, but VSTs is not able to pay him for his work. For this reason, the Union's management requested that he be relieved of his duties during working hours of at least a few hours in a week (PAVK). In 1927, after the publication of the first issue of the Gypsy journal *Romany zorya*, Nikolay Pankov left the factory and devoted himself entirely to various activities in the field of Gypsy activism, which continued also after the liquidation of VSTs. As part of the *Socially and Politically Active Gypsies Living in Moscow* (de facto informal organisation of Gypsy activists in Moscow), he participated in the Conference on the Gypsy Question organised by the newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, held on October 7, 1929, for discussing of the article by Georgiy Lebedev and Alexander German, entitled *What to Do with the Gypsies?* (*Комсомольская правда*, 1929, p. 4). In his speech, he focused on the problems that existed in the Central Gypsy Club, where, in his words, "now all the work is run by almost kulak elements" (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 121, d. 31).

After 1927, Nikolay Pankov did not have a permanent full-time job and fed his family with fees received from various places. This was the time when the Gypsy national literature was born and developed rapidly, and Nikolay Pankov was a leading figure in the organisation of this process. He not only participated in the preparation of the publication of the two Gypsy journals, *Романы зоря* (1927–1930) и *Нэво дром* (1930–1932), reviewed and edited the received materials, but also published many of his poems, translated works and journalistic essays.

Already in the first issue of *Romany zorya*, which marked the beginning of the Gypsy periodical press in the USSR, Nikolay Pankov was the author of one of the leading articles, *Лыла ромэндър и ромэнгэ* (Books from Gypsies for Gypsies) (*Романы зоря*, 1927f, pp. 7–8), in which he justified the need to create own national literature and its importance for the Roma, and in another article, *Амарэ клубы* (Our Clubs) (*Романы зоря*, 1927e, pp. 10–13) about the Gypsy clubs in Moscow and their significance for the community.

Nikolay Pankov worked also as an editor on editorial boards created by freelancers at various publishing houses – Tsentizdat, Goslitizdat, Uchpedgiz, Selkhozgiz, *Molodaya Gvardiya* (Young Guard), etc. A review of the lists of published literature in Romani (see Кожанов & Шаповал, 2018; Shapoval, 2021bc), including over 260 book titles, shows that

the most common name (as the author, translator or editor) is that of Nikolay Pankov (repeated more than 100 times); just for comparison, the name of arguably the most prolific author, considered by his contemporaries to be a “classic of Gypsy literature,” Alexander Germano, occurs more than 60 times. In this way, a large part of the Gypsy national literature in the USSR passed through the eyes of Nikolay Pankov, and his contribution was enormous for its overall development. No less important was Nikolay Pankov’s contribution to the development of Gypsy national literature, and more generally, to the processes of Roma civic emancipation through the translation into Romani of works from Russian and world literary classics, e.g. *Carmen* by Prosper Merimee (Мериме, 1935). Nikolay Pankov himself evaluates his contribution in this field as follows:

During the creation of Gypsy literature, I became involved in the work of translation, aware of the importance of this process for the language entering a new phase of its development. Translations helped me to learn the possibilities of my native language and find ways to create my own literary style. Translations are a test and an inevitable stage for all people when they awaken to a new life. I also felt an urgent need to acquaint the Gypsy people, at least in translations, with the great Russian classical literature and with the works of the classics of Marxism-Leninism. (ПАНК; LANB, ф. Николай Саткевич, д. Николай Панков).

Probably due to the great editorial and translation commitment of Nikolay Pankov, his authorial artistic literary work is much more modest. Thus, in practice, it is precisely the man who has done so much for the development of Gypsy national literature who has not published his own books of fiction, although he undoubtedly possessed poetic talent. Evidence of this is his poems published in the journals *Romany zorya* and *Nevo drom*, and also in the first *Almanac of the Gypsy Poets* (Германо, 1931, pp. 52–54), and the translations into Romani of the famous poem *Gypsies* by Alexander Pushkin, as well as his tales in verse (Пушкин, 1936; 1937).

In parentheses, Nikolay Pankov is also the author of almost all translations into Romani of works by Lenin and Stalin. He translated at least 3 books by Vladimir Lenin and 6 books by Joseph Stalin, but sometimes political publications did not have their translator’s name listed on the cover (Shapoval, 2021bc), i.e. it is quite possible that he was also a translator of other similar publications. This shows the confidence in the skills he enjoyed and because of which he was commissioned to translate publications that were so important from a political point of view.

Nikolay Pankov also devoted a lot of time and effort to the preparation and publication of textbooks and teaching aids. Together with Nina Dudarova, they jointly prepared the first primer for learning the Romani language, intended for adult literacy (Дударова & Панково, 1928), as well as the first primer for children in Gypsy schools (Панково & Дударова, 1930a). Independently or in co-authorship, Nikolay Pankov prepared another series of textbooks for Gypsy children and adults, including two chrestomathies of teaching literature with translations of works by Russian authors (Панков, 1933; 1934ab; 1935; Панково & Дударова, 1930b; Германо & Панково, 1932; 1934; Германо & Модина &

Панково, 1932). Special mention should also be made of Nikolay Pankov's book *Буты и джибэн* (Work and Life), aimed at for adult education, which includes short essays in which the history of Gypsies and various aspects of their lives in the Soviet state were presented in a popular form (Панков, 1929).

Nikolay Pankov was among the initiators and participants in the process of creating the State Gypsy Theatre *Romen*, was included in its artistic council, participated in the selection of artists in the theatre and took care of the solving of their everyday problems (LANB, ф. Николай Панков). He was actively involved in public discussions of the problems in the theatre, e.g. at the meeting of the "functionaries of the Moscow Gypsies" (GARF, ф. Р 1235, оп. 123, д. 28, л. 183–186) in December 1933, held on the initiative of the Commission on Nationalities of the Moscow City Executive Committee, the participants in which sharply criticized the work of the theatre and its director Georgiy Lebedev, as well as the staging of the play *Carmen*, for which there were many critical reviews in the press at the time (Ibid.). By order of the theatre's director Moses Goldblatt, Nikolay Pankov prepared a theatrical adaptation of Nikolay Leskov's short novel *The Enchanted Wanderer*, which was accepted for staging by the Theatre's Art Council but was later rejected by the new administration (LANB, ф. Николай Панков). At the same time, the play *Grushenka*, written by the famous playwright Isidor Shtock (Ром-Лебедев, 1990, p. 186), based on the same short novel, was staged at the Theatre *Romen*.

During Ivan Tokmakov's brief tenure as director at the Theatre *Romen* in 1936 (see above), Nikolay Pankov stood firmly on his side in the ensuing ferment and scandals in the theatre's staff, which began after the press criticised the new stage play *Gypsies* of the famous poem by Alexander Pushkin, as well as during its discussion by the Art Council of the theatre (PAVK). Moreover, in his unpublished book on the history of Theatre *Romen*, Alexander German accused in the first place Nikolay Pankov, on whose recommendation the new head of the literary part (playwright) of the theatre, Sergey Ignatov, was appointed. Nikolay Pankov was denounced by Alexander German as the bearer of the "left phrase" [i.e. adherer of leftist theatrical ideology] and the main inspirer and perpetrator of the so-called "rotten groupism" [i.e. the culprit for the division of the theatre team into rival groups] (Германо, 1954, pp. 102–104). Eventually, after the dismissal of Ivan Tokmakov from the post of theatre director at the end of 1936, Nikolay Pankov was isolated from the activities of Theatre *Romen* (LANB, ф. Николай Панков).

Shortly after this case, Nikolay Pankov made a last attempt to influence the development of Theatre *Romen*. He wrote a long article entitled *Gypsy Theatre – Not a National Theatre*, the manuscript of which he passed to the editors of the journal *Narodnoe tvorchestvo* (Folk Art) (RGALI, ф. 673, оп. 1, д. 454, л. 104–110). This text is especially appealing because it reveals his views on what the Gypsy National Theatre should be – an issue that had repeatedly stood before Theatre *Romen* in its long history, and which continues to be relevant today (Бессонов, 2013, pp. 453–464), and not only for Theatre *Romen* but also for all Gypsy / Roma theatres, including to this day.

Putting the dilemma to whom the work of Theatre *Romen* should be directed – to the Gypsy community or to society as a whole – Nikolay Pankov gives an unambiguous and definite answer. According to him, “the Gypsy theatre must, first of all, become the cultural factor for its people”, and it “must serve first of all its people, [...] the Gypsy mass of spectators, because Gypsy art in our socialist construction must be used in educating the Gypsy masses” (RGALI, f. 673, op. 1, d. 454, l. 104–110). To fulfil this main task and be truly national, Theatre *Romen* must reorganise all its activities and focus mainly on permanent and long tours, as the “Gypsy masses” live scattered throughout the Soviet country, and the theatre must reach its viewer. It should be noted that throughout his text Nikolay Pankov avoids taking a stand on the already discussed issue in the theatre concerning what language the performances should be in (see above), but from the whole logic of his presentation, it follows that they should instead be in Romani (which contradicts the choice already made for them to be in Russian).

In his article, Nikolay Pankov analysed critically specific productions of Theatre *Romen* – the plays *Life on Wheels* (author Alexander German), *Daughter of the Steppes* and *Wedding in the Tabor* (author of both is Ivan Rom-Lebedev). At the same time, he did not deny their leading, ideologically conditioned messages – exposing class enemies in the Gypsy camp and proclaiming the Gypsy woman’s right to free love (almost in the spirit of the famous Alexandra Kolontay) – but focused mainly on the shortcomings in the artistic presentation of ethnographic characteristics of Gypsies (“anti-national distortions of Gypsy life”), including even used stage costumes. In other words, Nikolay Pankov was trying to discuss the extent to which the theatre reflects the typical and authentic ethnographic characteristics of the Gypsy community, both as a whole and in individual details. Nowadays, it is possible that this approach would be considered by many authors in the field of Romani Studies as essentialism or exoticism, or both. However, there are no grounds for such interpretations; because, as Pankov himself writes, “in pursuit of the exotic” in its quest to meet the expectations of the mass audience, expecting to see in the Gypsy theatre “more mainly songs and dances”, the theatre loses its basic characteristics and especially its social functions as a national theatre. In fact, his approach represents a typical and legitimate ethnonational discourse (in this case a Gypsy discourse) to teach national art (in this case the theatre). This is very clear in the author’s calls for the Gypsy Theatre to be, in the first place, an ethnic, national theatre, that would educate the Gypsy masses in this national spirit. Moreover, Nikolay Pankov, unlike all others (Roma and non-Roma), writing or speaking about Theatre *Romen*, did not speculate demagogically with the declared leading goal in the creation of the theatre – the fight against the so-called *tsiganshchina* – and offers something completely different. According to him, non-Roma specialists who know the language and life of the Gypsies should be brought to the deed, and with their help, the research work on the Gypsy folklore should be organised in the theatre, i.e. Theatre *Romen* needed to significantly diversify and enrich its public functions, thus becoming a true national cultural centre of the Gypsies in the USSR.

In the end, in his article, Nikolay Pankov came to the disappointing conclusion:

These cursory remarks of the theatre's main shortcomings are enough to say that the theatre (is far from the path that a modern national theatre should follow) and has many mistakes that prevent it from becoming a real national theatre. A theatre that gives false images, a theatre that sacrifices the truth in the name of theatricalisation, a theatre that does not take into account the needs of its people and does not serve them – the people do not need it and it cannot be called national. It is permissible to think that a theatre that distorts the truth and does not know how to show its people correctly is not needed for an international audience either. (Ibid., p. 108).

The manuscript of Nikolay Pankov's article has been submitted for review to the famous theatrical critic Isaac Lubinskiy. The reviewer believes that the article should not be published for a number of reasons, the main ones being: "The author's reasoning is superficial and too subjective; a previous issue of the journal has already published a positive review of the play *Daughter of the Steppes*, and when publishing this article, the editorial will fall into contradiction; the author's critical remarks are insufficient for the accusations the theatre in national falsehood and the editorial board will be responsible for those accusations. Such accusation can only be made after a thorough assessment of the condition of the theatre, without which it cannot be blamed for such grave sins" (RGALI, f. 673, op. 1, d. 454, l. 203). In the end, Nikolay Pankov's article was not published.

In 1933, an important turning point in the life of Nikolay Pankov took place. He began working as a teacher of Romani language in the newly opened Gypsy Department at the Pedagogical College of the Krasno Presnensky District named after Timiryazev (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 130, d. 5), which in 1935 was separated into an independent Gypsy Pedagogical College, which existed until 1938 (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 127, d. 8). In this position, he quickly became a mentor to the trained students – young men and women, detached from their native places and family environment, which he involved in the field of Gypsy activism. The students from the college regularly participate in the public events organised by the Central Gypsy Club and the Theatre *Romen*, cooperate with the leading Gypsy artels, etc. In 1934, Nikolay Pankov was appointed by ON VTsIK from Narkomzem to lead a one-month working trip of students from the Gypsy Department in selected Gypsy kolkhozes, who were sent there to support during their summer vacation on-site cultural and educational work (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 28; f. P 1235, op. 127, d. 8). The selected students went to Gypsy kolkhozes *Nevo drom* (Krasnodar kray), *Trud Romen* (Mineralnovodskiy rayon, Stavropol krai), *Nevo dzhiben* (Shahunsky rayon, Gorky kray), and *Nevi baxt* (Sarapul rayon, then Kirov oblast), and after the end of the work, the team prepared detailed reports on the overall condition of these kolkhozes (Ibid.).

On this basis, Nikolay Pankov prepared an extensive Report to ON VTsIK, in which he presented in detail the existing weaknesses and problems, and outlined the reasons that "hinder the movement of Gypsies to sedentary life and work and also the organisational and economic strengthening of established kolkhozes". In conclusion, he made a series of proposals to Narkomzem and Narkompros, the implementation of which would

support the successful development of Gypsy collective farms (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 28, l. 403–429).

During his work in the Gypsy Department at the Pedagogical College of the Krasno Presnensky District named after Timiryazev, Nikolay Pankov faced several problems of various kinds that required his active intervention. Some of these problems, which are of a living and domestic nature (e.g. provision of the dormitory, amount of scholarships, obtaining reduced passes for the canteen of the technical school, etc.) were solved, albeit slowly (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 28; f. P 1235, op. 127, d. 8). However, other problems were more serious. On March 15, 1935, a meeting of the leadership of the Pedagogical College and the students in the Gypsy Department was held, which was also attended by more than 30 Gypsy activists from the Central Gypsy Club, Theatre *Romen*, and the *Tsygkhiprom* and *Yugoslavia* artels, which mentored the college students and supported them economically (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 127, d. 8). At this meeting, after the address of the director of the college, in their speeches, students sharply raised many of the existing problems in their education, even leading to a conflict situation. In his speech, the student Runenko raised the question of the need for the Gypsy Department to have a Gypsy as the head of the educational part. Ivan Tomakov, an instructor at ON VTsIK, who attended the meeting, replied: “Comrade Runenko, you have deviated into nationalism, I don’t think that all the students are so mischievous, but if even so, then such a mood should be eliminated”, and only the intervention of Nikolay Pankov managed to calm the conflict (Ibid.). It is significant that Pankov was not afraid to publicly object to the official representative of the higher Soviet institutions and to defend his student (it should be borne in mind that he maintains close friendly relations with Ivan Tokmakov).

The separation of Gypsy Pedagogical College as an independent educational institution in the autumn of 1935 did not completely solve the existing problems. It is no coincidence that at the Meeting of the Council of Nationalities at the TsIK USSR *On the Questions of the Employment of Toiling Nomadic Gypsies and Their Cultural and Economic Services*, held on 4 and 5 January 1936 (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 794, l. 77–125), Nikolay Pankov was not included in the group of representatives of Gypsy Pedagogical College who participated in the meeting. However he still took part in the meeting (in the Minutes he is presented as a “Gypsy writer”), and in his speech, he pointed out the acute problems with Gypsy Pedagogical College (which were not so much inside the College itself, but outside it):

There are too many abnormalities in the College. Young people in the College are neglected, left to their own. From the first enrollment of 28 people by 1936–37, only 5 people remained, the enrollment of the 1935–36 academic year was almost disrupted. If not for Comrade Tokmakov, we would not have enrollment in the college at all. (Ibid., pp. 92–93).

In his work as a lecturer at Gypsy Pedagogical College, Nikolay Pankov established friendly relations with the students, and after they completed their study and started work in various places in the country, he continued to maintain constant correspondence with many

of them. Their letters, preserved in his archives, are an important historical source for the real results and problems of the Soviet state's Gypsy policy. Particularly noteworthy is the letter to Nikolay Pankov written by Lyuba Mikholazhina (who had graduated from the Gypsy Pedagogical College), who went to work in a local (non-Gypsy) school in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR. What makes this letter interesting are the thoughts of the newly-created Gypsy intelligentsia and their social positions within the Soviet realities:

I strongly dislike those [...] who not only do not help their nation but also give it up. I managed to reach the level of the Russians and to prove that we do have abilities too. Now I am working in the Caucasus and not among my Gypsies. [...] What made me come here is that I wanted to learn about the life of the Caucasian people. It is very difficult and dangerous to live here. For example, an inspector was murdered today up in the mountains on his way to our regional centre Venedo. There are many such occurrences here: murders, robberies, raped girls thrown down from the high banks into the river. Going out in the yard at night [...] is dangerous because somebody may hit you on the head with a stone. They [the local Chechens – authors note] hate the Russians and treat us as conquerors. They have no idea about the existence of Gypsies and think that I am Russian. (Друц & Гесслер, 1990, pp. 301–302).

It can look strange at first glance, but in some cases, seen in post-colonial discourse, Gypsies in the Russian Empire and USSR could be on the other side of the barricade, on the side of the 'invaders'. This is not something unique in the history of the Gypsies in the world: it would be enough to think of the Calon Gypsy slave traders of the eighteenth century in Brazil (Fotta, 2018).

The radical turn in the national policy of the USSR in the second half of the 1930s, which we have discussed many times before, also reflects on the life destiny of Nikolay Pankov. In 1938, the Gypsy Pedagogical College was disbanded and the students were given the opportunity to transfer to other similar educational institutions. However, their education in the Romani language was dropped, and Nikolay Pankov lost his job. In this situation, he again became a factory proletarian and began work at the Moscow Machine Tool Plant named after Sergo Ordzhonikidze (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, д. Николай Панков).

At the beginning of 1938, it became clear to Nikolay Pankov that the current policy towards the Gypsies in the USSR was coming to an end and some of its most important achievements had been lost – the study of the Romani language was stopped, the Gypsy schools were closed and the publication of educational and fiction literature in the Romani language was stopped, although there is no explicit ban on this, and attempts to resume this publication process continued for several more years (Shapoval, 2021c). According to the memories of Yanina Stefanovna:

for the advanced part of the Gypsy intelligentsia, this was a complete ruin [...]; the liquidation of the Gypsy movement in 1938 deeply wounded Pankov's consciousness, he cannot believe that this is irrevocable [...]; Pankov can't and don't want to believe in this wreckage. (LANB, f. Николай Панков).

Desperate because of this development, he decided on the last possible move – to write directly a personal letter to Stalin himself, with which he tried to reverse the course of events. A draft of his letter to Stalin, dated February 1938, is kept in his personal archive, and it is explicitly stated that a second, edited version of this letter was sent (LANB, f. Николай Панков). According to Yanina Stefanovna, this second version was sent to Stalin on May 25, 1938; about a month later, Nikolay Pankov inquired whether his letter had been received, and understood that there would be no reply (Ibid.). In this case, for us, the initial version of Nikolay Pankov's letter to Stalin is more interesting because it more clearly shows the thoughts and feelings that excited the author in this crisis moment for the Gypsy movement, and reveals his overall vision of the necessary actions along the way of Roma civil emancipation.

At the very beginning of his letter, Nikolay Pankov stressed the importance of the problem which faced the overall Gypsy policy of the Soviet state:

In solving the fate of the Gypsy people, there are several alarming moments that I, as a son of the socialist fatherland and as a Gypsy, cannot help but worry about and which force me to search for an answer concerning these worrying questions. [...] After hundreds of years, wrapped with cruel legends about this people as an incorrigible tribe, as if they are some kind of a waste that is disastrous for those places where this "vicious" tribe has appeared, and in Capitalist societies until now, they are considered as people whose "vices and evil inclinations" are impossible to be corrected neither through persecutions, tortures, executions or harsh laws – here, in the USSR, this "damned" and "irredeemable" tribe was shaken by the ideas of Lenin-Stalin's Party proclaiming a fraternity for all the nations that are deprived of everything, providing help and support to the persecuted and exploited. Gypsies [...], with no economy, no living space of their own, living, for the most part, by chance, have begun to break down the tents in order to settle down and start to work. (Ibid.).

Further in his letter Nikolay Pankov presents the problems facing the realisation of the aims of the Soviet state – "to influence the minds of the Gypsies and to absorb the ideas of the Party and Soviet State [...]; to make the Gypsies conscious builders of socialism". He sees these problems in various areas. Many Gypsies still lead a nomadic lifestyle and only a small number of them are involved in production; the creation of Gypsy collective farms is slow, special funds and land are needed, as well as better interaction with Soviet institutions at the central and local levels. As a way out of solving these problems, Nikolay Pankov proposes the creation of a Gypsy newspaper, which will present the problems to the relevant institutions and will establish their relations with the Gypsies, and he sees this newspaper with much broader public functions:

The organisational and educational importance of the newspaper is enormous. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin has said that the newspaper teaches how to live and to build one's own economy. The absence of a newspaper greatly slows our movement towards labour and the strengthening of our economic life. (Ibid.).

Nikolay Pankov saw the state of Theatre *Romen* as another important problem that requires immediate attention:

The Moscow Gypsy Theatre detaches itself from the progressive toiling Gypsy masses of Moscow; the Theatre does not serve at all the Gypsy masses; it was transformed into an exotic theatre rather than becoming a weapon for the education of the Gypsy nation. (Ibid.).

The next big problem, according to Nikolay Pankov, is related to the preparation of cadres:

No one institution, the duty of which should be the discovering of the cadres and the main one – their cultivation, has dealt with and does not deal with it even now; but as known cadres are all important! No institution could say that it has prepared, armed the Gypsy worker on this front. The Gypsy cadres are not used even when their activities, given their knowledge of the language and the lifestyle of the Gypsies, should have a positive effect. (Ibid.).

Here, Nikolay Pankov refers to Stalin's famous slogan "кадры решают все" (cadres are all-important) and makes a connection with the closure of Gypsy schools. According to him, Gypsy children cannot (and should not) study in mainstream schools because they cannot achieve good results in them. However, here he is not so categorical and assumes the possibility in Gypsy schools the general education subjects can be taught in Russian.

In fact, this was a consideration of the existing mass practice in Gypsy schools until then, because despite the textbooks published in Romani language in various disciplines, there were not enough trained teachers to teach them (i.e. the mass publication of textbooks and aids in Romani language has been carried out since they will be used in the future, in the near or distant future). At the same time, however, according to Nikolay Pankov, in Gypsy schools and classes, students must learn their native language. In direct connection with this, he pleaded to continue publishing books in the Romani language, not only teaching materials, but also fiction due to its societal functions:

there is a nationality, a language, a drive towards economic life and a culture is being born; naturally, an interest in, and a need for, knowledge about these Gypsy people and their language is also being born, in a new way, and also among other nationalities that interact with them. (Ibid.).

In this context, Nikolay Pankov comes to a specific problem that directly concerned him and with which he is strongly involved: "the publishing house for dictionaries a Gypsy-Russian Dictionary was being prepared – it was completed, the layout was done, it went through corrections, and after all this, there came an order that the dictionary is dropped from production" (Ibid.). The reference is to *Gypsy-Russian Dictionary* (Сергиевский & Баранников, 1938), whose editor was Nikolay Pankov himself. It is not clear whether Nikolay Pankov's letter influenced the decision to publish the dictionary, but it was published, albeit with a delay of almost three years.

Nikolay Pankov's letter to Stalin ended, at least to some extent, unexpectedly:

And finally – one last question – concerns the elections for a Supreme Council. Keeping in mind the dispersal in small groups, our numbers would obviously be nowhere enough so that we could promote MPs from our people. (LANB, f. Николай Панков).

This section seems, at least at first glance, puzzling. The very idea of the need to empower the Roma by including them in the power structures is not new to the leading Gypsy activists in the early USSR. During the existence of the VSTs, this empowerment was realised in practice through the nomination of representatives of the Union in commissions set up by the individual ministries and local authorities. Subsequently, the appointment of Gypsy activists in the local administration (Mikhail Bezlyudskiy, Ilya and Trofim Gerasimovs) began, albeit slowly and to a limited extent, and finally, also entrance into central state institutions was achieved (inclusion of Ivan Tokmakov in ON VTsIK). In all these cases, however, it is a question of incorporating Gypsy activists into such Soviet institutions and administrations that exercise some power functions in a specific sphere. The ultimate goal in this vision of empowerment, which these Gypsy leaders have repeatedly declared (directly or only as hints), was to create the equivalent of a nation-state in the USSR in the form of a Gypsy autonomous socialist republic, the positions of power and positions in which will be occupied by Gypsies. As a specific (and more realistic) version of this vision was the desire and constant struggle to obtain such jobs and positions in the small “Gypsy kingdom” existing in the capital Moscow – the State Gypsy Theatre *Romen*.

Nikolay Pankov initially also moved in these parameters, which include his attempt to establish himself in Theatre *Romen*, including during the short term of office of his close friend Ivan Tokmakov (see above). In his letter to Stalin, however, he broke the paradigm of empowerment as a community and shifted his vision to the other side of the ‘community-society’ dichotomy, i.e. he was already beginning to think about empowering the Gypsies as an equal part of Soviet society as a whole. However, the choice of the Supreme Soviet as a place for the realisation of this vision is surprising at first glance. This undoubtedly important (at least in theory) Soviet institutions, in practice, in real political life, had a rather symbolic meaning, and it de facto gave legal form to decisions already taken by the real political power in the Soviet state – the highest Party institutions. Even more surprising is the source of this undoubtedly original idea of Nikolay Pankov – the new Soviet Constitution, adopted in 1936 (the so-called Stalin’s Constitution). It explicitly states that “the right to nominate candidates is provided for public organisations and workers’ societies: communist party organisations, trade unions, cooperatives, youth organisations, cultural societies” (Конституция, 1936, Art. 141). In fact, the meaning of the final passage from Nikolay Pankov’s letter to Stalin was his fears that the lack of a public national cultural organisation will effectively deprive Gypsies of the opportunity to nominate their own candidates for the Supreme Soviet.

Put in parentheses, these hopes of Nikolay Pankov were not as utopian as they seem at first glance. There was an idea, expressed publicly by Stalin himself, that the elections for the Supreme Soviet should be put on a competitive basis, and that voters should have the right to choose between several candidates (Правда, 1936, p. 1), even in some places such ballots were prepared in 1937. However, this idea was not realised, and according to some authors, it is in the reluctance of the local party nomenklatura to break its

monopoly in power lies one of the main reasons for the so-called Great terror (Вдовин, 2013, pp. 74–75).

Writing his letter to Stalin in 1938, amid mass political repression, Nikolay Pankov was well aware of the risks he was taking. According to the recollections of family members of Nikolay Pankov, months after the letter was sent, he lived in anxious expectation to be arrested and did not sleep all nights, but nothing happened. Only three years later, on the eve of Nazi Germany's attack on the USSR on June 22, 1941, he was visited by NKVD officials, who informed him that Comrade Stalin had become acquainted with his letter, but no further reaction from the authorities followed (Калинин, 2005, pp. 56–57).

In 1942, in the difficult military conditions, tiring work in the factory for the needs of the warring Soviet army and limited food rations, Nikolay Pankov became ill from tuberculosis because of exhaustion and received a disability rent. Soon after, due to the difficult living conditions, he was forced to give up his pension and start working again as a warden in the factory, and only after a few years, he finally stopped working. In 1944 Nikolay Pankov was accepted as a member of the Union of Soviet Writers (SSP) (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Николай Панков). For this, he received Recommendations from Prof. Maxim Sergievskiy, with whom they worked together on the preparation of the Gypsy Alphabet, and the famous theatre critic Sergey Ignatov, who was a playwright at Theatre *Romen* when the director of the theatre was Ivan Tokmakov (see above). It should be noted that Nikolay Pankov did not take advantage of the many privileges that his membership in the SSP brings him, e.g. he obtained the right to a bigger and better home, and for the rest of his life, he lived with his family in a small room in an old wooden house, far from the centre of Moscow (Черенков, 2017, p. 22).

Nikolay Pankov's life in the conditions of post-war devastation in the USSR was difficult. He made great efforts at that time to search for eyewitness accounts of the fate of his close friend Ivan Tokmakov, who was officially listed as "missing" at the front (see above). Based on the stories of comrades-in-arms of Ivan Tokmakov from the front, the partisan detachment and the prisoner of war camp, Nikolay Pankov prepared the biographical essay *In Memory of Ivan Petrovich Tokmakov* (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Иван. Токмаков). It is interesting to note that Ivan Tokmakov himself, dying, asked his comrades to find his wife Lena (Elena) and his brother Kolya (Nikolay) in Moscow, and to inform them of his death; since he had no brothers, Yanina Stefanovna Pankova suggested that he meant Nikolay Pankov (LANB, f. Николай Панков).

In the 1950s, in the last years of his life, Nikolay Pankov devoted a lot of time and energy to two important areas in the field of Roma civic emancipation – politics and academia. In the first of these, the political one, he continued his struggle to resume the old, pre-war affirmative policy towards the Gypsies in the USSR. He was not invited to join the signatories of the above-mentioned letter to Stalin, initiated by Ivan Rom-Lebedev in 1946, but nevertheless, he began his own struggle in this direction.

As early as March 1946, Nikolay Pankov prepared a text entitled the *Historical Report on Gypsies* (PAVK), which he later used as a basis for writing the letters he sent to the

higher Soviet institutions. Of particular interest in this text is the explanation he gave for the beginning of the Roma civic emancipation movement in the early USSR. Regardless of the phraseology used in the spirit of the times, Nikolay Pankov is extremely accurate in his explanation of the origin of the ideas of Roma civic emancipation – he expressed in Roma discourse the ideas that dominate the society of which they are an integral part:

The October Revolution awakened consciousness also [i.e. as well as at other nationalities in the USSR – authors note] among this nationality. [...] A group of cultural Gypsies united in the idea of rebuilding the lives of their people on the principles proclaimed by the Great October Revolution". (Ibid.).

In August 1951, Nikolay Pankov sent a letter to the official Communist Party broadsheet newspaper *Pravda*, in which he presented what the Soviet government had done for the Gypsies before the war, the successes achieved, and called for:

Addressing the newspaper *Pravda* with this letter, I hope that the editorial board will gather cultural Gypsies who participated in the work among the Gypsies (list and addresses in case I can supply) and discuss the current situation of Soviet Gypsies, and make one or another decision aligned with Stalin's national policy. (Ibid.).

The lack of any result from this letter does not despair Nikolay Pankov. In July 1953, after Stalin's death, he sent a letter to Petr Pospelov, Secretary of the TsK KPSS, in which he raised the question of the need to resume the affirmative policy of the Soviet state towards the Gypsies, and in particular the resumption of cultural-educational activities (ЛАНВ, ф. Николай Панков; Друц & Гесслер, 1990, pp. 304–305). Shortly after this letter, he was invited to TsK KPSS, where he was interviewed by responsible officials of the Party apparatus (Ibid., P. 305), but no concrete results followed.

However, Nikolay Pankov did not give up his efforts to attract the attention of the highest Soviet institutions and continued his epistolary activity. In March 1956 he sent a letter to the new First Secretary of the TsK KPSS Nikita Khrushchev (two versions of this letter are kept in his personal archive); in August of the same year he passed a third version of the same letter to Marshal Kliment Voroshilov, then Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR through his assistant Mikhail Morozov (PAVK).

In all these letters, Nikolay Pankov called for the resumption of the 1920s and 1930s state policy towards the Gypsies: in particular, he paid most attention to the policies of sedentarisation of the Gypsy nomads, to re-open Gypsy schools, to resume the mass publication of literature in Romani language, etc. In short, Nikolay Pankov pleaded for a return to the active policy of affirmative action towards the Gypsies during the interwar period (and, accordingly, raising the social position of the Gypsy activists themselves). It is worth quoting selected passages from these letters.

From the letter to Petr Pospelov in 1953:

[In the 1920s and 1930s] the sprouts of socialist consciousness appeared in the working Gypsy masses, and it was possible to foresee in the near future a time when the specific features of the vagrant Gypsy (divination, begging, horse trading) would become an anachronism without applying administrative measures. . [...] After 1938, the situation of the Gypsies in the domestic and social sense again became difficult and in some ways depressing. [...] The people became illiterate again, deprived of the most elementary [...] conditions for their development and cultural growth. The Gypsy people involuntarily found themselves away from the great family of the peoples of the USSR. (Друц & Гесслер, 1990, pp. 304–305).

From the letter to Nikita Khrushchev in 1956:

Based on the experience of 1926–1938 – when, with the direct assistance and assistance of the Party and the Government, there was widespread work to introduce the Gypsies to settled life, work and culture, which went on in a continuous cultural and political, educational work – in my letter I mean to ask for the resumption of work in some form among the Gypsies of the USSR, discontinued in 1938. (PAVK).

From the letter to Kliment Voroshilov in 1956:

The positive experience of recent work on sedentarisation and attracting them to work on the one hand, and the other, the current position of the Gypsies as an unorganized roaming tribe, inconsistent with the principles of the Communist Party and the socialist state, prompts me once again (for the fourth time), I will turn to you, Kliment Yefremovich, with a request to discuss the situation of Gypsies in the USSR and find an opportunity to resume work among Gypsies to attract them to work and settled life, culture. (Ibid.).

In his letters to top Soviet leaders, Nikolay Pankov invariably included a list of names of people to be addressed. In his words:

The necessary cultural and Party forces both from the Gypsies themselves and from the non-Gypsies, who know the Gypsy people well because of their connection with these people and their research work on the study of Gypsies and their language, are available, and it would be possible usefully to discuss the situation of Gypsies and the forms of work with them. An incomplete list of these individuals is attached. (Ibid.).

It is interesting to note that in all his letters at the top of these lists of people who can be useful to the Gypsies, Nikolay Pankov always puts non-Gypsies in the first place – the linguists Yan Loya and Paul Ariste (see below more about them), as well as Tatiana Ventzel, with whom Pankov had worked together since the 1920s (Prof. Mikhail Sergievsky and Academician Alexey Barannikov have already died). Among the old Gypsy activists from the interwar period, Mikhail Bezlyudskiy (with whom Nikolay Pankov maintained constant correspondence), Andrey Taranov and Nina Dudarova were invariably present in these lists, while Ivan Rom-Lebedev was included in them only once, and Alexander German (who died in 1955) not at all.

It is difficult to assess whether and to what extent all the letters to the top Soviet leaders (written by both Nikolay Pankov and the above-mentioned Andrey Taranov) had any influence on Soviet policy towards the Gypsies in general (and to those who continued to lead a nomadic lifestyle, in particular). In any case, if they have had any effect, the result was largely contrary to the expectations of their authors. On August 24, 1956, for the first and last time in the history of the USSR, the Gypsy issue was discussed at a meeting of the highest Party body, namely the Presidium (Politburo) of the Central Committee of Communist Party, and a special commission was established to draft the respective decree (Фурценко, 2003, Vol. 1, p. 161). On October 5, 1956, the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR *On the Admission to Labour of the Gypsy Vagrants* was issued. But at first glance, it seems that Gypsy activists (after more than three decades) have finally been able to convince the Soviet state of the need to eradicate the nomadic way of life of the Gypsies. However, the ban on nomadism did not lead to any other changes in the Gypsy policy. Thus, with one blow, the Soviet authorities deprived the Gypsy elite in the USSR of its main argument (the need to fight the nomadic way of life), which they have constantly used in trying to convince the authorities of the need for pro-Gypsy affirmative policies, in which they themselves expected to be attracted to participate as representatives of their people. However, these hopes were in vain.

As testified by Yanina Stefanovna, the adoption of the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR *On the Admission to Labor of the Gypsy Vagrants* was “shocking” for Nikolay Pankov (ЛАНВ, ф. Николай Панков). It became clear to him that the leading paradigm in Soviet Gypsy policy had been irreversibly changed, and there could be no going back. That is why he dedicated the last years of his life to his other main priority of the activities in the field of Roma civic emancipation – systematisation, enrichment and development of the overall academic knowledge about his people. This is not an escape from politics into academia, but an attempt to preserve and develop the ideas of Roma civic emancipation in other (non-political) spheres. For him, the development of academic knowledge about Gypsies was an integral part of the overall process of Roma civic emancipation. This is clearly evidenced by the fact that in all his letters to top Soviet leaders presented above, he invariably included large passages devoted to the need to develop academic research on the Gypsies in the USSR (and in particular on their history, language, ethnography and folklore), as well as in his letter from August 1957 to the Art Council at the Ministry of Culture of the USSR and in the Memorandum (the manuscript is undated) sent to the Institute of Oriental Studies at the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (ПВК). It should be noted that Nikolay Pankov believed that in the field of academic research must participate established non-Roma scholars, as well as representatives of the Roma themselves, he never opposed the two categories but considered them as one whole.

Throughout his conscious life, Nikolay Pankov showed a keen interest in the history, language and folklore of the Gypsies (both in the USSR and around the world). In the

1920s, he actively participated in the creation of the Gypsy Alphabet; in 1930 he was the editor of the *Gypsy-Russian Dictionary* (Сергиевский & Баранников, 1938). After the Second World War, these interests were renewed after a letter received in 1951 from the linguist Janis Loja (Yan Loya in Russified form), who was living in Riga at the time, with whom Pankov maintained constant contact until his death (LANB, f. Николай Панков). Influenced by this connection, which gave him new hopes for the development of Gypsy studies in the USSR, a team was gradually formed, in which Tatiana Ventzel and the Estonian linguist Paul Ariste were also involved, and who began to work actively on additions and amendments to the forthcoming joint new edition of *Gypsy-Russian Dictionary* (Кожанов, 2017, p. 286). Nikolay Pankov had to a large extent a leading position in this team, although at his insistence he remained only the editor of the future new, revised and significantly supplemented new edition. He studied new dialects of the Romani language based on various sources and prepared an extensive card index; there was even an idea to reformat the dictionary to include all possible dialects of the Romani language, which was subsequently abandoned (Ibid., pp. 286–287). Nikolay Pankov devoted a lot of time and energy to his work on this new edition, which remained unfinished, and he continued the work until the end of his life.

Along with his work on the *Gypsy-Russian Dictionary* in the last years of his life, Nikolay Pankov also dealt with many other issues in the general direction of the development of academic knowledge about Roma. He began to study English to be able to read the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, which he received as a member of the Gypsy Lore Society. He became a member of this oldest (founded in 1888, in Edinburgh) and most authoritative international academic organisation as early as the 1930s on the recommendation of Academician Alexey Barannikov, who invited Pankov to join the society through the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS) and remained its member for the rest of his life. According to the memoirs of the late Lev Cherenkov, the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* (now *Romani Studies*) received by Nikolay Pankov as a member of the organisation was a “window to the world” for those interested in the research of Gypsies in the USSR at the time because it allowed them to learn about the achievements of science behind the so-called Iron curtain in this direction (Черенков, 2017, p. 22); after reading the journal, Pankov donated it on to the Russian State Library. Nikolay Pankov himself was very proud of this membership and has repeatedly emphasised it in his autobiographies (PAVK; LANB, f. Николай Панков). Moreover, Nikolay Pankov even wrote about the Gypsy Lore Society in his letter to Nikita Khrushchev in 1956:

[...] in England for many decades there is a whole Association for the Study of the Gypsies and the Language [the Gypsy Lore Society], a journal with materials on the study of the Gypsy language and folklore is regularly published. Much of our past literature is reflected in their journal and bibliographic index. (PAVK).

After the Second World War and the creation of the so-called socialist camp, and especially after Stalin's death and the subsequent policy of de-Stalinisation, some of the existing restrictions on foreign relations were removed, thus opening up opportunities for establishing and maintaining constant contacts with Gypsy researchers and Roma outside the USSR. Thanks to this, the USSR already received more information about the Gypsy studies abroad, e.g. in the archive of Nikolay Pankov is preserved a handwritten translation of parts of the book by Jerzy Ficowski *The Poland Gypsies*, made by Yanina Stefanovna (Ficowski, 1953). Nikolay Pankov had been in correspondence for several years with Jan Kochanovsky (known as Vanya de Gilya Kochanovsky) from Lithuania, who lived in France, where the two discussed various issues related to the Romani language (LANB, f. НИКОЛАЙ ПАНКОВ). In 1955, he wrote a letter to Milena Hübshmannova, at that time a student at Charles University in Prague, who studied Romani. She sent a letter to Ivan Rom-Lebedev through a famous Soviet journalist and writer Boris Polevoy seeking contact with Roma in the USSR. In his letter, Nikolay Pankov encouraged her in her interest in the Romani language and briefed her on what was being done in the USSR in this direction (what had been published in Romani until then and about the plans for a new edition of the *Gypsy-Russian Dictionary*). It is interesting to note that in the text of the letter, written in Russian, the name 'Roma' is used several times instead of the hitherto generally accepted 'Gypsies', which is one of the first testimonies in this regard (Ibid.). In 1957, Nikolay Pankov wrote a letter in Romani to Nedzhit Mehmedov, a Roma from Bulgaria, in which he asks for information about the dialects of Romani spoken in the country (Ibid.). In the 1950s, Pankov prepared a manuscript of the book *Записки цыгана о цыганских хорах* (Notes of One Gypsy on Gypsy Choirs) (PAVK), which unfortunately remains unpublished to this day, as well as preliminary sketches of a volume with texts from Gypsy folklore (Махотина, 2009, pp. 64–65; 2012, pp. 111–112); some of these Gypsy tales having been published (Друц & Гесслер, 1991). He also translated into Romani the poem by Mikhail Lermontov *Мъѣри* (The Novice) and poems by Alexander Pushkin, and, in 1958 began translating Alexey Barannikov's book on Ukrainian and Southern Russian Gypsy Dialects (Баранников, 1933) from Ukrainian into Russian (PAVK). All these endeavours remain unfinished on account of his death.

The last text on which Nikolay Pankov worked until his last hour, was a draft of the Collective Letter to the USSR Government, signed by him, and was supposed to be joined by famous linguists Vyacheslav Ivanov, Jan Loja and Tatiana Ventzel, as well as a number of Gypsy activists. This letter briefly presented the history of the Gypsies and the policy of the Soviet state towards them, emphasised the successes achieved, as well as the participation and heroism of the Gypsies in the Second World War. The letter endorsed the 1956 Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, which put an end to the nomadic way of life of the Gypsies, justifying the need to organise the process of sedentarisation, including the designation of special rayons, where the Gypsy nomads should settle (i.e. the old idea from the 1930s, related to the preparation for the creation

of a Gypsy national territorial-administrative unit, was re-launched). The letter ends as follows:

Thanks to the help of the Party and the government, many of the Gypsies have risen to the level of the advanced representatives of the fraternal peoples, and a little more effort and systematic work with the remnants of the nomadic masses and the nomadism will be completely eliminated in the way that was predetermined by the great Lenin and his teachings about oppressed and backward peoples. (PAVK).

Nikolay Pankov passed away in 1959. With his death, his work did not die and most of his activities in the field of Roma civic emancipation were taken over by his wife Yanina Stefanovna and his two daughters, about whom it is worth saying a few more words. According to information received from Nadezhda Belugina, Natalia Pankova (1924–199?) was born on May 26, 1924, graduated from the Department of Chemistry of the Moscow Polytechnic University, worked as a research associate at the Moscow Scientific Institute of Organic Subproducts and Dyes. Lyubov Pankova (1925–2019) was born on November 5, 1925, she graduated from the Faculty of Natural Sciences and conducted Postgraduate Studies at the Department of Human and Animal Physiology at the same university; she became a Candidate of Biological Sciences (PhD), worked as a senior researcher at the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, and as a lecturer at several pedagogical universities (e.g. Udmurd Pedagogical Institute); and was the author of more than 50 scientific papers.

Nikolay Pankov's two daughters, too, not only continued to maintain his extensive correspondence for many years but also established new contacts, e.g. in 1974, they were contacted by Valery Sanarov (about him see Марушиакова & Попов, 2016, pp. 87–91), who wrote to them at the request of Grattan Puxon, who sought a photograph of Nikolay Pankov in order to prepare a publication titled *Gypsies and the October Revolution* (LANB, f. Николай Панков). Moreover, they continued to engage in new initiatives, such as to sent letters to the supreme institutions of the Soviet state on behalf of “toiling Gypsies” with demands to renew the affirmative policy towards the Gypsies in the USSR. Together with Nikolay Satkevich (a graduate of the Gypsy Pedagogical College; see below) and Nikolay Menshikov (a graduate of the Gypsy Schools with Children's Home in Serebryanka, an officer in the Soviet Army during the Second World War, badly wounded in the liberation of Dresden, invalid of the 1st category), they sent one such letter to the Ideological Commission of the Communist Party Central Committee and the Supreme Soviet of the USSR in 1965 (Ibid.); in 1969 another letter of this kind was prepared to the Prime Minister of the USSR, organised again by Nikolay Satkevich and Nikolay Menshikov, joined by Lev Cherenkov (Ibid.).

These letters present several problems that have arisen since the Decree *On the Admission to Labor of the Gypsy Vagrants* of 1956 (indicating cases of non-admission of Gypsies to kolkhozes, refusal of the right to residence, etc.) and address the authorities with the following proposal:

[...] positive experience of working with Gypsies, undertaken in the Soviet Union in 1926–1937. It showed that an absolutely necessary condition for the success of the measures for the transfer of Gypsies sedentary and cultural to new societal rails is a broad and patient explanatory and cultural and educational work, preferably in their native language and with the possibility of involving sedentary and cultural Gypsies in this work. (PAVK).

The authors of the letter see this work among the Gypsies in many dimensions, which include the creation of a special state body to manage the various activities, which should also include academic research, publications in the Romani language, etc., i.e. ultimately the resumption (if not entirely, then at least to some extent) of the affirmative policy towards the Gypsies from the early USSR. Particularly interesting is the proposal to sedentarise the nomadic Gypsies and their concentration in regions where more Gypsies were already living settled way of life (such as the North Caucasus, Smolensk region and the post-World War II Moldavian SSR), i.e. again, goals were set that were relevant in the process of preparing for the establishment of a Gypsy national territorial-administrative unit in the 1930s.

As seen, the Moldavian SSR is mentioned here for the first time. Nowadays in the Republic of Moldova, in the oral history of local Roma (and even non-Roma), there are narratives that the Soviet government intended to create a Gypsy Republic with its capital in the city of Otaci, and therefore many Roma from all over the USSR were resettled there. This once again confirms that at the heart of the narratives of oral history, as incredible as some of them may sound today (and do not correspond to historical reality), there are always some real events (or at least rumours of such events) that are developed, enriched with new details and modified over time according to the rules of folklore (each narrative of oral history sooner or later is transformed into a folklore narrative of different genres – myths, legends, stories, etc.).

The case of the two sisters, Natalia and Lyubov Pankovi, is unique in its own way also for another reason – in fact, the two are perhaps the only case of children of leading Gypsy activists from the early Soviet era who continued their work in the field of Roma civic emancipation. This gives food for thought on the issue of the continuity (or, in many cases, lack thereof) of generations in the field of Roma civic emancipation, and this is a question that continues to be relevant today.

In the memories of his contemporaries and in the oral history of the community, Nikolay Pankov remains a man who stands out from other Gypsy activists of his generation. Put in contemporary discourse, unlike many, his occupation was not that of a ‘Rom by profession’; he did not make a career on this basis and remained “unmercenary” (as he was often called) for the rest of his life. In this respect, his wife’s words about him are perfectly accurate:

[He] never made any deals with his conscience... . Full of extraordinary spiritual uplift, [Nikolay] Pankov gladly gave all his strength without residue for the realisation of the great dream of mankind – equality and brotherhood of all peoples. (Ibid.).

Alexander German

Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov

The Roma civic emancipation movement in the early USSR has many different dimensions. An extremely important aspect of this movement is the creation and development of its national literature, which is one of the main pillars of all the emerging nations of the modern era. It is in this sphere, the creation and development of Romani literature, that the place and significance of Alexander German (1893–1955), or Alexander Germano, as he signs himself in the Romani language, stand out.

The period from the 1920s to the 1930s can be considered a new beginning in the development of Romani literature in the early USSR (Marushiakova & Popov, 2020b) when an impressive number of Roma authors appeared in the public sphere, and more than this, they found their audience within the Roma community itself. This development can be properly understood only if it is regarded in the general historical and social context of the Soviet national policy at that time. This national policy was based on the principles of equal rights for the individual peoples of the USSR and comprehensive support for their national development, including the creation of a written language and literature for those nationalities that had been lacking it until then, as it is the case with Roma.

An important component of the nationalities policy of the Soviet state with regard to the Gypsies was the development of a standardised codified Romani language and, on that basis, the comprehensive education of the Gypsies, which includes setting up Gypsy schools and respective teachers' training, organising likbez, publishing textbooks and teaching materials, publishing of Gypsy journals, newspapers, and of propaganda and agitation materials, etc. This whole process aimed at the creation of Gypsy literature and Gypsy theatre understood as national literature and national theatre, all this was regarded as one of the key elements in the development of any nation, and an important public symbol of its equality in the new Soviet state. To realise all these ambitious plans, the Soviet state and the affiliated Gypsy movement desperately needed well-trained personnel. This was crucial concerning the development of Gypsy literature (which by definition should be in Romani language), and here the figure of Alexander German appears on the historical stage.

Of course, it is naive to suggest that, in the context of the rapid development of Romani literature in the early Soviet Union and among a relatively large number of Roma authors, one could be declared the most significant for creating Romani literature. However, unlike the assessment of literary texts in accordance with artistic criteria, which is always at least subjective, from a historical point of view, it can be considered that the closest in this respect is Alexander German. His extremely important and leading role in the process of the creation and development of Romani literature in the early USSR has been explicitly emphasised repeatedly by all the authors who have touched on this topic so far; there is only one, unexplainable exception – the Digital Archive of the

Roma – where the name of Alexander Germano is completely missing (sic!) in the essay on Romani literature in the USSR (Kozhanov & Makhotina, 2019).

Most of the details of Alexander German's life and work presented below have been prepared on the basis of two consecutive years of working in the personal archive of Alexander German, preserved in his home city of Oryol in the Russian Federation, in the State Literary Museum of Turgenev (OGMLT, f. 29). This archival heritage of several thousand pages is extremely rich and until now has hardly been used by researchers. It includes not only his publications (many books and articles in numerous newspapers and journals) but also a large number of manuscripts, including literary works, as well as historical, folklore and literary studies, that have never been published. In addition, the archive contains numerous personal diaries and files that reveal different aspects of his life. Also of interest is the collection of published and unpublished reviews of his work by literary critics and colleagues, including many letters from readers (Roma and non-Roma) that show the public impact of his work. All the documents preserved in this archive (including several Autobiographies written on various occasions) allow us to clarify all the blurred spots in his biography and to follow his creative path.

Alexander Vyacheslavovich German was born on May 26, 1893, in the village of Startsevo-Lepeshkino in the Orlov region, although his family lived in the nearby town of Orlov, which is listed in the official documents as his birthplace. His parents were economic migrants from the then Austro-Hungarian Empire. His father's name was Václav (Russified version Vyacheslav) German, he was of Czech origin, was born in Hořovice (at that time in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, today in the Czech Republic, near Prague), and worked as a mechanic. His mother, Karolina, with the maiden's name Knotek, was also from Hořovice. These are the testimonies of German himself and there is no other documentary evidence of these data apart of preserved metric book's record of his birth and baptising made by the priest of the St. Nicolay Orthodox Church of the village Startsevo-Lepeshkino, where it is noted that the parents of newborn Alexander are: "Austrian citizen Vyacheslav Vyacheslavovich German and his legal wife Karolina Vasilyeva, both of Lutheran confession" (OGMLT, f. 29, OФ-12358). In any case, the searches in the metric books and the administration documentation in Hořovice in the Czech Republic of his father's names (according to German the original surname of the family was spelt as 'Hermann') and his mother's name (Knotek) gave no results, and no documentary evidence of the birth and the existence of such persons during this historical period is indicated. There may be several explanations for this mystery – loss of documents, inaccurate memories of German, even conscious mystification – but in this case, the birthplace of his parents is not essential.

According to Alexander German, his father was an Evangelist (Lutheran), and his mother was Catholic which contradicts the metric book's record. Nevertheless, as pointed, immediately after his birth, Alexander German was baptised into the Orthodox Christian religion. His father died a few months before his birth, and his mother lived very poorly with five children, although they owned a house in Oryol (no longer preserved).

Alexander German studied at first in a parochial school, then in an urban school in Oryol. He interrupted his studies because of scarlet fever, and for a number of years, he was “a street child” (at least, in the words of German himself, which is obviously a romanticising mystification, following the example of Maxim Gorky’s book *My Universities*, but in reality, he had lived with his relatives, as he simultaneously mentions that his sister took care of him). In any case, with the help of his two older sisters, he managed in 1915 to graduate from a Commerce boarding school in Sviatoshyno (now a suburb of Kiev). He enrolled as a student at the Kiev Institute of Commerce, his student card, his *matrikul* (students registrations document), certificate of grades, etc. are preserved in his personal archive (OGMLT, f. 29, ОФ-1338/48–49, ОФ-1338/52–55). As a student, he made his living off private tutoring, but after a year his study was interrupted yet again due to a lack of funds. He returned to his hometown where he started working as a pharmacy assistant. For medical reasons (due to his previous illnesses) he was discharged from military service during the First World War.

From that time, during the First World War, we can date the first literary publications of Alexander German. In the collection *Орловцы – жертвам войны* (Oryol’s Inhabitants – to the Victims of War), published in Oryol in 1915, he wrote a miniature *Червь грызёт* (The Worm Gnaws) and a short story, titled *Иван Талыго* (Ivan Talygo). After the October Revolution in 1917 Alexander German worked as a minor administrative clerk in Oryol, he was an accountant with the Finance Department of the Oryol City Executive Committee and then an instructor at the local Consumer Union.

In 1919 Alexander German was drafted into the Red Army. In his Autobiographies and public presentations later, he claimed to have fought in the Civil War “on almost all fronts” (this standard phrase was repeated frequently), but in fact, his military service is not at all as heroic as he wants to present it, and he toiled initially in Petrograd (Saint Petersburg) as a clerk and head of the army warehouse, then in Oryol as a clerk at local military establishments.

In 1921 Alexander German was demobilised and from then onwards he was entirely engaged in literary and journalistic activities, while at the same time working at different jobs, e.g. as a permanent contributor to several local newspapers, head of a literary circle and a theatre studio at an army club, instructor and head of the Literary Department at the Provincial Department of Public Education, secretary of the Editorial Board of the Provincial Publishing House, responsible secretary of the section of journalists in the local trade union, etc.

After the October Revolution in 1917, the topics of the literary work of Alexander German radically changed, and he was included in the general new Soviet Literature movement. During this period, he published numerous short stories, publicistic essays, feuilletons, miniatures, etc., including one satirical stage play, entitled *В некоем учреждении* (In One Institution), which was performed at the City Theatre in Oryol, and then in other provincial theatres in the region, and which had over 300 performances, and was published as a separate issue twice. Throughout this period, from 1918 to 1925, five of

his books (authored collections, which included mostly his press articles) were also published by various local publishing houses in Oryol. They were well-received by the local public but did not provoke any other echo in wider literary circles.

In 1925 Alexander German worked in the newspapers *Orlovskaya pravda* (Oryol's Truth) and *Nasha gazeta* (Our Journal). On March 30, 1926, he left this job because of the reorganisation of the newspapers and the sharp reduction of the staff (OGMLT, f. 29, OФ-6993, l. 30) and moved to Moscow. Let us quote his own words (according to one of his Autobiographies) about this radical turn:

In May 1926, I, a "provincial classic", who did not know harsh criticism, went, full of bright hopes, to Moscow. In my portfolio, there were dozens of new and newly reworked stories, which, immediately after my arrival, I distributed among the publishers, and received one answer: "come back in a week or two". That term passed – and alas! something does not fit the theme of the journal, something else does not fit the season, and another thing is generally worth nothing. One story was accepted but printed after a year [...]. Countrymen said, "Well, Sasha, prepare your feet and head back home!" What discouraged me was the lack of money and shelter. In search of a permanent job, I was contracted to fill in the forms of postal orders for periodicals [...]. Somehow, someone from the Muscovites suggested that I apply to the All-Russian Union of Gypsies, as they needed an organiser of cultural events and publications in the Gypsy language.

On June 1, 1926, I was appointed at the Gypsy Union (All-Russian Union of Gypsies – authors' note) for the job of editing and publishing. (OGMLT, f. 29, op. 1, d. 156, l. 4–5).

From June 1926 Alexander German began his service for the *All-Russian Union of Gypsies* and already in July of the same year, he was commissioned to start work on the preparation of a periodical journal in the Romani language. From August 1926 he worked as Secretary of the Editorial Board of the journal *Romany zorya* and right in its first issue, published in 1927, his first publication in the Romani language appeared, namely the short story *Руворо* (The Little Wolf) (Романы зоря, 1927b, pp. 30–32). This is how the glamorous career in the field of Romani literature of Alexander German began. He describes the rationale behind it in the following way:

This period of time was organisational in all respects for the people without an alphabet. The Communist Party and the Soviet Government developed measures to facilitate the transition of nomadic Gypsies to a settled way of life. In order to conduct explanatory work, it was necessary to have literature in the native language of the Gypsies, who had suffered oppression and persecution during the Tsarist years and were still in the power of the tabor's kulaks, and who treated with distrust the attempts to attract them into the working life under the conditions of equal rights. It was necessary to discredit among the wandering Gypsies homegrown legends made up by the bourgeoisie about the Gypsy origin and history, which praised their eternal isolation and hostility towards their neighbouring cultural peoples. (Ibid.).

In fact, the periodicals in the Romani language played an extremely important role in the development of Romani literature in the early Soviet Union. The journal *Romany*

zorya came out in 1927, with a total of four issues, published at irregular intervals (for the discussion on the date of the first issue of the journal see Шаповал, 2019b). In 1930 this magazine was replaced by the journal *Nevo drom* which had 24 issues by 1932. The journals contained all sorts and all literature genres, including Gypsy folklore. Along with this, publishing books in the Romani language was quite impressive activity (Shapoval, 2020: 346–357). A Gypsy department was set up at the Central Publishing House (Tsentrizdat) in 1930. By 1932 there were already Gypsy departments at four other publishing houses – Selkhozgiz (specialised in publishing books about kolkhoz-related and agricultural issues), *Molodaya Gvardiya* (specialised in publications for students and young people); Goslitizdat (specialised in publications of fiction), and Uchpedgiz (specialised in textbooks and teaching aids for Gypsy schools and for adult training). In 1936 a total of eight publishing houses published books in the Romani language (Калинин, 2005, p. 49).

The late 1920s and especially the 1930s were the time of the birth and development of Romani literature in the USSR, and the scale of publishing activity in this field is truly impressive. The total number of books issued in Romani language between 1928 and 1938 was over 260 (Русаков & Калинин, 2006, pp. 266–287; Shapoval, 2021a, pp. 1058–1066; 2021b, pp. 264–273), and this is not the comprehensive number; many of them (71 titles) are original works by Gypsy authors – fiction (32 titles), journalism (15 titles), textbooks and educational materials (24 titles). This includes not only Romani literature per-se, but also primers for students and adults, textbooks and educational materials, practical manuals for work on kolkhozes and artels. They should also be noted the translations into Romani of Russian and world literature, such as books by Alexander Pushkin (short novels, fairy tales, and the famous poem *Gypsies*), Lev Tolstoy, Prosper Mérimée (the famous novel *Carmen*), Maxim Gorky (his stories devoted to Gypsies), including children's books, etc. (Ibid.); as well political literature (including some works of Lenin and Stalin), propaganda and agitation publications in the spirit of the Soviet era, popular science, technology and industry, agriculture, medicine and hygiene, family life, etc. (Marushiakova & Popov 2017, p. 50).

Among the names of prominent authors in the field of Roma literature should be noted those of Ivan Rom-Lebedev (prose and dramaturgy), Mikhail Bezlyudskiy (political essays and poetry), Mikhail Ilyinskiy (prose), also the poets Georgiy Lebedev, Ivan Khrustalyov, and Alexey Svetlov, and the poetesses Olga Pankova, Evdokiya Orlova and Mariya Polyakova (see the data of all publications in Русаков & Калинин, 2006: 266–287; Shapoval, 2021a, pp. 1058–1066; 2021b, pp. 264–273). The genres of these books included mainly prose and short stories, poetry, theatre plays, and journalism. It even inspired the beginning of a new genre, which nowadays is especially popular in Romani literature – the comics – with the main character *Rom Pupyрка*, published in the Gypsy journal *Romany zorya* (Романы зоря, 1929b, p. 49; Романы зоря, 1930f, p. 63).

It is natural to question the reasons for the huge amount of Gypsy books being published, given the small potential target of these publications for the scale of the Soviet

state; was it a matter of short-sightedness of authorities, or was it a matter of making a political point. The answer here is completely unambiguous – it was a political decision, conditioned by the spirit of the times and the dominant ideology in the USSR, reflected in the leading national policy, including in the sphere of publishing. The Soviet state listed Gypsies among those nationalities ('backward' or 'cultural backward' according to the terminology used at the time), who were entitled to receive education and literacy in their own language with special priority, and who required special care (O'Keeffe, 2010, pp. 283–312; 2013). In the case of Romani literature in the early USSR, it is about the creation of a comprehensive new, holistic social and cultural phenomenon that finds its place in the lives of the Gypsies.

Within this overall process of development of Romani literature, the place of Alexander German is clearly prominent, and to a great extent, his involvement appeared to be decisive and determining its wide scope. His activities were extremely many and varied. In addition to the work in the editorial office of the two Gypsy journals (*Romany zorya* and *Nevo drom*), he also worked actively in a number of Soviet Publishing Houses, wrote huge amounts of journalistic articles and reports for central and provincial newspapers and journals, and took part in various public committees, boards and councils. From 1927 Alexander German participated in the activities of the Central Gypsy Club *Лолы чергэн* (Red Star), held public talks, ran a literary group to train Gypsy authors, etc.

In 1928 Alexander German became a member of the All-Union Society of Proletarian Writers *Kuznitsa* (Forgery), uniting the left-wing proletarian writers, and already in February 1929 within the *Kuznitsa* he created a Gypsy Literary Group *Romengiro lav* (The Gypsy Word) and became its chair. Members of the group were Ivan Rom-Lebedev, Nikolay Pankov, Georgiy Lebedev, and others (OGMLT, f. 29, ОФ-6993, l. 36). In January 1931 he together with his group of Gypsy writers moved to the organisation *Moscow Association of Proletarian Writers*, which was competing *Kuznitsa* and adopted the most radical class positions in the field of literature. In 1934 he was accepted as a member of the official Union of Soviet Writers (a significant Soviet organisation supported by the authorities with important ideological tasks that provided its members with numerous significant social benefits).

In September 1930, Alexander German participated in the Initiative Group on the organisation of the Gypsy Theatre, and he was the author of the first play *Джшибэн прэ роты* (Life on Wheels) to be presented on stage at the newly created (in 1931) Gypsy State Theatre *Romen* (the premiere of his play was on December 16, 1931). Until the end of his life, Alexander German was a member of the Artistic Council of the theatre, where this and the others his plays *Машикур яга* (Between Fires), *Палага нэрво* (Palaga the First), *Ваи кхэллибена* (About Dances) were performed with great success.

The literary heritage of Alexander German is truly impressive. Here we will not be able to present the full bibliography of his work, as his productivity was remarkable, and he worked in almost all literary fields – poetry, prose, dramaturgy, publicistic, journalism, translation, editorial work, he prepared teaching and educational material, made

translations and literary editorial work, etc. Below we will mention only briefly the most significant of them.

In the field of poetry, Alexander German published the collections *Лолэ яга* (Red Fires), *Яв прэ стрэга* (Be on Watch), *Гиля* (Poems), *Роспхэныбэна дрэ гиля* (Stories in Poems), *Нэвэ гиля* (New Songs) (Германо, 1934а; 1934ф; 1935b; 1937b; 1938). Some of his poems and songs were translated into Russian and published in individual volume: *Стихи и песни* (Poems and Songs) (Германо, 1937с); another volume with his poetry translated in Russian by famous Russian poets were printed in the printing house of the city of Oryol (Германо, 1941), but the entire print-run was destroyed during the German bombing after the start of the Second World War, and only two draft copies with editorial corrections survived (Shapoval, 2021c, p. 195). He is also the author of a collection of lyrics for the so-called mass songs (songs which are envisaged to be sung by many people together, often devoted to revolution or socialist construction) (Германо, 1934d).

In the field of prose, the following collections of stories by Alexander German were published: *Атасятуно бурмистро* (Yesterday's Leader), *Лэс кхардэ рувэса и ваврэ роспхэныбэна* (He Was Called the Wolf and Other Stories), *Ганка Чямба и ваврэ роспхэныбэна* (Ganka Chyamba and Other Stories) (Германо, 1930; 1933а; 1935а); some of them were translated into Russian and published: *Ярга: Цыганские рассказы* (Yarga: Gypsy Stories) (Герман, 1930b); after his death, two editions of selected stories and short stories were published (Германо, 1960; 1962).

In the field of dramaturgy, Alexander German published his playscripts' volume *Романо театро* (The Gypsy Theatre), which includes *Джибэн прэ роты*, *Машикур яга*, *Палага нэрво* and *Ваш кхэллибена* (Германо, 1932), and he also co-wrote with Olga Pankova the theatre play for children *Серёга Лагуно* (Seryoga Laguno) (Германо & Панково, 1933).

Alexander German was especially active in the field of politically engaged publicistic, aimed at agitation and propaganda both among the Gypsy population and the general public. His articles and essays were published (and reprinted) both in the two Gypsy journals (*Romany zorya* и *Nevo drom*) and in numerous editions of the Soviet press (mainstream – metropolitan and provincial). Several collections of articles in the Romani language have also been published, some of them previously having appeared in the press, *Нэво джибэн* (New Life) (Герман, 1929) and *Джняна нэвэ рома* (New Gypsies Are Coming) (Германо, 1933а). At the same time, the propaganda of the 'new life' that Gypsies need to build was combined with practical advice on how to act in this direction, as in his book, *Ангил кэ буты: Со трэби тэ джिनэс ломэ кэ вгэи дро колхозо* (Forward To Work: What Gypsies Should Know when Entering a Kolkhoz) which was co-authored with Mikhail Bezlyudskiy (Безлюдско & Германо, 1933).

Publications of Alexander German (mainly publicistic journalistic articles and essays) in the press were extremely numerous. Some of them were translations in different languages printed in publications of other nationalities in the USSR and abroad (with the

support of specialised institutions for the international presentation of Soviet literature). As he wrote:

Since 1930, my poems (also stories, essays, articles, and fairy tales) have been translated into the languages of the peoples of the USSR and foreign languages: Ukrainian, Belarusian, Armenian, Tatar, Jewish, Lithuanian; [abroad in] English, French, German; possibly in other languages, but I have no information. (OGMLT, f. 29, op. 1, d. 156, l. 8–9).

The important role played by Alexander German in the development of Romani literature should also be noted, especially in attracting, encouraging, and assisting new (young and not-so-young) Roma authors to enter the field of literature. In addition to the many training courses and creative workshops in this direction, special mention should also be made of the two almanacks compiled and edited by him, which present the nascent Romani literature in the early USSR through the work of Gypsy authors. The first one, the *Альманахо романэ поэтэн* (Almanac of the Gypsy Poets) (Германо, 1931), includes only poetic works, while the second one, the *Романо альманахо* (Gypsy Almanac) (Германо, 1934e), contains several sections presenting poetry, prose, essays and even literary criticism (including a review of the new Gypsy literature by Prof. Maxim Sergievskiy).

Alexander German edited the vast part of the original (i.e. written by Roma authors) and translated books in Romani language published at that time. It is also interesting to note that Alexandr German himself translated several books into Romani language, including Stalin's official biography (Товстуха, 1933). He was a translator (along with Mikhail Bezlyudskiy) also of the text of the world proletarian anthem, the Internationale (Нэво дром, 1932c, p. 1; Пандж масова гия, 1932, pp. 2–3; Германо, 1934d, pp. 3–4), which was the national anthem of the USSR until 1944.

Alexander German was not only the editor of the two Gypsy journals but also of several dozen books published in Romani language in various publishing houses. The Board of Directors of the two Gypsy journals was headed by Andrey Taranov, which was due to political reasons – he was a member of the VKP(b), was the leader of the VSTs, and has leading positions in the Gypsy movement. In practice, however, the real editorial work on the texts of Roma authors, at least from a linguistic point of view, fell on Alexander German. The situation was the same in the publishing houses where books in the Romani language were published.

On November 4, 1931, Alexander German received his first award as a *ударник* (shock worker) of the 3rd Year of Five-year Plan at Central Publishing House of the Peoples of USSR, together with Andrey Taranov and Nikolay Pankov (OGMLT, f. 29, ОФ-6993, l. 44). Until August 1932, he was the Executive Secretary and part-time Technical Editor of the new Gypsy journal *Nevo drom*, and also in the Tsentrizdat. Since 1932, he was also an external editor and main reviewer in a number of other publishing houses – Goslitizdat, Uchpedgiz, Partizdat, Profizdat, *Molodaya Gvardiya* (Youth Guard), Antireligious Publisher, *Sovetskoe Zakonodatelstvo* (Soviet Legislation), Detgiz, Profizdat, Selkhozgiz, Medgiz, and others.

At the same time, Alexander German took a full-time position of editor in the National Sector of the Goslitizdat Publishing House for the production of literature in the national languages, where he worked from November 1934 to December 1938, and thus actually managed and coordinated all publishing activities in the field of Romani literature during its most flourishing period.

Alexander German's contribution to the development of Romani language education in Gypsy national schools is also significant. He is the author (or rather co-author) of 7 primers and textbooks, as well as of one reader (Германо & Панково, 1932; 1934; Германо et al., 1932; Германо, 1934bc; 1937a; Вентцель & Германо, 1934; 1937).

Considering all the authorial, and especially, the editorial activity of Alexander German, his primary role in the standardisation and codification of the Romani literary language is undoubted, although he was included a little later in this process (after the official affirmation of the Gypsy Alphabet). It is understandable, why it was exactly him who had crucial significance – he was the only Gypsy author at that time who had a comparatively better education and experience in editorial work. In this case, his professional skills (as well as his exceptional ability to work) turned out to be more important than the level of proficiency in the Romani language (which was not his native language after all). Particularly significant in this direction is his account of how he began to write poetry in the Romani language and de facto became not only a leading Gypsy writer but also a Gypsy poet:

By the way, I will briefly inform you about my poetic experiments in the Gypsy language. I have never tried to write poetry in Russian. When I wrote the musical play *Жизнь на колесах* (Life on Wheels), I needed lyrics in Gypsy language. I offered to write them to the Gypsy poets, but their work did not satisfy the stage director. (This also happened with the poetic examples in my *Книге для чтения для 1-го класса* (1st-grade reading book.) Having experienced at first the difficulties of mastering the poetic language of the Gypsies, I began writing poetry in 1931, as well as translating classics and modern poets from Russian. (OGMLT, f. 29, op. 1, d. 156, l. 1–80б).

Alexander German worked hard and constantly to master and improve his Romani language, which he combined also with his field-research trips for collecting Gypsy folklore. This can be seen from the field-research clearances preserved in his archive, e.g. from October 15 to November 15, 1937, the Union of Soviet Writers send him for collection of Gypsy folklore in Gypsy kolkhozes *Svoboda* and *Krasniy Oktyabr* in Western Region (OGML, f. 29, op. 1, d. 142).

Apart from acting in the field of literature, dramaturgy, publicistic and education, Alexander German prepared and published a unique scholarly work, *Библиография о цыганах. Указатель книг и статей с 1780 г. по 1930 г.* (Bibliography on Gypsies: An Index of Books and Articles from 1780 to 1930) (Герман, 1930a), which is still a major source for the history of the Gypsies in the Russian Empire and the USSR, which has not lost its significance to this day.

After moving to Moscow, Alexander German lived first in the outskirts of the city (on Sacco and Vanzetti Streets) and from the early 1930s in the very city centre (Stoleshnikov Lane, house 11). He also owned a dacha in the Podlipki area near Moscow. He spent a lot of his time there. In the 1930s he divorced his first wife (Maria Alekseevna, no more information is known about her) and married Maria Emmanuilovna Vardashko on 22 June 1939 in Moscow. Vardashko's father Emmanuil Kogout (the family name as spelt in Russian, in original Kohout) was of Czech origin, and before the marriage with German, she lived in Kramatorsk (today in Ukraine) (OGML, f. 29, ОФ-7011). After his death, Maria Vardashko took care of his creative legacy, and supported the efforts of Fedor P. Peki-Poloy, a local historian and ethnographer from Oryol, to preserve his huge personal archive.

On November 4, 1938, a new structure at the Soviet Writers' Union was established, the Bureau of National Commissions and it was positioned over the individual National Commission; the latter were not elected but appointed (Shapoval, 2021). On December 15, 1938, Alexander German was relieved of his post in the Editorial Board of National Literature at the SNK RSFSR "in connection with the termination of the publication of literature in national languages" (OGMLT, f. 29, ОФ-6993, p. 61). However, as it became clear from preserved minutes even after 1938 the Section of Gypsy Writers continued to exist and was headed by Alexander German; in 1940 plans were made for the official installation of its status at the Bureau of National Commissions (Махотина & Шаповал). Since February 1941, the Section was ruled by Andrey Taranov as an elected Executive Secretary, without being a member of the Writers Union. After 1940 numerous manuscripts of Roma authors were prepared for publication but the second World War hindered its realisation (Ibid.).

It is important to emphasise that the radical turn in the national policy of the Soviet state at the end of the 1930s does not mark the definitive end in the existence and development of Romani literature in the USSR. Sometimes, preposterous statements can be found, such as "Romani literature and culture were unofficially (sic!) banned" (Kozhanov & Makhotina, 2019), which simply do not fit the historical reality. Publication of works by Gypsy authors became possible again only after World War Two; then Alexander German's collection of stories was published in two editions (Германо, 1960; 1962), as well as collections of Roma authors with poetry and short stories (Романо, 1968; 1975; Саткевич, 1972; 1974; 1977; 1982), and even a collection of plays from the repertoire of the Theatre *Romen* (Ром-Лебедев, 1983). In some cases, Romani literature books were even published in print runs that were huge for their time (and even more so for the present day), for example, the two collections of children's poems by Leksa Manush (Alexander Belugin) were published in 300,000 copies (Мануш, 1980; 1983), and his children's book *Звездочка* (The little star), on the cover of which it is explicitly stated that it is a "retelling from the Gypsy language", was published in 1,500,000 (sic!) print-run (Мануш, 1976). Restrictions in the development of Romani literature in the USSR at that time were in another sphere – firstly, greatly reducing the number of publications by Roma authors (when compared with the period of the 1930s), and secondly, limiting the publications

in the Romani language, the exception to this being the academic editions of Gypsy folklore (Кантя, 1970; Деметер & Деметер, 1981). Much more precise (and correct) is the statement: “Literary texts by Gypsy authors have been kept to a minimum” (Цветков & Махотина, 2018, p. 477), although this wording also needs some clarification. The main question here is what is the criterion according to which this literary production is defined as a minimum. If the basis for comparison is the period of the 1920s and especially the 1930s in USSR, then there is undoubtedly a significant collapse. However, if we compare the situation globally, it does not look so bad. In the period from the end of World War II to the collapse of the USSR, the publications of Gypsy authors outside the socialist camp are much less, and in the Romani language are de facto absent (excluding translations of the New Testament, published by the British and Foreign Bible Society). So, we cannot say that the Romani literature of the early USSR ended in 1938; moreover, the collection of poems by Gypsy poets (Саткевич, 1974) includes works by authors from the 1930s (translated in Russian) as well as contemporary Gypsy poets, i.e. the continuity in the development of Romani literature is undeniable. However, this development is no longer the same as in the early USSR; although new pieces of Romani literature continue to emerge (although not in the same amount), it is no longer possible to speak about the development of the Romani language, which is a significant disadvantage in the development of any national literature as one of the main pillars of its national identity.

During the Second World War, Alexander German, who was discharged from military service due to his age and medical reasons, did not go to evacuation (unlike many of the Soviet writers’ and arts’ elite), although according to a reference from the Union of Soviet Writers he received a direction for evacuation together with his family (OGMLT, f. 29, ОФ-6993, l. 67), and remained in Moscow. Until the end of the war, he was the head of the emergency and recovery unit of the district department for control of the civil defence, gives night shifts in air defence during the bombing of Moscow, actively collaborates with the Soviet Information Bureau, performed poetry and fairy tales in the Red Army units and military hospitals in Moscow region, and wrote a special cycle of poems about the participation of Roma in partisan detachments.

After the war, Alexander German became actively involved in the initiative of Ivan Rom-Lebedev to restore the pre-war policy of affirmative action in regard to the Gypsies.

His name stands second (after that of Ivan Rom-Lebedev) in a letter sent to Stalin in May 1946 (see above). After the failure of this endeavour, he became a freelance writer and collaborated with various publishers and journals in Moscow, as well as in his hometown of Oryol. He was hesitant about the chances of restoring the mass publishing of Gypsy literature, so he stopped creating original literary texts in Romani, but instead in hope that the interest in the Gypsy theme will remain in academia and propaganda he prepared numerous texts on the Gypsy history and culture. However, only a small part of his work has been published in this period, and most of the prepared manuscripts remain in his personal archive. He died in 1955 in Moscow, where he is buried in Vvedenskoye Cemetery.

In all his literary activity, Alexander German constantly adhered to the societal requirements of the time: his first texts were written in the spirit of the patriotic military literature; after the October Revolution, they were already in the mainstream of the so-called proletarian literature; and after starting to work in the field of the Gypsy activism, his publications actually lay the foundations of Roma national literature. However, he did not become a leading Gypsy activist. Despite claims found in the literature that the “Pan-Russian Romani Union” was “under the leadership of Alexander Germanov” (sic! – authors note) (Hancock, 1991a, p. 140; 1991b, p. 257), his and other archives lack any evidence of him ever being a member of the *All-Russian Union of Gypsies*, though he was involved as its representative in many artistic councils and editorial boards. Generally speaking, in all his activities and in his work, Alexander German was not so much a generator and implementer of new ideas and policies, but a talented and extremely workable propagandist of the already defined ideas and policies.

Especially impressive (and maybe even shocking) is his diary, which he kept writing for four decades (from 1912 to 1952). This diary looks like a detailed timesheet of his work. In it, he only recorded his literary activity, public presentations and lectures, interviews given, etc. over the years, and documented its impact (noticed also the awards received and reviews of his publication) and there are just very few remarks of a personal nature. All other societal events (the First World War, the October Revolution, the Civil War, the Second World War), and his two marriages, proved to him to be less significant than his literary work, which, it would appear, was the most important thing in his life. This diary reveals Alexander German as a person who, from his school years, had a passionate dream of becoming a famous writer, and devoted his entire life to the realisation of this adolescent dream. A strong influence on him was probably the overall spiritual atmosphere of his hometown of Oryol, which was known in the public space as the “city of writers” a great deal of renowned Russian writers was born there, such as Ivan Turgenev, Nikolay Leskov, Leonid Andreev, Ivan Bunin, and many others, as well as the famous literary theorist and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin.

It should also be borne in mind that, at that time, literature had an important place in public and political life as a whole. Soviet writers, these “engineers of human souls” as defined by Yuri Olesha, which saying was repeatedly used in Stalin’s public statements and disseminated in the public space through the media, were called upon to actively contribute to the formation of the new, Soviet man. That is why the Romani literature for the Gypsies in the early USSR was an extremely important pillar of their new, Soviet civic identity, which did not contradict their Roma/Gypsy ethnic identity. Gypsy culture in the USSR (including Romani literature as part of it) was perceived similarly to any other culture according to Stalin’s famous postulate proclaimed at the Seventeenth Congress of the VKP(b) in 1934, as “Socialist in content, national in form” (Сталин, 1947b, p. 367). In this historical context, it is therefore quite natural that almost all Gypsy activists at the time (both men and women) were also writers (poets, prose writers, translators), who, like many others during this epoch “wrote with a determination and persistence that

justifies our calling them writers” and “they wrote less to create ‘art’ than to speak aloud about the world” (Steinberg, 2002, p. 1). Against this background, the place and position of Alexander German take on particular significance. All that has been said so far turned Alexander German, for his contemporaries (both Roma and non-Roma) into the undisputed “classic and living doyen of Gypsy literature”, and this is the standard definition by which he is presented from the 1930s until his death in the public space, where this definition has acquired wide popularity.

The topics of Alexander German’s interests (apart of creative literature work) are impressive and strongly varied – the history and language of the Gypsies, the place of the Gypsies in the work of Russian writers and poets, Gypsy folklore, the history of Gypsy Theatre *Romen*, bibliographies, translations, etc. In addition to the literature manuscripts, his archive also contains numerous extracts from various sources on these (and other) topics of his interest. In his archive, about two dozen manuscripts (some of them in several draft versions) of varying degrees of completeness have been preserved, which for various reasons have not been published. Among them are the manuscripts: *Цыгане в русской художественной литературе (От Державина до Блока)* (Gypsies in Russian Fiction: From Derzhavin to Blok), *Основы цыганского языка* (The Basics of the Gypsy Language), *Дополнение к библиографии о цыганах* (Supplement to the Bibliography of Gypsies), *Фашизм и цыгане в Отечественную войну* (Fascism and Gypsies in the Great Patriotic War), *Краткая история советских цыган* (A Brief History of Soviet Gypsies) (in co-authorship with Ivan Rom-Lebedev), *Цыгане Советского Союза* (Gypsies of Soviet Union), *Советские цыгане* (Soviet Gypsies), *Литература на цыганском языке* (Literature in Gypsy Language), *Краткие исторические сведения о цыганах вообще* (Brief Historical Data about Gypsies in General), *Цыгане в русской классике* (The Gypsy in Russian Classics), *Цыгане у современных поэтов* (Gypsies in the Works of Contemporary Poets), *Цыганиана: цыганское в изображении художественной литературы* (Tsyganiana: The Gypsy in Fiction), *Сказки русских цыган* (The Tales of the Russian Gypsies), *Репертуар Стеши* (Repertoire of Stiosha) about the famous Gypsy singer Stepania Soldatova (1784–1822), *Краткая история Государственного Цыганского театра* (A Brief History of the State Gypsy Theatre), *Театр Ромэн во время Великой отечественной войны* (The Theatre *Romen* during the Great Patriotic War), *Материалы о советских цыганах и театре Ромэн* (Materials on Soviet Gypsies and the Theatre *Romen*), *Театр Ромэн: Библиографический указатель* (Theatre *Romen*: Bibliographical Index), translations of the theatre plays of Pushkin, *Mozart and Salieri* and *Stingy Knight* in Romani language, etc. (OGMLT, f. 29).

Alexander German’s exceptional working capacity and dedication are especially worth noting. It should also be noted, that besides Russian and Romani languages, he also spoke fluent German and Czech, and used in his work (at least passively) English and French.

In all his Autobiographies, Alexander German presents himself primarily as a writer and devotes much less space to his public activity (still does not fail to mention it).

However, this does not mean that his place in the movement of Roma civic emancipation in the early USSR was in the back row. On the contrary, it occupied a leading position also there. He undoubtedly played a paramount role in the very origin and development of the Gypsy national literature in the early USSR, and this was one of the main pillars of this movement. Moreover, he was one of the leading authors in a new field, which is located in the border zone of literature and political propaganda and agitation. In the 1920s and 1930s, this specific genre of Gypsy literature publicistic was born and developed. Under this term are covered social and political essays aimed at enlightening and educating the public, as well as opinion-based and advocacy journalism. Within this genre, Roma authors had the opportunity to bring topics important for the community (and also for the society) to public discussion, primarily those concerning the life and problems of the Gypsies in the USSR. The fact that these authors had the opportunity to publish their texts both in Russian, in the mainstream press (including in the most authoritative and popular publications), meaning they were accessible to the entire Soviet society, and in the Romani-language journals, meaning they were intended for the Gypsy community offered them new possibilities to promote their visions of the Gypsy community's present and future, as well as to act as opinion-makers. The influence of Gypsy activists on state Gypsy politics can take other forms too, and it is worth noting the public impact of their articles in the central press. This effect is most evident in the case of the article by Georgiy Lebedev and Alexander German *What to Do with Gypsies?* (Комсомольская правда, 1929, p. 4), after whose publication the editorial board of the newspaper *Komsomolskaya pravda* convened a special extended meeting to discuss its ideas and messages, a meeting attended by representatives of various Soviet institutions, leading newspapers and many Gypsy activists (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 121, d. 31, l. 334–348).

In the field of journalism, Alexander German undoubtedly has a leading position in comparison with other Gypsy activists, if not as a generator of new ideas, then at least as a presence in the public sphere. Dozens of his articles and messages (many of them are variants of the same text), published in various central and provincial editions, are stored in his personal archive. As already mentioned above, two collections of such articles have been published as separate editions (Герман, 1929; Германо, 1933a), and a collection of articles has also been published in Russian under the title *Gypsies Yesterday and Today* (Герман, 1931).

Much of Alexander German's work in the field of publicistic expresses the spirit of his historical era. However, this does not mean that he is just a talented propagandist of foreign ideas, which were proposed by Gypsy activists and approved by the Soviet authorities. He, at least in some cases, was even a visionary in the field of Roma civic emancipation, presenting his ideas to which the authorities may have a more reserved attitude, for example, the above-quoted article, written together with Georgiy Lebedev, is accompanied by editorial comments that some of these ideas are "still controversial in some cases" (Комсомольская правда, 1929, p. 4).

And, something more, some of Alexander German's concepts remain relevant to this day. He is the progenitor of an important trend in contemporary academia, namely the concept of anti-Gypsyism (Holler, 2014, pp. 84–85). This idea was firstly presented in 1928 in his article *The Gypsies* (Безбожник, 1928, pp. 11–13), and was further popularised in the press through the quoted article *What To Do with Gypsies?*, in which a separate section was devoted to the *Roots of anti-Gypsyism* (Комсомольская правда, 1929, p. 4). The idea was also used by other Gypsy activists such as Andrey Taranov (Нэво дром, 1931s, pp. 1–3), and was a leading one in the Roma civic emancipation movement in the early USSR (Holler, 2014, pp. 84–88). After the rediscovery of this theory at the end of the 20th century, in a new, modified shape (Hancock, 1987; 1996; for more details see Holler, 2014, pp. 82–92), anti-Gypsyism is not only one of the leading concepts in the field of Romani studies, but it even defines the European policy towards the Roma, which is expressed in the European Parliament as Resolution on the need for a strengthened post-2020 Strategic EU Framework for National Roma Inclusion Strategies and stepping up the fight against anti-Gypsyism (2019/2509).

In the theory of anti-Gypsyism in the early USSR, the emphasis was primarily set on the overall policy of “rotten Tsarist anti-Gypsyism” in the Russian Empire, and this social phenomenon is defined as inherent for the epochs of feudalism and capitalism, which should no longer exist in the Soviet state. In the publications devoted to the topic, however, there are carefully worded notes that make it clear that there are still some remnants of anti-Gypsyism in Soviet society. Anti-Gypsyism in this case is explained as an insurmountable legacy of the old social order and against which it is necessary for the Soviet state to constantly fight. These individual manifestations of anti-Gypsyism in the early Soviet Union are expressed in the inattentive or neglectful attitude of the local authorities towards the Gypsies, spreading defamatory rumours, public expression of anti-Gypsy stereotypes, etc. Descriptions of specific examples of such attitudes, including misconduct against Gypsies by the soviet militia (i.e. police), are also contained in a number of documents prepared by VSTs and sent to various Soviet institutions (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763, l. 179–184; f. P 1235, op. 120, d. 27, l. 30–38; f. P 1235, op. 121, d. 31, l. 148). As a rule, the Soviet authorities responded quickly and effectively to such signals, as well as in cases of any manifestation of Anti-Gypsyism by the majority population. The reason for such prompt action of soviet power against any appearance of anti-Gypsyism was made because they were seen as a serious violation of the dominant ideology of proletarian internationalism and of Soviet legislation that did not permit discrimination on a national basis. For illustration, it is enough to list some titles of articles in the mainstream press, like e.g. *The Chauvinist Language – The Language of the Class Enemy: Shameful Belching of Great-Power Chauvinism at the Smolensk Pedagogical Institute* (Большевицкий молодняк, 1931, p. 2). This article describes a case of bullying and allegations of theft of a Gypsy student by his colleagues. Some press headlines reflect cases when persons accused of Anti-Gypsyism are brought to court, e.g. the article *This Is Where the Enemy Works: The Ridiculous Gossip of the Chauvinists Must Be Put To an End* (Борьба, 1931a, p. 3) and the article *Provocateurs before the Court: The Myth of*

the Abduction of Children (Борьба, 1931b, p. 3). In the same spirit are the articles: *Hit the Great-Power Chauvinists Hard: Culprits Harassed Gypsy Workers Brought to Justice* (Тверская правда, 1931a, p. 3), *Cut Off the Dirty Paws of the Chauvinists: The Culprits of the Persecution of Gypsy Workers Soon Will Be Brought before the Proletarian Court* (Тверская правда, 1931b, p. 3), and *In Response to the Sortie of the Chauvinists, the Front of International Education Is Being Strengthened* (Тверская правда, 1931c, p. 3) about the sentencing of two workers to forced labour for one year because of the ethnic mockery of a Gypsy colleague. It is hardly necessary to clarify that ‘chauvinists’ should be understood as ‘Great Russian chauvinists’. Therefore, one should not be surprised by the sharp words in the published texts of the Gypsy activists against the ‘Great Russian chauvinists’. The fight against this still occurring phenomenon was a major trend in the national policy of the early USSR (see Martin, 2001). This, in turn, logically explains the emergence of the concept of anti-Gypsyism among Gypsy activists.

The Gypsy activists’ campaign against anti-Gypsyism was not only restricted to the USSR but included regular information on the persecution of Gypsies abroad. This information was in close cohesion with the general Soviet propaganda discourse, which comprehensively presented to the Soviet society the class, race, and ethnic oppressions in the “world of capital” and accordingly promoted the Soviet model of a non-class society, where the cruel and unjust race and ethnic treatment is annihilated. A classic example in this regard is the highly admired film *Circus* (1936), in which a woman who gave birth to a child with a black father is persecuted in the US but finds happiness in the USSR, where there is no racial issue. In this context, materials prepared by Gypsy activists about anti-Gypsyism in the West are numerous, and especially fruitful in this regard was Alexander German, who mastered a number of foreign languages and regularly monitored the Western press. An example of this is the article *Lynch Law in Czechoslovakia* describing the anti-Gypsy pogrom in Slovakia (the case in Pobedim village in 1928), and presenting the adopted anti-Gypsy law against nomadism. The article summarises: “The life of Roma in Czechoslovakia is the same as the life of Negroes in America and Jews in Tsarist Russia” (Нэво дром, 1931f, p. 22–23).

Alexander German’s biography has a discussion point that deserves special attention because it directly concerns the overall assessment of his place in the beginning and development of Romani literature in the early USSR (and also globally). Undoubtedly the most intriguing question is the one regarding the ethnic origin and identity of Alexander German. Nowadays it is generally assumed that he was of mixed (Roma and non-Roma) origin, as his mother was a “Moravian Roma Woman”, allowing for various speculative interpretations. According to Milena Hübschmannová “although Germano was not brought up like a Rom and was a Roma only on his mother’s side his Roma identity was revived because of the prestige of the official task” (Hübschmannová, 2002, p. 80).

Nevertheless, for Hübschmannová, Alexander Germano was a Roma writer despite his mixed origin and the fact that he learned the Romani language at adult age (Ibid., 2002, pp. 79–81). She emphasises the fact that Alexander Germano did not learn Romani in his family and thus indicates that a national writer may also become a person for whom the

relevant national language is not his native one. It is not clear, however, why the question of the mixed origins of Alexander Germano (which for Hübschmannová is certain and indisputable) is raised at all in this context since it is widely known that many Roma activists and writers (both in the past and nowadays) are of mixed origin (and some have doubts as to whether they are Roma at all). The very idea of questioning the affiliation of individuals with mixed backgrounds to Roma activism and/or Romani literature is irrelevant, because if this logic is accepted then the whole Gypsy movement and the Romani literature in the early USSR could also be called into question, as both the president of the *All-Russian Union of Gypsies*, Andrey Taranov, and the secretary of the union, Ivan Rom-Lebedev, were Gypsies only on their fathers' sides (ANB, f. Nikolay Satkevich, d. Andrey Taranov; Ром-Лебедев, 1990, p. 7), and the most famous star of Theatre *Romen*, Nadezhda Kiseleva (whose stage name was Lyalya Chyornaya) only had one Gypsy grandmother (Bessonov, 2016, p. 146). The mixed origin of all these personalities, however, was never discussed, and it is not clear why an exception should be made only for Alexander Germano.

According to Brigid O'Keeffe, who also accepts, without any doubt or hesitancy, the Roma origin of Alexander German's mother, it was quite characteristic for him to play a game with his identities (Roma and non-Roma) depending on the social and political situation. She argues that in the early Soviet Union when an active pro-Gypsy policy was being implemented, he emphasised his Roma origin and Roma identity, and when the leading paradigm of Soviet national politics changed, he demonstrated a Russian ethnic identity (O'Keeffe, 2013, pp. 239–254).

However, this interpretation (and more specifically, – over-interpretation) is quite controversial because documentary evidence does not confirm the existence of such a game of identities. In several Autobiographies, the first one written in 1925, and the last in 1952, he consistently declared himself a 'Gypsy Writer', but never a 'Gypsy', and the second does not follow automatically from the first. Alexander German was perceived also by his contemporaries as a 'Gypsy poet', a 'Gypsy writer', a 'Gypsy dramaturg', a 'Gypsy translator', etc., and also a scholar in Gypsy Studies (see numerous quotations of these notions in many official presentations, articles and reviews of his work in OGMLT, f. 29, ОФ-6993).

As for the evidence written by Alexander German himself, which Brigid O'Keeffe accepts as evidence of his identity game, they are also unconvincing, or to be more precise, they are absent altogether. As already said, in fact, Alexander German never wrote anywhere that he was of Gypsy origin or had a Gypsy identity. In searching for wording that could be interpreted as a hint of such an origin for his mother we found this only one notice, which was written in 1925, in Oryol:

My mother didn't like to be in one place, she loved to travel, and because of her, my father changed jobs, sold all the home junk, and travelled away without knowing what would happen. (OGMLT, f. 29, op. 1, d. 137, l. 2).

First, however, if Alexander German wanted to play with his origin, it is not clear why he should use such a complex metaphor instead of directly indicating his mother's Gypsy background. Second, and much more important, there is no logical explanation for why this game was needed at all. This version of his Autobiography was written in 1925, i.e. at that time when Alexander German did not think at all that he would become a 'Gypsy Writer' (as stated above, he would leave for Moscow the following year). And something more, no one at the time even imagined that there would ever be an affirmative pro-Gypsy policy of the Soviet state and that Gypsy literature would emerge, i.e. such an identity game with Gypsy origin and identity was not needed. Much more logical is the explanation that here again there is a romanticising metaphor about love for travel, without having ethnic dimensions.

In the next few variants of the Autobiography of the 1920s and 1930s, i.e. just at the time when Alexander German established himself as a 'Gypsy Writer', he never mentioned a single word about his mother's Roma background. something more, on 16 May 1928 in a letter to his friend, namely the writer Iosif Kalinnikov, he describes his first impressions of Gypsies:

When I arrived in Moscow, I took up work among Gypsies. Do not think about "stealing horses." The Gypsies are not like that anymore. Craving for culture, the desire to become settled, build Gypsy schools, clubs, organise Gypsy farms, etc. – this is what the current Gypsies are striving for. It's even becoming strange that a half-tramp Gypsy reaches into the ranks of an organised population. [...] In two years of studying the Gypsy people, I have gathered quite valuable material about Gypsies. (RGALI, f. 267, op. 2, d. 96, l. 1; Шаповал, 2020a, p. 332).

As can be seen from this quotation here, he is speaking as an outsider, a stranger, and not as a member of the community. Let us give the floor to Alexander German himself on the question of his origin and his development into a leading Gypsy author:

I undertook a collection of nomadic folklore and a study of the Gypsy language orally (using voice). Having reincarnated in a kind of Aleko [the name of the main hero in Alexander Pushkin's poem Gypsies, who was a non-Gypsy who lived in a Gypsy camp – authors' note], I spent weeks in the tabor [Gypsy camp – authors' note]. All this has led to the fact that I have freely mastered the language and began to write poetry and prose like a Gypsy, versatile and familiarised with the life and hopes of nomadic Gypsies and with the parasitism (tsyganshchina) of the Gypsy choirs in the capital city. I stop at this explanation in order to avoid further questions: a non-Gypsy or a Gypsy? Who am I? I've learned the language (I know the Northern and Southern dialects) and the soul of the Gypsies because otherwise, I would not be able to conduct political and educational work among nomads by pictorial artistic means. Have I achieved this goal? – it is not my task to assess my own published works. (OGMLT, f. 29, op. 1, d. 156, l. 6–7).

There was no need for an identity game in 1952 either when he wrote in the here cited version of his autobiography, which unambiguously answers the question of Alexander

German's ethnic origin and identity. It is unclear what might press an author, who was widely known in the public sphere as the most prominent 'Gypsy writer', to resort to such 'identity games', i.e. to pretend to be an ethnic Russian without being one. And to do so in documents that are not public, but for official use only (his autobiography was prepared for his personal dossier in the Union of Soviet Writers). The natural question here is what would have happened to Alexander German if he had written that he was a Gypsy, as did, for example, Ivan Rom-Lebedev (RGALI, f. 2928 op. 2, d. 246), which in no way disrupted his professional and public career (for several decades he was the permanent artistic director of the Theatre *Romen*). Moreover, he formally added to his family name Lebedev a first part (Rom), with which he wanted to publicly emphasise his ethnic origin and his identity.

Therefore, it is much simpler (and more logical) to assume that Alexander German expressed his real ethnic origin and identity, which, as it turns out, was no obstacle to him being the 'Gypsy writer' – as he became publicly known throughout the USSR – on which his entire career is built. To put it briefly, there was nothing that could push him to play such complex games of identity within the Union of Soviet Writers, especially in this case when the dossier was prepared only for internal administrative documentation.

Discrepancies between the actual real-life internalised ethnic identity of certain individuals or communities, on the one hand, and the public ethnic label that is attached to them by the others, on the other hand, has repeatedly been reflected in numerous studies on Roma (Marushiakova & Popov 2015; 2016e). In the case of Alexander German, we do not see any reasons for an over-interpretation and for connecting the issue of his ethnic identity with the Soviet national policy. There is no (and generally cannot be any) contradiction between the two dimensions of identity (as Gypsies and as Soviet citizens), and therefore their artificial opposition, as well as any other over-interpretations in this direction, are doomed to failure. This is not some unique Soviet phenomenon, but a concrete demonstration of the common model in the modern era, when Roma existence is manifested in two main dimensions: 'community' (as an ethnic formation), and 'society' as ethnically based integral parts of the respective nation-states of which they are citizens); these two dimensions may, in short, be called 'ethnicity' and 'civic nationality' (Marushiakova & Popov, 2016e, p. 15; 2021a, p. XXIII).

In fact, Alexander German's entire literary career is built on this very foundation. The fact that he got a job at the *All-Russian Union of Gypsies* should not be taken as something unusual. With the same success, he could turn to another nationality that was in dire need of well-trained staff to support the construction and development of their national identity and culture, which was the main trend of nationalities policy in the early USSR. During this period, it was a common practice in the USSR to hire the so-called professionals who were not only of different ethnicities but even experts with "foreign" class origin were accepted (including even in the Red Army command staff). Based on the same principle, some 'specialists' of other ethnic backgrounds were hired by the *All-Russian Union of Gypsies*, including Evgeniy P. Ivanov, who headed the ethnographic

and scientific section for the study of the Gypsy language (Вся Москва, 1927, p. 233; 1928, p. 211; Друц & Гесслер, 1990, 294–295).

The origin of Alexander German was not a secret to any of his contemporaries, including Gypsy activists and writers, but we have never found any evidence of this circumstance ever being publicly problematised. However, this does not apply to personal, informal relations, as particularly interesting in this regard are some materials stored in the personal archive of Nikolay Pankov (LANB, f. Nikolay Pankov), which has not been shared publicly. When Alexander German presented his book *Gypsies Yesterday and Today* (Герман, 1931) to Nikolay Pankov, he wrote a dedication: “To dear Nikolay Alexandrovich Pankov. My first experience concerning Gypsies is at your trial”. Under the dedication, Pankov wrote in pencil: “We need only marvel at our [i.e. of the Gypsies – authors’ note] good will, which allowed such disgrace without any rebuke” (Ibid.). Moreover, in his personal diary, Nikolay Pankov devotes much space to Alexander German and his relationship with him. According to Nikolay Pankov, both he and the Gypsy activists in general “cherished and favoured” Alexander German as “pride for the Gypsies” and promoted him everywhere, despite his “decomposition in everyday life and work (unrestrained drunkenness, women, ..., discerning attitude to work) ... his limitedness, the scarcity of his culture and even his mediocrity” (Ibid.). It should be borne in mind here that these notes were written in 1952, when “now when we are not idols anymore, we can be kicked”, i.e. when the social significance of Gypsy activism had already disappeared and Alexander German no longer needed to comply with Gypsy activists (the specific reason for these words was his jubilee essay on the 30th anniversary of the Gypsy Theatre *Romen*, in which he somehow conceals and belittles the role of Nikolay Pankov for the creation and development of the theatre). Of course, these accusations against Alexander German should not be accepted without reservation and may have been an expression of the personal attitude of Nikolay Pankov toward him. It is difficult to judge whether and to what extent these overall assessments of Alexander German are shared by other Gypsy activists because there is also evidence to the contrary. Especially impressive in this direction is the Petition by the leadership of the Theatre *Romen* to the Union of Soviet Writers with a request to organise a celebration of his 60th birthday of Alexander German (OGMLT, f. 29, ОФ-1545), and as a result of which the Secretariat of the Union of Soviet Writers issued a special Decree on its award (OGMLT, f. 29, ОФ-1338/50). In our case, however, concerning the issue of Alexander German’s ethnic origin and identity, the relationship between him and the Gypsy activists is very clear – as Pankov wrote: “Who is to blame that he reduced himself to the position of a slave to all of us? We never looked for it” (LANB, f. Nikolay Pankov), i.e. neither did they accept Alexander German as a Gypsy, nor (more importantly) did he ever want to present himself as such.

The first time the alleged “Gypsy origin” of Alexander German (in particular the determination of his mother as a “Moravian Gypsy Woman”) appeared was 1960, five years after his death, in the new edition of a collection of his novelettes and stories published by his second wife, Maria Vardashko, in the Afterword written by Boris Turganov (Германю,

1960, p. 237); the same statement is repeated in the second edition of this book, in the Preface, written by Zinaida Sidelnikova (Германо, 1962, p. 3). There appears also for the first time the patronymic surname of the mother of Alexander German, Vasiliievna, which is quite strange (it is not clear to what Czech name could be given this Russified form). In 1964, the statement about her “Gypsy origin” was made official in the entry on Alexander Germano, written by Edvard Sholok, in *Concise Literary Encyclopaedia* (Шолок, 1964, 138), and since then, it has become dominant to this day in all publication devoted to Alexander German (see for example: Романи яг, 2003, p. 9; Dunajeva, 2019, pp. 95–109). Given that he professed his origin categorically and unequivocally, as already shown above, there is no need to discuss it any further.

The emergence of allegations of the Gypsy origin of Alexander Germano’s mother can be explained by the efforts of his widow, Maria Vardashko, to promote his work after his death (her archive is also included in the OGMLT). In 1944, while he was still alive, Maria Vardashko prepared a collection of articles and reviews of Germano’s work, which was not published (OGMLT, f. 29, ОФ-6995). This collection presents another version of the beginning of his work as a Gypsy writer – after his arrival in Moscow, he became known in literary circles, and as a member of the All-Union Society of Proletarian Writers *Kuznitsa* he was sent to help the Central Gypsy Club, and there his interest in the Gypsies was born (as seen above, Alexander German presents in his Autobiography a rather different version of the sequence of these events). In the biographical essay on Alexander Germano, written by Vardashko herself in 1940, there is not a word or even a hint of his Gypsy origin.

Some years following Alexander German’s death, Maria Vardashko attempted to persuade the Soviet institutions and publishing houses to publish his multi-volume collected works. In her letters to the Union of Soviet Writers and to various publishers, as well as in her articles and press interviews, she made statements in the public sphere that sought to present Alexander German’s image in a favourable light, e.g. he was declared by her to be the creator of the Gypsy Alphabet (though in fact, Alexander German had nothing to do with the activities of creating the Gypsy Alphabet), he is presented as an active participant, and almost a Civil War hero, who “fought on almost all fronts” (cf. above about the actual nature of his service in the Red Army), etc. An important part of this marketing strategy (to put it in contemporary language), appears to be the emphasis on Alexander Germano’s Gypsy origin. This has been a widespread practice since the times of the Russian Empire, where re-discovery of “Gypsy origin” (quotes are not accidental as there is usually no real basis for such claims) among the artistic elite was often found because of the Gypsies’ exotic and romanticised public image. Apropos, this phenomenon is also known in contemporary Russia, where many stars of show business, cinema, and literature often publicly claim to have Gypsy roots (most often it turns out to be some mythical Gypsy grandmother about whose ethnicity there is no real evidence).

Summarising what has been said until now about Alexander German’s place in the birth and development of Romani literature, we can say that there is a relatively rare case of divergence between the ethnic origin and identity, on the one hand, and the national

dimensions of someone's literary work, on the other. However, it is not without analogies in the history of world literature. It is enough to recall the case of Sandor Petöfi, the renowned Hungarian national poet, who was of Slavic origin (his father was Serbian, his mother Slovak). The case of Alexander Germano clearly shows that the emergence of national literature does not necessarily need to always be co-related with the ethnic origin and identity of the particular author. The significance of an individual author for the development of national literature must always be judged based on their literary work and especially in relation to its public dimensions, and public impact. So, there is every reason to accept that the place of Alexander Germano in the history of Romani literature as an important part of the process of Roma civic emancipation during the interwar period in the USSR is indisputable, and he is de facto one of its main progenitors and its most prominent representative.

Roma Activist Women

Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov

With the establishment of Soviet power as a result of the October Revolution of 1917, the fundamental idea was that a completely new type of state should be built, in which all social ills of previous historical epochs would be eliminated. An important aspect of this radical historical change is the complete elimination of the disadvantaged position of women, manifested in various spheres (social, economic, political, cultural, educational, etc.). This ambitious goal finds expression in the overall policy of the Soviet state in all its aspects and, accordingly, has had a strong impact on the Roma civic emancipation movement, which is inextricably woven into the general discourse of Soviet national policy in the early USSR.

In USSR, for the first time, the Roma activists (men and women) brought to the forefront the specific problem of the Gypsy woman and the issue of the need to achieve gender equality both within the wider society and within the community. In modern terms, this is also found in present-day discussions about the double discrimination faced by Roma women. As one Gypsy male activist in the early Soviet Union writes, the Gypsy woman is a "slave" and she must earn the living for the whole family, including her husband (Звезда, 1926, p. 2). That is why the Work Plan of VSTs for 1926 stated that one of the goals of the Union was the need to release women "from the yoke of the family and man's supremacy" so that they could have more time for socially useful work (GARF, f. 1235, op. 1, d. 27, l. 94). In this way, the activities towards equality of the Roma woman became one of the important aims in the work of the Union, and the Roma women themselves were included in it as leading figures.

Unfortunately, the available historical evidence of Roma women who have been actively involved in the civic emancipation movement (both in general and in its "female" aspect) is scarce, incomplete and even quite fragmentary. However, these testimonies

provide an opportunity, at least briefly, to present the most important women activists in the early USSR.

Nina Dudarova

Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov

One of the leading figures in the field of Roma civic emancipation in the early USSR was Nina Alexandrovna Dudarova (1903–1992). In her Autobiography, she presents very brief information about herself and her family:

I was born in Leningrad [St Petersburg – authors note] in 1903. My mother was a Gypsy, she sang in a Gypsy choir. I don't remember my father. When I was five years old, my mother remarried a Russian, a very good man, who treated me like a daughter. (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, д. Нина Дударова).

From this information, neither her mother's surname nor who her father was, nor her real surname is clear. Some authors point to Zakrzhevskaya as her second surname (Цветков & Махотина, 2018, p. 477), but it is not clear whether this is her father's surname, and Dudarova is the surname of her second father or vice versa. According to Valdemar Kalinin (personal communication), Zakrzhevskaya is her second father's surname, and Dudarova (a widespread Ossetian surname) is her husband's family name. However, the issue of her marital status is also unclear. There is no record of when (and whether) she was married or who her husband was; according to Kalinin, he was an officer in the Imperial Russian Army who disappeared without a trace during the Civil War (personal communication). In an index titled *Figures of the Gypsy Language and Culture*, compiled by the linguist Janis Loja (see above) in the 1960s, the name Elena Nikolaevna Dudarova is included. She was a graduate of the Institute of Oriental Languages, worked as an English translator and lived at the same address in Moscow with Nina Dudarova (OGMLT, f. 29, ОФ-12354). However, it is not clear whether she was Nina's daughter or niece.

According to Nina Dudarova's Autobiography, she completed her secondary education in Leningrad in 1919, after which she began working at a school and simultaneously she obtained pedagogical education at the Institute for Raising the Qualification of Teachers (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, д. Нина Дударова). In 1925, she moved to Moscow (Ibid.). At that time, the *All-Russian Union of Gypsies* had already been established and with the assistance of the Narkompros and local authorities in Moscow, began organising three Gypsy schools. Nina Dudarova was assigned to organise a school in the Rogozhsko-Simonovsky (Proletarian) rayon (Ibid.). She rounded the Gypsy homes and persuaded the parents to send their children to school; petitioned the authorities for funds to purchase clothes and shoes for the children, as well as teaching aids.

In October 1925, the Gypsy school was opened. Its significance was especially noted by Egon Erwin Kisch, who called it “the first Gypsy school on earth” (Kisch, 1992, p. 119). The school had about 30 children. They were studying according to the general mainstream education program, were divided into two classes according to the age of the students (younger and older children), and the teachers were Nina Dudarova and another non-Roma woman, the latter subsequently left the school (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Нина Дударова).

At that time, Nina Dudarova was the only Gypsy woman with a relatively good education, and, in the conditions of almost complete lack of trained educated personnel among the Gypsy activists, she was quite naturally involved in the leadership of VSTs. At the same time, her involvement was conditioned by another, very important factor of high symbolic significance, namely the need for a publicly visible female presence in the leadership of the union. Through this female presence in the leadership of the Gypsy organisation, the new, equal position of the Gypsy woman was publicly demonstrated – both in Soviet society as a whole and within the Gypsy community itself. Initially, among the ten founding members of the prototype of the VSTs, *the Society for the Organisation of Proletarian Backward Gypsy Masses of the City of Moscow and the Moscow Governorate*, founded on January 10, 1924, was only one woman – Yelizaveta Yurovskaya (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 119, d. 9, l. 3). In the list of founders her social position is marked as an “artist” (i.e. a participant in Gypsy choirs), without any party affiliation, born in 1887; subsequently, when reducing the composition of the Initiative Group for the creation of a new organisation called the *Gypsy Society*, carried out on the recommendation of ON VtsIK in August 1924, she dropped out of its composition (Ibid., l. 11). In the Draft Statute of the new organisation is explicitly noted: “All Gypsies can be members of the society [...] without distinction of gender” but in practice the number of women involved in the Roma civic emancipation movement is insignificant. However, at the end of 1925, after the official registration of the *All-Russian Union of Gypsies* by the NKVD, a new Presidium of the Union was elected, which included Andrey Taranov (Chairman of the VSTs), Sergey Polyakov (Deputy Chairman), Ivan Lebedev (Secretary), Mikhail Bezlyudskiy and Nikolay Pankov, and three candidate-members, one of them was a woman, Leontyeva (her first name is unknown), who studied at Rabfak (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 120, d. 27, l. 83).

At the end of 1925, at a meeting of the Presidium of the VSTs, a general Working Plan for 1926 was adopted, in which a special place was given to the activities necessary to solve the problems of the Gypsy woman. It was planned to organise a department for work among Gypsy women at VSTs, which would hold agitation meetings on the relevant topics (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 120, d. 27). The problems of the Gypsy women were addressed in more detail in the Working Plan of the Cultural Department of VSTs, adopted in early 1926, which stated: “A woman supports the whole family by fortune-telling [...], she has no right in the family, does not have the right to vote and self-defence”, and that is why the following task was set:

To free a woman from the yoke in the family and the dominance of a man over her, to achieve that she would refuse to earn a living through fortune-telling, and to using her in socially useful branches. (Ibid.).

There is no concrete data on which of these plans were implemented in practice, but in any case, the topic of double discrimination (in society and in her community) of the Gypsy woman was on the agenda.

According to some testimonies, Nina Dudarova had been a member of the VSTs leadership since the summer of 1925, when the NKVD approved its statute (Иващенко, 2011, p. 40). However, Nina Dudarova's preserved membership card shows that she was accepted as a member of the VSTs on April 12, 1926. This card has No. 167, i.e. so the Union had many members at that time. Following her joining the VSTs, she was included in the leadership of the Union, and in this position, she became involved in attempts to reform it to avoid its liquidation. At a meeting of the Presidium of the VSTs, held on February 15, 1927, a decision was made to replace the existing Central Board of the VSTs with the established Board of Founders of VSTs consisting of 5 members and 3 candidates, one of these candidate members was Nina Dudarova (GARF, f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763, l. 160). This idea for the reconstruction of VSTs was not realized, but in the first issue of the journal *Romany zorya* presented a photo of the leadership of the VSTs, namely Andrey Taranov, Ivan Lebedev, Sergey Polyakov, and Nina Dudarova (Романы зоря, 1927а, p. 3), i.e. Dudarova had been brought to the forefront in the management of VSTs. This could be seen also from the poster with the appeal *To Gypsy Inhabitants of RSFSR* issued in the same year on behalf of the *All-Russian Union of the Gypsies Living on the Territory of RSFSR*, which was signed by the Chairman of the VSTs Andrey Taranov, Secretary Ivan Lebedev and Board Members Nikolay Pankov, Nina Dudarova and Dmitriy Polyakov (GARF, f. P 9550, op. 2, d. 2010, l. 1; Marushiakova & Popov, 2021a, pp. 712–718).

The overall impression from the available historical sources is that the position of Nina Dudarova in the VSTs was rather demonstrative – to present her as a public example (to both Gypsies and to the Soviet society) and to point to the equal position of a Gypsy woman. However, this does not in any way mean that Nina Dudarova's place in the development of the processes of Roma civic emancipation in the early USSR should be underestimated. On the contrary, her active work should be especially emphasised: namely, her contribution to the creation of the Gypsy Alphabet, as well as her successful work as a teacher in the Gypsy school in Moscow, and especially her published teaching materials, as well as her translations and editing of the Romani language texts.

After the order of the head of the Narkompros of the RSFSR, Anatoliy Lunacharskiy, on the creation of Gypsy Alphabet was established *Committee for Creation of the Gypsy Language Alphabet* at the General Directorate of Scientific, Scholarly-Artistic and Museum Institutions (Glavnauka) of the Narkompros. VSTs sent as its representatives in this Committee Nikolay Pankov and Nina Dudarova (Друц & Гесслер, 1990, p. 295). Despite the different versions about the composition of the Committee (for details see

above), Nina Dudarova's participation in it is unquestionable, and this is quite natural given the fact that she was the only Gypsy woman at that time who was a teacher in the Gypsy school and had pedagogical experience.

Immediately after the adoption of the official alphabet, Nina Dudarova together with Nikolay Pankov began work on the creation of the first textbooks for learning the Romani language. In 1928, the world's first such textbook, *Нэво дром: Букварё ваш барэ манушэнгэ* (The New Road: Primer for Adults), was published, intended for the literacy of illiterate Gypsy adults (Дударова & Панково, 1928). However, this textbook was not just a simple primer for learning the Romani language but contained many additional materials on various topics, e.g. about the social and political structure of the USSR, about the origin and history of the Gypsies in the world, about the changes in their life in the conditions of the Soviet state, about their inclusion in the public life of the Soviet side, for the creation of Gypsy artels, kolkhozes, clubs and schools, etc., including about the disadvantages of women in the traditional Gypsy family, as well as the importance of International Women's Day (8 March).

Together with Nikolay Pankov, Nina Dudarova prepared two more textbooks (Pankovo & Dudarova, 1930ab) for the children who studied in the Gypsy schools – *Джиды буты: Романо букварё ваш I бэри сыкляибэ* (The Live-work: Gypsy Primer for the First Schooling Year) and *Лолы чергэнори: Книга ваш гинэибэн прэ дуйто бэри сыкляибэн* (The Red Little Star: The Reading Book for the Second Schooling Year) – which marked the beginning of the study of the Romani language in the Soviet educational system (and for the first time in world history). These textbooks, like the first primer, were very rich in content and present a complete picture of life in the Soviet state and the Gypsies there (of course, in the spirit of Soviet ideology and mass propaganda). Subsequently, Nina Dudarova prepared another textbook for adult literacy, as well as several textbooks for teaching children in Gypsy schools (Дударова, 1932ab; 1933ab; 1934). In addition, she has published some articles in Gypsy journals on the successes and existing problems in the education of children in the Gypsy national schools (Романы зоря, 1927с, pp. 15–18; Нэво дром, 1931i, pp. 19–20).

Nina Dudarova's activity in the field of Roma civic emancipation was far from limited to the school and educational sphere. She was a member of the board of the Central Gypsy Club *Лолы чергэн* (Red Star), and in this position, she directed many activities within the club. The club published its own wall newspaper, and Nina Dudarova organised many talks on various topics – political, pedagogical, anti-religious, medical, sanitary, etc. An amateur group called the Blue Blouse was created, in which high school students participated, which gave public performances, e.g., the play *Амасы и ададывес* (Yesterday and Today) from the repertoire of the Theatre *Romen*. Nina Dudarova herself wrote music to her poems and adapted them for presentation on stage – in Column Hall of the House of Unions, in the Central House of Pioneers, in various factories, and in other places. She took care of the artistic upbringing of children, organized their visits to the theatre, to the cinema, to art galleries. A pioneer detachment was set up at the club,

and meetings were organised with students from other national schools, which, in her words, “developed Gypsy children, brought them up in the spirit of internationalism [...] and a new Soviet generation of Gypsies grew up” (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Нина Дударова).

Like many other Gypsy activists at the time, Nina Dudarova also wrote poetry. Her poems were included in the first *Almanac of the Gypsy Poets* (Германо, 1931, pp. 25–33), one of which is a poetic address entitled *Кэ романычяй* (To the Gypsy Girls). She also published her poems in the textbooks she prepared. In addition, she actively collaborated as an editor and translator of many of the books published in Romani by various publishers in the early 1930s (see Shapoval, 2021b, pp. 159–195).

Special attention deserves the book published in 1929 by Nina Dudarova *Пало власть советэн* (About Soviet Power) (Дударова, 1929). This book, together with the book by Alexander German *Нэво джибэн* (New Life) (Герман, 1929), marked the beginning of a new genre in the emerging Roma national literature in the early USSR – political journalism. Nina Dudarova’s book is with encyclopaedic character, with a clear popularising and agitational character, and presents a detailed political picture of the world in which Gypsies live, with special emphasis on their new social position in the USSR and the opportunities offered by the Soviet state. It is worth noting that the book includes the above mentioned poem by Nina Dudarova herself, entitled *To the Gypsy Girls* dedicated to International Women’s Day (8 of March), i.e., the topic of the emancipation of the Roma woman had not been forgotten.

Taken as a whole, it can be said that in Nina Dudarova’s texts and overall activities during this period the issue of the emancipation of the Roma woman was not mentioned separately, but was inscribed in the leading discourse of the Roma civic emancipation in the early USSR. This should in no way be interpreted as an underestimation of the “female topic”, on the contrary, she always included this problem in a more general framework, i.e. for her, the emancipation of the Roma woman in the society inevitably is accompanied with her emancipation in the community too.

In fact, despite Nina Dudarova’s multifaceted activities in the field of Roma civic emancipation, her main activity remained her work as a teacher in the Gypsy National School. It is to this activity that she devoted the most space in her Autobiography, written from the distance of time, in which she noted:

I must admit that I enjoyed great respect and even love from both adults and children, and that meant a lot. Meeting my former students now, I hear from them how important the school was for their future. [...] Rumours about our school spread beyond the Soviet Union. Foreign delegations came to us, took photos of us, wrote about the school in magazines and newspapers. [...] I received a letter from a professor from Sweden. The envelope read: USSR – Moscow. The only Gypsy teacher. And the letter arrived. Later, when Gypsy kolkhozes were organised, teachers of collective farm’s Gypsy schools in the Smolensk region and the North Caucasus wrote to me. They asked for advice and help. In each issue of the journal *Нэво дром* (New Way), I wrote about the school, about our achievements and

shortcomings. [...] We all worked then with great uplift, with joy, because our beaten, backward people grew before our eyes. Gypsies became equal citizens of our great Motherland. (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Нина Дударова).

After the first Gypsy national school, organised by Nina Dударова, several similar new schools were established – both in Moscow and in the countryside (mainly at the established Gypsy kolkhozes). In 1933–34, there were 7 Gypsy schools and groups of the 1st stage (i.e., primary school) in the Moscow region, in the North Caucasian krai 3 schools, in the Western oblast 2 schools and 2 groups, in the Central Black Earth oblast 2 schools, in the Nizhne-Volzhskiy krai 1 school, and the Sredne-Volzhskiy krai 1 school; one seven-year school with children's home, opened in 1928 in the Western oblast (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 127, d. 8, l. 154-15406). In 1935, a total of 12 Gypsy schools of the first degree and 18 Gypsy groups at mainstream education schools functioned in the RSFSR, as well as one seven-year school with children's home school (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 130, d. 5, l. 66–70). The number of these Gypsy national schools was volatile and changed over the years, and not all of them were sustainable, but they still played an important role in the education of Roma children and the literacy of adults.

Nina Dударова worked as a teacher in a Gypsy national school for 13 years, until 1938, when, as a result of the Decree *On the Reorganisation of National Schools*, many national schools in the USSR were closed (including Gypsy schools), and she began working as a teacher in a mainstream school. On this occasion she wrote:

I also treated my work with love, because I love my job and I love children, but my most joyful memory will always be the difficult years of my work in the Gypsy school. (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Нина Дударова).

After Nazi Germany attacked the USSR in 1941, some schools in Moscow were closed, including the one where she worked, and she began working at the Moskabel plant (a cable factory). In addition, she worked in a hospital for the wounded and participated in groups that dug anti-tank trenches to protect Moscow, for which she was awarded the Medal for the Defense of Moscow. After the opening of the closed schools, she returned to work as a teacher. For her work in the field of school education in 1949, at a ceremony in the Kremlin, she was awarded the Badge of Honor (Ibid.).

Nina Dударова died in Moscow in 1992. In her Autobiography, written in the 1960s, she made a recapitulation of her work in the field of Roma civic emancipation:

This is the whole story of my life. The work we started is not over yet. There is nothing to hide that the situation of the Gypsies is still like a dark spot against the light and joyful background of our present. You, our shift, remember that the Gypsies are also children of our great Motherland and they should live the same way as all the people of our country, and not be its stepsons. This must be achieved, but for this, it is necessary to work a lot and hard. (Ibid.).

Olga Pankova

Elena Marushiakova, Vesselin Popov and Viktor Shapoval

Another important figure in the field of Roma civic emancipation in the early USSR, and in the aspect of the emancipation of the Roma woman in the community, is Olga Ivanovna Pankova (1911–1991). She was born in St Petersburg and came from the great family of Pankovs. She was the daughter of Ivan, the older brother of Nikolay Pankov (about him see above). Left without parents at the age of 10, in 1921, when her father died. At that time, the entire Pankovs family had left Leningrad and lived in the Tambov gubernia, where her father worked as a horseman in a Red Army sovkhoz. She was raised by her uncle Nikolay Pankov, with whom she moved to Moscow in 1922 (PAVK; LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Ольга Панкова).

In the early 1930s, Olga Pankova joined the movement for Roma civic emancipation. In 1931 she started working in the editorial office of the Gypsy journal *Nevo drom*, first as a typist, then as a proofreader, editor and translator into the Romani language. In addition, she was a member of the leadership of the Central Gypsy Club *Лолы чергэн* (Red Star) and the Gypsy Komsomol organisation created at the club, devoting a lot of energy and time to the elimination of illiteracy among Gypsies and their employment, organising various public actions, theatre performances, music, dance and choir circles, kindergartens and camps, etc. (Ibid.). At that time, the club received a new building from the local authorities, with many more rooms, including a large hall and a theatre stage, and quickly became the centre of Gypsy social and cultural life in the capital, Moscow.

In the 1930s Olga Pankova developed a vivid creative activity as an author, editor and translator of many different publications in the Romani language. Her literary heritage provides an opportunity to reveal her views on the need for the emancipation of the Roma woman in the community and society.

If talking about her literary activities, first of all, she was a phenomenally productive translator into the Romani language. This fact is remarkable because her biographical data showed she had got nothing but “primary education” (RGALI, f. 631, op. 1, d. 4777, l. 15). This is not surprising; her childhood fell on the very dramatic years of the large Pankovs family after the loss of their private house in St Petersburg. This should be kept in mind further when looking through the long list of books she translated successfully dealing with the various topics. Her first steps in the field of translations are impressive. In 1931, she published two translations of the highest political status: Lenin’s *The Tasks of the Youth Leagues* (Ленино, 1931) and Stalin’s speeches *About Komsomol* (Сталино, 1931). A less than 20-year-old Komsomol member, the author of the single published poem won this honourable double order and left behind all more experienced Gypsy activists and writers. She translated many books from various fields of knowledge and special professions, e.g. politics, agitation, agriculture, geography, car construction, teaching materials,

etc. (for more details see Shapoval, 2021b). However, there was a clear focus on books for women and children.

In her texts, Olga Pankova herself served as a model for a new liberated Roma woman, a living example of what opportunities the Soviet system created for representatives of all nationalities and, what is especially significant for women. When she wrote about Gypsy kindergartens, schools, clubs, she used her own experience of participating in those activities (Панкова, 1932, pp. 32–35).

The first poem (without a title) by Olga Pankova was published in the magazine *Nevo drom* in 1930 (Нэво дром, 1930с, pp. 10–11). It was a politically literate diptych in which the depiction of the horrors and hardships of the past nomadic life clearly contrasted with the happy life on the Gypsy kolkhoz: *Ёв парудя гаджэнса грэн* (He was swapping horses with peasants) vs. *Ёв дро колхозо дром латхья* (He has found his way to the kolkhoz). This dilemma was without any hesitation resolved in favour of a sedentary working life. Thus, the first appearance of the young poetess on the printed pages demonstrated her civic and political maturity and complete harmony with the state policy toward the Gypsies, and this was her leading principle, reflected in her entire artistic creative work.

Olga Pankova's poetry includes 3 books of poems *Амарэ дывэса* (Our Days), *Ростасадо джибэн* (A Crushed Life) and *Гиля* (Poems) (Панкова, 1933; 1936; 1938), and she also co-wrote with Alexander German the theatre play for children *Серёга Лагуно* (Германо & Панково, 1933). The themes of her poetry are very diverse, and two things should be emphasised: the very good quality of her language, the language that is already a monument of the past today; and the very positive personality of the author that arises behind her poetic lines and images. This author is a young Roma woman of that time. She has expressed the specific feminine point of view of her often silent contemporary women, and this is the additional value of her poetic messages.

In the plan of the Roma (and especially women's) civic emancipation we are interested in, without any doubt, the first published book by Olga Pankova with journalistic essays, entitled in Romani *Комсомоло дрэ марибэ поло нэво джибэ* (Komsomol in the Struggle for New Life) and translated in Russian as *Комсомол в борьбе за оседлость* (Komsomol in the Struggle for Sedentarisation) is of special value (Панкова, 1932). Its content gives a clear idea of this type of publication. The individual sections in this book are entitled: *Социализмо барьёла* (The Socialism Grows up), *Ром акана сы бутярытко* (Gypsies Today are Toiling), *Сыр быяндлэпэ пэрва романэ колхозы* (How the First Roma Kolkhozes Were Born), *Сыр ли кулаки машик ромэнде?* (Are There Kulaks among Gypsies?), *Романпро производство* (Gypsies in Production), *Романэ школы* (Gypsies schools), *Марибэ пало политехнизация* (The Struggle for Polytechnisation), *Ваи романо театро* (About Gypsy Theatre), *Пэрво дро свэто романы редакция* (The First in the World Gypsy Publishing), *Романо клубо* (Gypsy Club), *Ваи джювякэ* (About Woman), *Сыр кэрла буты амаро романо комсомоло* (How to Work in our Gypsy Komsomol), *Со бангэ тэ джигэл и тэ прольджял дро джибэ комсомоло* (What the Komsomol

Should Know and Implement). While the individual parts largely repeat the basic facts and interpretations contained in many other similar publications, the part dedicated to the Roma woman is undoubtedly original and one of the relatively few texts devoted to the problems of emancipation of the Roma woman in the community and society.

Generally speaking, the literary work and public activities of Olga Pankova showed the combination of two aspects of civic emancipation, which both were popular in that historical period. It appears to be very symbolic. On the one hand, she acted as a representative of an entire small Gypsy nationality, which for a long time, for many reasons, did not have the opportunity to enter the public arena to present their position and declare their interests and needs in the public sphere. On the other hand, as a representative of Roma women, she also revealed a specific feminist agenda, acknowledging the problems and demands of this part of the nationality. Roma women found themselves, as one might say, under double oppression, both under the pressure of the surrounding majority society and under the pressure of social restrictions determined by inner norms and customs. The latter rules, in turn, were formed within the community itself, subjected to one or another restriction of its rights and forced from the side of the dominating majority, probably for survival, but those patterns of strict gender-based division of duties and behavioural control in all spheres of everyday life started to be redundant and regressive in the new socialistic conditions, as Roma activists believed.

In the public activities of Olga Pankova, the emancipation of the small nationality and the emancipation of the women were combined quite organically. At that very time, the circle of new opportunities that opened up for the active and competent Roma woman, in comparison with the previous historical period, was incomparably wider and more attractive. The ideas of feminist emancipation offered to the Soviet society were extremely diverse and covered the widest spectrum from the extremely bold and shocking concepts of freedom up to the rigoristic and ascetic behavioural models of selfless service to the revolution and socialism. In this spectrum, there was also a place for the choice of intermediate and rational position, a choice that does not come into sharp conflict with the principles of the parents' generation.

Olga Pankova was a successful and suitable candidate for overcoming both sets of problems of Roma women, perhaps for several important reasons. She was a representative of the clan of trade and choral Roma, lived in St Petersburg, and later in Moscow; therefore, she belonged to those cultural mediators who had the social experience and intellectual resources necessary for orientation in urban life and, what is important, in the public sphere of interaction between citizens. This experience of multiculturalism was extremely important for successful communication with both the authorities and the diverse Roma communities. The position of a woman in them varied, sometimes quite significantly. Comparing the position of women in the families of sedentary choral Gypsies (in general representatives of *Ruska Roma*) with their position, for example, among former nomadic *Kelderari*, that had recently settled in Moscow at that time, observers noted the great archaism and categorical nature of the behavioural restrictions

that existed in the latter groups (O’Keeffe, 2015, pp. 69–71), for example “from the words of Gypsy women, we learn that they still do not dare to sit at the same table with men, should not interfere in the conversation of men, like beings of lower status. Some Roma men try to avoid entering the room which women have entered – they consider it desecrated (polluted)” (Гончарская, 1929, p. 56).

In the background of this complex picture, the work of Olga Pankova, quite naturally, turns out to be closely related to the Soviet concept of ‘liberation of a woman’ as an equal member of a collective, a worker and a mother. As soon as Roma women achieved civic equality, she was, like all other working women, able to use the measures offered by the state for protection and support of motherhood and upbringing the children. Olga Pankova not only shared and supported the Soviet concept on women but expressed them clearly in her publications, in particular, when portraying the tragic fate of a Gypsy woman before the 1917 Revolution, and in descriptions of the new prospects which they received in the Soviet state.

In her texts on the situation with the Roma woman in the conditions of the Soviet state, Olga Pankova adhered to a simple and clear scheme. First, she described how under the capitalist rule, in the conditions of Tsarist Russia, Gypsies were generally discriminated against and persecuted by the state. Secondly, their unequal position in society reflected on the relations in the community, where the Roma woman was deprived of any rights and was treated as the property of her father and after the marriage, she became obedient to her husband, without having any rights. In her words:

In many small nations that were oppressed by the Tsar before the revolution, the woman was not a human being. The man did not reckon with her. The way of our Gypsy women was under the whip. Until she was married, her master was her father. If the father liked some guy, he would give him the girl as a wife. Nobody cares whether she wants to marry him or not. And then her husband is already her master. How much suffering does she endure in her life? In the cold and the heat of the summer day she trudges with her bag over her shoulder, at windows, asking for bread. Coming home she has there a lot of works to do, the children dirty, ragged, asking for food. And the husband either is lying on a feather bed like a panther and if not lying, he is playing cards. He is her master. He’s even yelling at her. If the husband starts to drink, she, the poor one, doesn’t know how to please him. And he has nothing but rudeness for her. He makes his wife stand on her knees, sing songs, beats her. She, the poor thing, trembles with fear, and is afraid to utter a word. (Панкова, 1932, pp. 30–31).

In Olga Pankova’s scheme then follows a description of a bright future. The October Revolution of 1917 and the creation of the USSR as a new type of state radically changed the position of Gypsies in society. They became equal citizens of the Soviet state with all civil rights, and that state took comprehensive care of them. Along with this, the Soviet state changed the place of the woman in the society as a whole, she received civil equality for the first time in world history. All this is naturally reflected in the position of the Roma woman in the community, or in words of Pankova herself:

But the October revolution put the woman's shoulder by the man's shoulder. We know that a woman can take any job a man can. And we see that the woman does not lag behind the man. They say that women have long hair but small mind. And we say it's not true. [...]

But Gypsy sisters! Gone are the years when your husbands were your masters. Now it is another order. Now there are no masters here. The October revolution took the conceit of your husbands. A husband has to be a comrade to his wife. (Ibid., p. 31).

Olga Pankova confessed that the changes did not come so quickly and easily, there were still some unresolved issues and problems with the position of the Roma woman in the community, so much more work was needed. As Olga Pankova underlined, leading positions in this struggle to achieve full equality of the Roma woman not only in society but also within her community must be taken by the young generation, united by the Soviet ideology and within the Komsomol organisation:

But I must say that among our Gypsies there are still such "heroes". Not every Gypsy woman has reached the consciousness that her husband is not her master. This former depravity should not be allowed into our new socialist life. It is necessary to fight the old days' customs. And this struggle should be carried out by young people. It is her task. Young people are building a new life. They are the fastest and the best for it. Our Komsomol must realise and fulfil this task. Now a Gypsy woman is doing work in the workplace, studying. Literacy opens the eyes of a formerly ignorant woman. She now sees a lot of good things. And everything is new for her. (Ibid., pp. 31–32).

Of course, in real life (and even in the life of Olga Pankova herself), things were not as simple as presented by her, both in the Gypsy community itself and in the Soviet state. In this case, for us, however, her vision for the emancipation of the Roma woman is more important. For Olga Pankova, the emancipation of the Roma woman is inextricably linked to her community and is de facto part of the processes of the overall Roma civic emancipation in Soviet society. In other words, her views, in general, did not differ in essence from the views of Nina Dudarova or even from the modern principles of the emancipation of the Roma woman today.

In the mid-1930s, Olga Pankova married Yevgraf Yefimovich Yankovskiy (1910–1988), called Grafo, who at the time was an artist at the Theatre *Romen* (Калинин, 2005, pp. 230–231). According to the memories preserved in the oral history among the Moscow Roma, he was a talented artist, but with a complicated life destiny. Olga Pankova herself also started working at the Theatre *Romen* but also spent a lot of time with her family, which was the reason her latest book's (Панкова, 1938) publication was delayed by several years (RGALI, f. 613, op. 1, d. 4777, l. 4, 21, 31, 63). Her first son, Ivan Yankovskiy (later worked as a lighting designer at the Theatre *Romen*), was born in 1935; her second son, Yevgraf Yankovskiy (Jr.), called Grafchik (later a famous artist in Theatre *Romen*), was born in 1938 (Калинин, 2005, pp. 230–231).

The radical turn in Soviet national politics in the second half of the 1930s and the ensuing Second World War interrupted Olga Pankova's civic and creative activity. In 1947,

her third daughter was born, Olga (later known with the family name of her husband – Kovtun), who later worked as an administrative assistant in various Soviet institutions (Ibid., p. 202). Olga Pankova raised her children alone at that time. In the late 1940s, she left the Theatre *Romen* and worked for many years as a typist (PAVK; LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Ольга Панкова). In 1971, she was the editor of the book of Gypsy songs collected by a composer Semyon Bugachevskiy (Бугачевский, 1971). Olga Pankova died in Moscow in 1991.

In her Autobiography, written in 1964 (PAVK; LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Ольга Панкова), Olga Pankova gave a comprehensive assessment of her civic and creative activity (as well as of the activity of her entire generation of Gypsy activists) and the problems of Gypsies in the USSR in the post-war realities, part of which deserves to be brought here:

After the hurricane of the war of 1941, no trace remained of the work that was carried out by those who are no longer among us. [...] But we have people, new cultural Gypsies, who are striving to revive what was cast into the dust by the war. They are looking for ways to start working again among the Gypsies. And if this is achieved, the Gypsies will show that they are able to live and work in step with the century. [...] The thought that there should be an opportunity to work for my people does not leave me. And despite my rather advanced age, I will fulfil my duty to [my] people. (Ibid.).

* * *

The participation of Roma women in the processes of Roma civic emancipation in the early USSR is by no means limited to the names of leading activists (Nina Dudarova and Olga Pankova). In various forms, a number of other Roma women were also involved in these processes, about whom it is worth saying at least a few words, no matter how fragmentary the available information about them is.

Yevdokiya Ivanovna Orlova (1890–1964) was a famous Gypsy singer. In her application for membership in the Dramsoyuz (Association of Dramatic and Musical Authors and Composers), completed in 1929, she noted that she is 39 years old (i.e., she was born in 1890), that she received a “home” education (i.e., she did not go to school), and that from 1905 she worked in the restaurant *Strelna* (a famous restaurant with Gypsy music). In this application, she wrote: “I wrote songs and romances since 1910, and started to publish since 1928” (RGALI, f. 675 op. 2, d. 464.l. 2). In the late 1920s, she created her own music and dance group, called the Theatre of Small Forms, which worked at the club named after Nadezhda Krupskaya (Bessonov, 2016, pp. 144), which in the period 1936–1940 continued to exist under the name Moscow State Ethnographic Gypsy Ensemble (RGALI, f. 656, op. 3, d. 4759, l. 36–3606). In 1930, Yevdokiya Orlova published in the journal *Romany zorya* the small theatrical play in three stages *Хасиям палэ гилы* (We perished for the song) (Романы зоря, 1930e, pp. 46–57). In 1933, she published her collection of poems entitled *Прэ фэлды мурдэна яга* (In the Fields the Fires Are Extinguished), in

which civic poetry on current political topics prevailed, including the poem *Джювликано участь* (Women's Fate), dedicated to the problems of the Roma woman (Орлова, 1933, pp. 22–23). Yevdokiya Orlova died in Moscow in 1964 (Kalinin, 2020, p. 67).

Another Roma woman who appeared in the field of Gypsy national literature in the 1930s was Maria Yegorovna Polyakova (1904–1976). She was the daughter of Yegor Polyakov, leader of a famous Gypsy choir, and wife of Georgiy Lebedev (about him, see above). She is the creator of a new genre, namely of (so popular also nowadays) comics, which presents the adventures of the character 'Rom Pupirka' – *How Rom Pupirka Was Going to Gypsy Union in Moscow* (Романы зоря, 1929b, p. 29) and *How Rom Pupirka Was Going to Visit Gypsies in Moscow* (Романы зоря, 1930f, p. 63). It is interesting to note that this comic character continues to be found in the folklore of the Roma in the post-Soviet space. Maria Polyakova also published two books of poems for children, *Сыр Маша гья тэ сыклёл* (How Masha Went to Study) и *Холямо башно* (The Angry Rooster), as well as a collection of short stories (Полякова, 1930ab; 1931). Her work is generally sustained in the spirit of the era and as expected, presents the participation of Gypsies in socialist construction in the USSR.

In the Gypsy journals (*Романы зоря* и *Нэво дром*), as well as in the published almanacks of poetry (Германо, 1931; 1934e), other Roma women also participated as authors of poems, among whom in our field of interest (the emancipation of the Roma woman) of special significance are the works of P. Voinova-Masalskaya, who presents herself as a student in the theatre studio at the Theatre *Romen*. In the 1931 issue of journal *Nevo drom*, her poem *Women's Day* was published (*Нэво дром*, 1931e, p. 21), as well as a short note entitled *About the Women's Day* (March, the 8th), which repeats in prosaic form the content of the poem:

Under the Tsar, I had sung in restaurants for fat-rich gadže, they threw money to me for my songs and dance. They did not understand, how hard it was for me. I was very young and night performance was very exhausting; however, those fat pigs did not understand it; they looked at the Gypsy girl as an attraction, I was obliged to perform everything, whatever the gentleman would order, and if I had not done what the customer wishes, they would kick me out of the choir. Such bitter was our life under the Tsar. Now, under the workers' power, my life has changed, they respect me as well, as all people; now I have just realized where real life is, not slavery. I am currently studying in the theatre studio, and I will be a true actress. [...] I will perform all these things not for drunk rich men, but for all people. [...] (*Нэво дром*, 1931d, p. 21).

In this case, it is clear that, due to her age, the author herself cannot have memories of the era of Tsarist Russia, which she describes, i.e. there is an art that very accurately reflects the spirit of the era, and in particular the prevailing pattern for the representation of the civic emancipation of the Roma women in the conditions of the Soviet state.

The participation of Roma women in the general processes of Roma civic emancipation in the early USSR was not limited to the capital, Moscow, where most Gypsy

activists were concentrated. Although to a lesser extent, similar processes took place in the countryside (at least in some places). Such was the case with Roma woman with dramatic fate, Yefrosynya (Ruzya) Tumashevich (1908–1993), from the Smolensk region (actually Smolensk was the second centre of the Roma civic emancipation movement in the early USSR). She was called by her contemporaries the ‘Gypsy Ibarruri’, referring to the legendary Isidora Dolores Ibárruri Gómez known as La Pasionaria, a Spanish communist and hero of the Spanish Civil War. She was the chairman of the kolkhoz *Svoboda* in Kardimovo, in the Smolensk region (Нэво дром, 1930g, pp. 9–10), worked at Gypsy school with children’s home in Serebryanka and during the Second World War was a participant in the partisan movement (for more details see Kalinin, 2021, pp. 174–175).

Some of the examples of Roma women’s participation in Gypsy activism in the early USSR were reflected in the press at that time. Such was, for example, the case of the kolkhoz shock-worker Yevgenia Tsigenenko from the kolkhoz *Trud Romeni*, who took part in the *Second All-Union Congress of Kolkhoz-Shock Workers* in Moscow in 1935, where she met Lenin’s widow, Nadezhda Krupskaya (Второй Всесоюзный съезд, 1935). Similar were the cases of published photographs of V. Yarysheva from the Gypsy kolkhoz *Nevo drom* (Novo-Velichkovsky rayon of the Azov-Black Sea krai), taken in 1936, who drove a tractor (RGAKFD, d. 99274, сн. 4-99274 ч/6), or of the Gypsy teacher N. P. Pedanova, who in 1938 in the Stalingrad oblast conducted classes for a group of Gypsy kolkhoz workers in the field, where she introduced them to the rules for holding elections to the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR (GTsMSIR), as well as Z. I. Lebedeva, a Gypsy Komsomol member from the kolkhoz *Trud Romeni*, who originated from a Gypsy nomadic community, graduated from law school and worked as a judge in Rostov-on-Don in 1937 (Известия, 1937, p. 4; Иващенко, 2011, p. 66).

It is beyond any doubt that these photographs were taken and published for propaganda reasons, but, nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that they represent real people and they reflect actual processes of civic emancipation of the Roma woman that flowered at that time in Soviet society. Moreover, these processes were not always conditioned by the affirmative policy of the Soviet state towards the Gypsies, because often the general spirit of the era, revealing new opportunities for women (regardless of their nationality), turned out to be more important and effective. The existence of such cases is evidenced, for example, by a letter to Ivan Tokmakov in ON VTsIK from 1935, sent by A. V. Lebedeva from Ardatov (today in the Republic of Mordovia), who wrote that she graduated from an agricultural technical school and works as an agronomist. After realising that there is a search for a mother-tongue teacher, she wanted to pass on to the Gypsies the knowledge she had (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 130, d. 5).

Of course, the processes of emancipation of the Roma woman did not proceed without any problems within the community itself, where the established traditional gender-age patterns and relationships continued to maintain more or less leading positions. It is no coincidence, for example, that of all the preserved photographs of Roma women from

the time of the early USSR, only two of the photographed activists (N. P. Pedanova and Z. I. Lebedeva) are with short haircuts, which was considered a drastic violation of the established traditional norms (by the way, these norms turn out to be extremely stable, and even today, in the post-Soviet space, long hair continues to be an important ethnic marker for the Roma woman).

Perhaps the potentially most dangerous area in which conflict situations related to the emancipation of the Roma woman were possible (and in fact, arose) was the training of young Roma girls in the higher levels of the education system. The Soviet state, true to its principles of supporting the civic emancipation of women in Soviet society, facilitated women's participation in these educational initiatives in various ways. This principle also applied to Gypsies, e.g. in 1934 a total of 32 people were admitted to the Smolensk Medical Faculty, 20 of them men and 12 women (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 28); in 1932, at the opening of the Gypsy Department at the Pedagogical College of the Krasno Presnensky District named after Timiryazev, which in 1935–1936 was transformed into the Gypsy Pedagogical College, 25 students aged 17 to 30 were enrolled, of whom 13 were men and 12 women (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 127, d. 8), and this practice continued over time.

The separation of young Roma girls from their families, who traditionally exercised control over their pre-marital behaviour, created the preconditions for the violation of traditional norms in the new social environment. In 1935, ON VTsIK initiated an investigation into the case of a student at Gypsy Pedagogical College N.G. (born in 1918) after a complaint to the prosecutor's office that she had been raped by a fellow student and then insulted by her fellow students and sexually harassed by their fellow students. The investigation lasted a long time, went through many twists and turns (N.G. withdrew her testimony and withdrew her complaints, then obtained a certificate from a doctor that she was still a virgin, etc.), and finally, the investigation was terminated. However, the case shows that the emancipation of the Roma woman in some cases did not pass painlessly for herself and without upheavals in the community.

Finally, a few words should be said about the situation of women's emancipation among the so-called Gypsies in Central Asia, i.e. in the assemblage of non-Roma communities with different origins and identities, collectively referred also as *Lyuli* or *Jugy* (Marushiakova & Popov, 2016a). Public campaigns of Soviet power in Central Asia for the removal of the *paranja*, used by 'Women of the East' to completely cover themselves, did not target Gypsy women (Northrop, 2004, p. 51). This was because the *paranja* was rarely used by them; instead, they wore a 'softer' form of veiling, with an uncovered face. In place of the fight against the *paranja* another movement for the liberation of Gypsy women arose in Samarkand – the fight against the begging bag. For the Gypsy women, it was a symbol of their unequal position in the community as with it they were obliged to feed their entire families. Female Gypsy activists Koromat Dzhililova and Dzhumakikh Norbaeva were especially active in this regard and repeatedly took action to persuade women to burn their begging bags, and to go to work in local factories. Koromat Dzhililova became a member of the VKP(b) and joined an agitation unit that travelled

around the region and propagated the ideas of Soviet power; in one such public event, she was attacked and received seven knife strikes, but survived and died many years later as an honorary retiree in 1965 at the age of 79 (Назаров, 1969, p. 116). By the way, the stereotype about the begging bag turned out to be extremely strong – the wedding custom is still preserved when the groom hides under the bed, and the bride begs him to go out and swears that she will sustain him and the whole family with her begging bag (for more details see Marushiakova & Popov, 2016e). Of course, in real life, the situation is much different (Ibid.).

Despite all difficulties, the examples above reveal the history of Roma women emancipation which occurred for the first time in the early Soviet Union, thanks to the efforts of the women whose portraits are included in this chapter.

Conclusion

Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov

The portraits of the most prominent and leading Gypsy activists in the early USSR presented here reveal both the existing common characteristics and the personal specifics of each of them. Together, they form the overall appearance of the movement for Roma civic emancipation in the USSR during this historical period.

In order to properly understand and evaluate the characteristics and significance of this movement, it is not enough to present and analyse the relations ‘Gypsy activism – Soviet state’ placed in the whole social and political context. More than this is needed: namely, to consider the overall national policy of the Soviet state in the early USSR, and to reveal the comparative place of the Gypsies in this policy. In other words, it is necessary to answer the question about the specific dimensions of the policy towards Gypsies in the overall Soviet multinational discourse.

Historical data give immediate, unambiguous answers. The stigmatisation of Gypsies and their differentiation from other nationalities in the USSR has never (sic!) existed – neither in theory nor in practice. On the contrary, as illustrated, in many cases, Gypsies enjoyed more privileges than other nationalities. The fact that the Gypsies have not been able to establish their national administrative-territorial unit at a higher level than the village council was grounded in their diasporic settlements and the existence of a very high proportion of nomads. Moreover, dozens of other nationalities were in the same situation (i.e. lacking their own administrative-territorial unit) and quite a few others were even worse off (i.e. they did not even have a national selsoviet).

There is no point to pay special attention to the statement that following the logic of “Stalin’s rather mechanistic model of what constituted a nation” Gypsies were considered “a ‘social’ and not an ethnic layer who needed to be drawn into the proletariat” (Stewart, 2001, p. 71). This interpretation (which is later repeated by several other authors)

is based on an analysis of the post-war period in some of the Eastern European socialistic countries, but the transfer of data from one historical epoch to another is methodologically unjustified. In the USSR, no one and never in its entire history has expressed even a hint of doubt that Gypsies are not an ethnic community (nationality according to the accepted terminology of the time). An overview of the overall Soviet policy on the Gypsies shows the apparent insolvency of such interpretation, which underlines the contradiction between two imaginary alternatives. These, in fact, are not alternatives, but manifestations of the two simultaneously existing basic dimensions in the life of the Gypsies: community and society.

In the same range is also the interpretation that Gypsies in the Soviet Union had a distinct status, inequitable to other nationalities because they did not meet Stalin's notorious definition of a nation. The statement "According to the Stalinist definition, Gypsies were no longer to be considered a national minority as they had no territory and no 'economic life'" (Klímová-Alexander, 2005a, p. 164) is unfounded and has no corroboration either as documentary evidence or in terms of actual political practice. This approach does not take into account the fact that Stalin's famous pamphlet *Marxism and the National Question* was first published in 1913 under the title *Как понимает социал-демократия национальный вопрос?* (How Does Social Democracy Understand the National Question?) (Сталин, 1946, pp. 32–55), and in which his well-known definition of 'nation' is derived, is, in fact, a topical political pamphlet against Austro-Marxism and the General Jewish Labour Bund in Lithuania, Poland and Russia. Stalin's so-called definition of the nation in this pamphlet is not original, it is based on the definitions of Karl Kautsky and Otto Bauer (Семёнов, 1966, pp. 106–129), and it is this text that gave Stalin the name of a specialist in the national question, and therefore after the October Revolution, he held the post of Commissioner for Nationalities in the Council of People's Commissars. What is the most important thing, in this case, is the fact that Stalin's so-called famous definition of a nation is by no means the basis and guiding principle in the formation of the national policy of a Soviet state (both in the early USSR and beyond). If Stalin's definition of a nation was used as a basis in the design and implementation of nationalities policy in the early USSR, then it would be interesting to ask how many of the 180 nationalities, according to the 1926 Population Census (Всесоюзная перепись, 2020a), met the criteria to be considered a nation, and how the policy towards Gypsies differs from the policies towards all other nationalities in early USSR, that, similarly, do not fully meet these conditions. In fact, all reflections on which nationalities fit Stalin's definition of a nation and which did not, appeared only after his death. They were in the markedly anti-Stalinist discourse that was a leading party ideology in the USSR after the dismantling of Stalin's cult of personality in 1956.

The main problem here is in the 'Roma-centric' approach, when all the attention of researchers is focused only on Roma, without taking into account the overall historical context. On this basis, the perception of their identity occurs in only one dimension, and both their multidimensional identity (in the parameters of the dichotomy

‘community – society’), despite the alphabetical truth that any identity is always contextual. Hence the constant opposition of Gypsies in the USSR as an ethnicity/nationality on the one hand to their position as a social and civic category on the other naturally leads to the conclusion (directly or implicitly) that the Soviet government tried to assimilate Gypsies to can turn them into ‘Soviet citizens’, ‘Proletariat’, ‘Socialist Workers’, etc. (Lemon, 2000; O’Keeffe, 2013; Dunajeva, 2021b). However, these conclusions are not relevant, because the very opposing of these two leading dimensions (society and community) of Gypsies’ identity in the USSR is completely unjustified. From the point of view of the dominant ideology and the existing political practice in the early USSR (as well as in the whole history of the USSR) there is no problem for the Gypsies as for all Soviet citizens to be ‘Socialist Workers’ and/or ‘Proletariat’ as a social-class category, and at the same time to be also a separate nationality; one does not contradict the other; on the contrary, this two-dimensional position was widely welcomed (and encouraged in various ways) in the early USSR (e.g. the creation of the Gypsy Alphabet, Gypsy Schools, Gypsy Literature, Gypsy Theatre, Gypsy collective farms, Gypsy artels). Therefore, in the end, all this opposition and substitution of the two dimensions of the existence of the Gypsies is incorrect and even manipulative, because it puts them back in the stigma of the eternal outcast, and does not take into account the importance of affirmative action policy in the early USSR for the formation of the new Gypsy civic elite.

The concept of the flowering of cultures national in form and socialist in content under the dictatorship of the proletariat was approved at the 16th Congress of the VKP(b), held in Moscow from 26 June to 13 July 1930 (Сталин, 1947, Т. 12, р. 369). Despite the dominance of anti-Stalinist discourse imposed by Nikita Khrushchev in the 1950s, this key formulation in the field of culture remained the leading one and was unchanged until the end of the USSR in 1991. Of course, there was not a total correlation between Soviet party slogans and their implementation in life. Just on the contrary, the practice was often more or less opposite to the leading concept. The concept of the development of national cultures was applied (especially after the Second World War) very selectively and did not encompass all nationalities in the USSR equally. However, this does not apply to Gypsies, and this is particularly visible in the case of the Theatre *Romen*.

As mentioned above, the transition from Romani to Russian at the Theatre *Romen* in the 1930s was the result of the internal development of the theatre itself, not because of some repressive policy of the Soviet state or because of the desire to assimilate the Gypsies. It is commonly written that the Romani language was banned in the theatre’s repertoire and replaced with Russian, but this is not the most precise wording. It is more accurate to say that the performances were in two languages – Russian (used in stage dialogues) and Romani (in numerous songs, as well as in individual words and expressions). On the one hand, this approach stops the development of the Romani language but, on the other hand, it makes theatre performances much more accessible to the general public, which in turn raises the public prestige of Gypsy art and Gypsies in general. The issue here is that the topic of Theatre *Romen* has accumulated many biased interpretations

in recent decades. In general, the development of the theatre is placed almost entirely in the discourse of the changes in the national policy of the USSR in the 1930s, and the leading tendency is to present it (explicitly or indirectly) as another manifestation of the anti-Gypsyism of the Soviet policy towards the Gypsies, as a suppression of the public manifestations of their identity and, ultimately, as a pursuit of their assimilation (Lemon, 2000; O'Keefe, 2019). This interpretation is not only presupposed and biased but also completely incorrect. Firstly, there is no documented ban on the use of the Romani language in the Theatre *Romen* (or at least no one has found traces of such a ban in the archives of the Soviet state administration, as well as in the theatre itself). Secondly, in practice, in the performances of the theatre also after the 1930s, individual words and phrases in the Romani well known to the audience, continued to be used; also, numerous songs in Romani continued to be an important part of every performance. This fact makes the very idea of assimilation meaningless because in fact Gypsy songs and dances were, and are also now, among the main and most important markers of Gypsy identity in the USSR. And, thirdly, this interpretation does not offer an answer to the most logical question – if the Soviet authorities wanted to assimilate the Gypsies, why did they simply not eliminate one of the main pillars of their identity during the Soviet era, the Theatre *Romen* itself (in this respect they had no doubts how to act, it is enough to mention the closure of the Moscow State Jewish Theatre in 1948). Instead, in eyes of supporters of the idea of forcible assimilation, it turns out that the Soviet authorities chose a very strange and ineffective strategy – to support the work of the Gypsy National Theatre effectively, and only controlled its repertoire from an ideological, political and aesthetic point of view.

The Gypsy State Theatre *Romen* not only existed and developed successfully in the conditions of the USSR after the Second World War until its collapse (and continues to exist today), but became one of the most important tourist attractions in Moscow, and tickets for his performances must be purchased in advance (as is also the case with the famous Bolshoy Theatre). Moreover, in the 1960s and 1970s, Gypsy music and dance ensembles began to be created en masse at the regional philharmonic orchestras, the cultural homes of large enterprises, etc.; these dozens and even hundreds of Gypsy music and dance ensembles constantly toured the vast Soviet country with their performances, and assisted these institutions in the implementation of their financial plans. Gramophone records with Gypsy music and songs (most of them performed in Romani) were published in millions of copies and were distributed not only in the USSR but also throughout the socialist camp. Thus Theatre *Romen* (along with the dozens of Gypsy music and dance groups created over the years by its artistic models) became the main pillar around which the Gypsy identity in the USSR was preserved and upgraded and their ethnic culture developed (even today in the post-Soviet space Gypsy music and dance folklore is entirely built on its patterns). The research of the ideological basis and the pursued political aims of the Soviet state concerning the Theatre *Romen* (Lemon, 2000; O'Keefe, 2019) undoubtedly has its place in academic studies, but from today's point

of view, these have all long been forgotten. What remains is the role and significance of Theatre *Romen* for the shaping and awareness of Gypsy identity. Whether this is an ‘invented tradition’ (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1992), and based on a certain ideological basis, is irrelevant because for the Gypsies themselves this tradition is the only one that really exists; whether this tradition is a product of an exotic approach to the Gypsies is also irrelevant because, from this point of view, it can be said that in practice they have long been part of a process of self-exoticisation (the same process, to some extent, also occurs among many other nations). Therefore, it should come as no surprise that, for example, the type of theatrical women’s costume developed according to the patterns imposed by the performances of the Theatre *Romen* is now considered ‘traditional’ and is used even now by many Roma music and dance ensembles throughout the entire region of Central and Southeast Europe, including among Roma Muslims (Marushiakova & Popov, 2016c, p. 53), for whom it was unknown in the past. This shows, once again, that real life always turns out to be stronger than any academic interpretations and assessments because, in the end, ‘authentic’ is exactly what the Roma themselves accept as such.

In general, the issue of the interdependence of identity with the music-dance and song repertoire presented for the audience has its methodological dimensions. Together with Aspasia Theodosiou, we consider the “dualistic perspective that characterises identity as either essential or performative” dissatisfactory (Theodosiou, 2004, p. 41). Moreover, identity, as mentioned many times above, can have more than one dimension; it can be presented in both contexts – of the community and of the society. These two dimensions may not coincide but enter into different correlations. This multidimensional identity directly reflects on their culture, including their song repertoire, not only on stage but even at home. One is this repertoire in front of the guests in a given family in a mixed (Roma and non-Roma) company, i.e. when Roma are positioned as part of the society in which they live – then the public demonstration as a community comes to the fore, and songs known in the whole society known as ‘Gypsy’ are performed. This repertoire is completely different in the family circle with its close relatives and friends when the community identity does not need to be demonstrated because it is known and accepted by all present – then, paradoxically, public civic identity comes to the fore. and are performed mainly songs that are popular in the society in which Roma live (Marushiakova & Popov, 2009).

In the specific case of the Theatre *Romen*, it is methodologically unjustified to conclude that state policies concerning the theatre’s music, dance and song repertoire influenced the development of Roma identities in the USSR. In general, throughout their history, Gypsy musicians have always conformed their performances, which is in many cases the main (or at least additional) source of their livelihood, with the dominant in this society ideological, political, aesthetical, etc. norms; how this repertoire affects the choice of songs and dances within the community is a different topic. In the case of Theatre *Romen*, there is a clear selectivity. A large part of the theatre’s repertoire, which is not ideologised and influenced by Soviet ideologues, is transferred within the community

as a whole and becomes part of its so-called traditional folklore. That is why even today in the whole post-Soviet space it is extremely difficult to find musical-dance and song folklore samples that are not born (or at least strongly influenced) by the norms and patterns presented in the public space by the Theatre *Romen*. However, all these examples are valid only for those cases of songs and dances, built on old, folklore samples, or for newly created ones, which preserve their content and forms. Among this folklore heritage of the Theatre *Romen*, however, there is not a single example in which one can feel any influence of the ideological norms and patterns imposed by the Soviet state in this repertoire, i.e. it turns out that the new forms (mostly songs) created in the spirit of the dominant Soviet ideology were intended only for public presentation, and remained only on the stage, without entering the life of the Roma. Moreover, these new forms are not even present in the hugely released gramophone records, i.e. de facto, they did not reach the majority of Roma in the USSR.

Another very serious problem in the study of Roma in the early USSR is the 'Roma-centrist' interpretation of the history, as a result of which one can reach the following wording: "In 1928, Stalin's ascent to power lead [sic!] to the disbanding of the PRGU [i.e. the *All-Russian Union of Gypsies* (VSTs)– authors note]" (Klímová-Alexander, 2005a, p. 164). The impression is that, for Stalin, after he won the party-internal struggles in the VKP(b) in December 1927, which led to Trotsky's expulsion from the Party, and when the next grand historical task (mass collectivisation of agriculture and the accelerated industrialisation of the USSR) was intensively prepared, one of the most important tasks was the closure of the VSTs. It is hardly necessary to argue how absurd all this sounds. In the interest of historical truth, we must note here that throughout the vast written heritage of Joseph Stalin on a wide variety of topics, repeatedly published and reprinted, there is not a single word (sic!) about Gypsies, and there is neither any other historical evidence that he ever displayed any interest in Gypsies. Moreover, Stalin has not even once visited a performance of Theatre *Romen*, although he very often attended theatre performances in various other theatres in Moscow, and attended many times performances of plays he particularly liked (e.g. *The Days of the Turbins* of Mikhail Bulgakov).

The place of the Gypsies in the common line of the nationalities policy of the Soviet state during the interwar period was determined by different factors. The most important (but still not the only one) were demographic data, and more specifically, the number of Gypsies in the USSR at that time. The population census in the USSR in 1926 reported 61,234 Gypsies (plus 31 'Bosha', i.e. *Lom*, who lived in the Caucasus, who only in this Census were considered a nationality separate from Gypsies), of whom 12,823 lived in cities and 48,411 in villages (Всесоюзная перепись, 2020a). The census recorded Gypsies according to their residence, and because at that time permanently settled Gypsies in villages were relatively little and only in some regions, it can be assumed that the majority of Roma registered as living in villages were nomads. The total population of the USSR was 146,637,530 people, i.e. Gypsies represented about 0.42 per cent of this population

and therefore occupied 44th place in the ranking of nationalities in the USSR in their numbers.

The Census of the Population in the USSR in 1939 reported 88,242 Gypsies (Всесоюзная перепись, 2020b). With a total number of the entire population of the USSR 170,557,093, Roma represented about 0.05% of it and placed in 43rd place in the ranking of nationalities in the USSR by their size (i.e. the changes from the 1926 data were insignificant).

The VSTs' leadership in the 1920s disputed this data and claimed that the number of Gypsies was significantly higher, indicating different figures – most often around 500,000, also 600,000 and even 800,000 (GARF, f. P 3260, op. 6, d. 44, l. 5; f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763, l. 80; f. A 259, op. 96, d. 4233, l. 22; f. P 3316, op. 17, d. 188, l. 3). However, the Soviet administration preferred to work with official data on the number of Gypsies for quite understandable bureaucratic reasons, which were revealed in 1935 ON VTsIK Report: if the reasons (and figures) offered by Gypsy activists were accepted, then the share of employed Gypsies in the reports will be no more than 15%; however, if the official census data are accepted, this share will be 30–35% (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 27).

The Gypsy activists pointed out two main reasons for indicating higher numbers. The first was that in the Census many Gypsies self-identified as Romanians, Hungarians, Bulgarians, and others because they had foreign passports. This is quite misleading because, in the Census, all foreign nationals were accounted by their citizenship, not by their ethnicity; and those Gypsies who were foreigners (mainly *Kelderari* and *Lovari*) could not be counted in the total number of Gypsies. The second reason for claiming higher numbers was that Gypsies supposedly could not be covered by the Census because they were not domiciled. This argument also is not convincing enough because Gypsy camps were usually on the outskirts of the settlements and thus were easily reached by census takers. Most probably not all Gypsies were covered by the census, but they were hardly enough to significantly alter the total number. Besides, it should be borne in mind that, at that time, Gypsies as a whole were clearly distinguished from their surrounding population, not only in appearance but also in their traditional clothing (or some elements of it) used by the majority of them, and could hardly mislead the census takers, even if they wished to do so. Thus, even with the widest acceptance of all the inaccuracies and incompleteness admitted in the Census of 1926 and 1939, the real share of Gypsies from the total population of the USSR in the interwar period could not exceed 0.1%.

In this situation, when Gypsies appear to be a very small proportion of the total population of the USSR and their economic importance to the Soviet state was even smaller, it is only natural that in the general context of Soviet policy during the interwar period the 'Gypsy issue' occupied quite an insignificant place. The USSR during this period solved extremely important internal and external political tasks, and the problems of the Gypsies were very far in the periphery of the state policy. In this context, it seems more than strange to claim that "the Bolsheviks viewed the Romani population of the Soviet Union with dread" (O'Keefe, 2019), especially given that it was a Party that was not

afraid to oppose the entire “old world” in the name of its ideals (Slezkine, 2017). The real attitude to the Gypsy issue of the VKP(b) is most clearly shown by the fact that for the entire period of the early USSR this topic was not discussed even once at a meeting of the Politburo of TsK VKP(b), which was the highest Party and state authority, especially given that at that time the Politburo was discussing thousands of the most diverse (and insignificant, from today’s point of view) issues. In fact, the Gypsies in the entire history of the USSR were mentioned only once (sic!) at such a high level. It was in 1956 when, at a meeting of the Presidium of the TsK KPSS (an analogue of the Politburo at that time), the issue of their sedentarisation was decided (Фурценко, 2003, p. 161).

The case of the sedentarization of the Gypsy nomads is particularly indicative in terms of the importance (more precisely its absence) that the Soviet government attributes to the Gypsies. We mentioned more than once the restrained position of the Soviet state to the calls of Gypsy activists for imposing the sedentarization of nomadic Gypsies through administrative pressure. Even more striking is such an attitude towards the nomadic Gypsies in the conditions of the early USSR, when the policy against nomadism, in general, was considered an extremely important task, which was a necessary condition for the transition to socialism (Зверьяков, 1932) and the sedentarisation (or the placing under control, through the creation of permanent summer and winter settlements) of pastoral nomads in Central Asia (Kindler, 2014; Cameron, 2018) and other regions was imposed, along with that of the so-called Small Peoples of the North (Синицин, 2019). All these nomadic communities were seen as crucial from an economic point of view, as they provided (or could provide) the state with important animal products (meat, milk, fur, etc.). The same cannot be said about the nomadic Gypsies, who were not regarded as economically important for the Soviet state, and this allowed the issue of their sedentarisation to be left in the background and be drawn into an indefinite future (in this case – until 1956). These conclusions are confirmed by the available digital data, which leaves no room for any other interpretations. According to Alexander Khatskevich (Secretary of the Council of Nationalities at the TsIK USSR), in 1917, on the eve of the October Revolution, more than 10 million nomadic people lived in the Russian Empire; in 1933 it was estimated that as a result of the measures taken by the Soviet state, more than 7 million nomads had moved to a sedentary way of life (Правда, 1933, p. 4). In fact, by the beginning of World War II, the issue of nomadism was generally resolved (except for Gypsies), although after the war there was a process of partial renomadisation, involving various communities (mainly in Central Asia) as well as some already settled Gypsies (Marushiakova & Popov, 2003; 2016a). There can be no doubt that if the Soviet state in the 1920s and 1930s had really aimed at forcing Gypsies to move to a sedentary lifestyle, it could have achieved that goal without much effort – after it had forced more out of 7 million nomads to settle in such a short time, tens of thousands of Gypsy nomads could not be a difficult task.

From this point of view, it becomes absolutely clear that any attempts to explain Soviet affirmative policy towards the Gypsies in the 1920s and 1930s as preparation and the first step towards their sedentarisation (and even future assimilation) are completely

ridiculous and should not be taken seriously. The logical question here must be why the Soviet state paid so much attention to Gypsies and made so much effort to integrate them into the “new life”. The answer here is in two dimensions, which are not mutually exclusive but, on the contrary, mutually compatible.

On the one hand, Gypsies are by no means a particular exception to the general discourse of the leading Soviet national politics during this period. The declared basic principles of this policy were not just propaganda slogans without real coverage; and the number of established national territorial-administrative units at different levels in the early USSR (more specifically, until the turn in the 1930s) is impressive. In addition to the Union and Autonomous Republics, and National Autonomous Okrugs and Oblasts, there were also national rayons (about 250 in 1933), and national selsoviets in 1933–1934 being 5,400 and over 19,000 in 1937; every tenth rayon in the country was a national one and every eighth to the ninth selsoviet was national too (Вдовин, 1992, pp. 36–37).

On the other hand, Gypsies, unlike many other nationalities with similar demographic and economic parameters, had some clear advantages in terms of being able to be used by the Soviet state for propaganda purposes, both at home and abroad. The proof of this are the dozens of articles in the central and local press in the USSR itself, and even more in various countries around the world. Some authors overestimated this propaganda aspect as the most important reason for the Soviet policy towards the Gypsies (Деметер et al., 2000, pp. 206–207). There is no reason for such interpretation because the attitude towards them was within the framework of the common nationalities policy during this period which was no different from the attitude towards all other nationalities. It is true, however, that the examples of changes in the lives of Gypsies in the USSR would have been much more comprehensible to the world, where Gypsies were known as a people, while only a very limited circle of people would have heard about the dozens of other nationalities in the USSR, even within the country, not to mention abroad. This propaganda effect should not be overestimated, because these articles, and especially those abroad, were either in the pro-communist press or rather attributed to the ‘Curiosities’ headings; this attitude was also valid in cases where other forms of mass propaganda are sought, e.g. in the distribution of the film *The Last Tabor* starring Lyalya Chernaya in the United States. Nevertheless, though limited, this effect was visible. Of course, despite this, hardly anyone in the Soviet leadership had hoped that the example of Gypsies in the Soviet Union will contribute substantially to the expected ‘World Proletarian Revolution’.

In their work with the Gypsies, the Soviet institutions applied the policy model common for other relatively small and dispersed nationalities, which did not have territorial-administrative structures (except at the lowest level). On the recommendation of the ON VTsIK, the Statute of the VSTs was prepared following the model of the Statute of the Koreans in the USSR (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 119, d. 10, l. 17). In many cases, the documentation of the Gypsy organisation is stored together with that of the Assyrian organisation in the record-keeping of Soviet institutions (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 64, d. 1637; NARB, f. 34/133C, op. 1, d. 727). In its activities already in the 1920s, the leadership of the VSTs has

repeatedly called on the Soviet institutions to deal with the Gypsies, taking into account the experience of working with the Soviet Jews. However, this does not appear as a realistic request. Jews at that time were the 7th largest nationality in the USSR (Всесоюзная перепись населения, 2020ab) and in determining the national policy towards them played many other important factors (including international ones), which were absent in the case of the Gypsies. Therefore, the aspirations of Gypsy activists to be treated by the Soviet state as a nationality of the same order as the Jews were doomed to failure.

In general, state policy towards the Gypsies in the early USSR was a composite and inseparable segment of the common national policy of affirmative action. The many historical sources available clearly show that in many cases Soviet-era Gypsy politics not only fitted organically into the mainstream of the Soviet common affirmative action but the Gypsies often even enjoyed some additional privileges compared to many other nationalities, and also many of the decrees of Soviet institutions repeatedly equated the status of the Gypsies who wish to settle with that of the so-called resettlers (a privilege that almost no other nationality enjoyed). The same attitude occurred also in other fields: the publications of fictional and educational literature in the Romani language were more numerous than in the languages of many other nationalities; the remission of loans to Gypsy kolkhozes and artels was almost a regular practice. Moreover, strange as it may sound, the privileged attitude towards Gypsies is visible even in the sphere of political repression, at least as far as the fate of the Soviet Gypsy elite is concerned, which was generally not affected by these mass persecutions.

The very topic of Stalinist repressions towards the Gypsies deserves a separate study, in which they must be placed in the general context of mass terror during this era to reveal to which extent they were ethnically motivated. To say it in other words, it is necessary to specify whether the Gypsies were repressed as members of a particular community or as 'ordinary' Soviet citizens. An important part of the mass political repression in the 1930s in the USSR was the series of so-called national operations directed against individual nationalities and especially against their national elites (party, administrative, cultural, literary, etc.). During the Great Terror in 1937–1938, the NKVD issued a series of decrees and directives against many specific nationalities (Охотин & Рогинский, 2007), but the Gypsies were not among them, i.e. they were not repressed as a separate nationality but in the general political context of the era. In this context, it becomes clear why the most common were repressions against the so-called 'foreign Gypsies' who were citizens of other countries; that is why the most common accusations against them are espionage for foreign countries, as absurd as it may seem today.

The statements that the trials against the Gypsies were in fact persecution of the traditional Roma culture (Lemon, 2000, pp. 166–193) is undoubtedly very effective, but it is not only untrue, it is also misleading. Many preserved materials from the lawsuits against members of the artels of the so-called 'foreign Gypsies' in fact have a lot of data about the so-called Gypsy courts and Gypsy kings but no allegations were made against these institutions as such, the accusations were made against the specific criminal activities,

and at the forefront were indictments of their service for foreign intelligence (GARF, f. 10035, op. 1, d. 74091). More generally, the Soviet state never denied, in principle, the Roma traditional culture in general, only certain segments of it that were considered “reactionary”. On the contrary, one of the main goals in the activity of the Theatre *Romen* was the preservation and development of that what was considered (according to the norms of Soviet ideology) to be its “authentic” and “progressive” part. This was the reason for the constant struggle against the so-called *tsiganshchina*, considered a “false” Gypsy art, an illustrative example of which is the reply of Alexander Khatskevich, addressed to Nikolay Pankov during the Meeting at the Council of Nationalities at the TsIK USSR *On the Questions of the Employment of Toiling Nomadic Gypsies and their Cultural and Economic Services*, held on January 4 and 5, 1936: “We are not interested in Gypsy bourgeois romances [a typical symbol for the so-called *tsiganshchina* – authors’ note], but in Gypsy people art – the folklore” (GARF, f. P 3316, op. 28, d. 794, l. 92). That is why the attempts to introduce into the Roma national discourse the mass repressions against the so-called foreign Gypsies in the 1930s are not only unconvincing but also unsuccessful, and they should not be taken seriously.

In this context, the fate of the new Gypsy national elite in the period of mass repression is more important to us. Here we will only briefly state that the Gypsy case is, if not unique to Soviet realities, at least one of the few exceptions. An important part of the mass repression, especially during the Great Purge in 1937–38, was directed against the new Soviet national elites created by the Soviet state; their destruction was one of the main goals of the mass repressions during this period (Martin, 2001, p. 595). Unlike the general practice, when huge sections of these new national elites, were annihilated during the repressions of the 1930s. Gypsy activists as a whole (with some controversial exceptions, which will be discussed below) did not fall victims to these reprisals. Only some of them received a surprisingly minor punishment, for instance, Andrey Taranov, who after two failures (as the head of the VSTs and of the journal *Nevo drom*) was punished by being sent to work for a short time to at a low-level nomenclature position in Kyrgyzstan, after which he began to work in the NKVD system (see above), i.e. he was fully rehabilitated.

In the context of the repression against the new Soviet national elites, and in particular the fate of the Gypsy national elite, we can consider the case of Georgiy Lebedev as one of the few exceptions in this regard. Moreover, he was convicted of criminal charges, although he was appointed director of the Gypsy State Theatre *Romen* to exercise ‘political guidance’. (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 28, l. 183). However, his condemnation did not in any way affect the fate of the Theatre *Romen*, which not only continued to exist but also developed successfully over time. A comparison with the fate of the Latvian State Theatre *Skatuve* (Stage) in Moscow shows radically different results in a similar situation: in 1937 the theatre was closed down, the entire staff of the theatre was arrested, 32 people were shot dead and the rest were sent to GULAG.

The lists of members of the VKP(b), victims of political repression in the 1930s, include the names of only two people who indicated their nationality as ‘Gypsy’. The first of these was Grigoriy Lutsenko from Kiev (1906–1937), sent to the GULAG camps on charges of Trotskyism, where he was again convicted and shot. Lutsenko was a teacher of Marxism-Leninism and there is no information about him having any activity in the field of Gypsy activism. The second case, which is more complicated, is that of Velya Pashun, who wrote under the alias Volodimir Zorin (born in 1904 in Bessarabia, shot dead in 1937 in Kharkiv), a participant in the Civil War, a member of the VKP(b) since 1919, graduated from a High Party school for leadership training, a journalist in the *Vesti* (News) newspaper, and a writer, author of several collections of short stories about the Civil War, including two books on Gypsy themes, one of which has even been translated into Moldovan (Зорін, 1932ab; 1934; Zorin, 1933). The interesting question here, to which we have no logical answer, is why, despite this impressive (by Soviet standards of the time) biography and education, he was not attracted to the VSTs nor to central Soviet institutions or local Ukrainian governments to work with Gypsies, especially given the apparent shortage of trained personnel in this area.

Seen in the general context of the affirmative action policy of the early USSR, it is clear that it facilitated the emergence and development of Gypsy activism. However, this process had its downsides too, because it presupposed the linking of Gypsy activism with the general leading tendencies in the development of the nationalities policy of the Soviet state, and hence its dependence on these trends. This was clearly evident in the case of the shift in overall Soviet national politics, which happened in the late 1930s. The changes did not occur immediately; their first manifestations became visible already in 1932 within the processes of the so-called Ukrainisation (Martin, 2001, p. 595) and became even clearer when the new Constitution of the USSR from 1936 omitted to mention national rayons and selsoviets (Вдовин, 2002). On December 1, 1937, the Organizing Bureau of the TsK VKP(b) revised the question *On the Liquidation of National Rayons and Selsoviets* and found it “inappropriate to continue the existence of both special national rayons and selsoviets” (RGASPI, f. 17, op. 114, d. 633, l. 3–4); the relevant decision of the Politburo of the TsK VKP(b) on this issue was adopted on December 17, 1937 (RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 1006, l. 39–40). The endpoint was reached after the decisions on the reorganisation of the national schools in 1938 (see above). Naturally, the shift in the general nationalities policy was reflected also in the policy towards Gypsies and Gypsy activism.

This policy has been scrutinised many times as different authors offer own interpretation and assessment of its general characteristics (see e.g. Друц & Гесслер, 1990; Crowe, 1994; Деметр et al., 2000; Калинин, 2005; Иващенко, 2011; Бугай, 2012; O’Keeffe, 2013). Without entering into details, we need to notice that in all previous research, no attention is paid to a very important point, namely the fact that the special policy towards Gypsies was only of minor importance in the frames of the general Soviet civic policy of the state. In this sense, for the Gypsies in the early USSR (and beyond) there was not only

one (the special Gypsy policy) but also other social elevators and roads for social realisation. Of course, from today's point of view, it is very difficult to assess exactly which of the specific results were achieved thanks to the special affirmative policy towards the Gypsies in the early USSR and which thanks to the general mainstream policy towards all Soviet citizens: for example, to what extent the illiteracy of Roma children was finally eliminated through the limited number of Gypsy schools that existed for a relatively short time, and to what extent through the system of compulsory school education of all children in the USSR.

We can offer another example in this regard. In 1941, 265 Gypsy communists were reported, i.e. members and candidate members of the VKP(b) (Edele, 2014, p. 290). In the USSR, membership in the Party was a sign not only of civic emancipation but also of belonging to the Soviet nomenklatura – members of the Communist Party enjoyed many privileges (and therefore greater responsibilities) than ordinary Soviet citizens. There is no exact data on how many of the Gypsy activists were party members at that time, but judging by the available documents, their number hardly exceeded a few dozen: i.e. the communist Gypsies, for the most part, have reached these positions thanks not to a special affirmative action but to a common policy, which should be a cause for reflection.

Among the Roma themselves at the time, some felt this contradiction between the special and the mainstream concerning the Gypsies in the early USSR and wondered which approach is better for the community as a whole. An illustrative example in this regard is the letter from G. M. Andreev, a student at the Gypsy Pedagogical College in Moscow. The letter was entitled *On the Shortcomings of the Work with the Gypsy Population* and was sent to the newspaper *Pravda*, an edition of the TsKVKP(b), from where on April 21, 1937, it was forwarded to ON VTsIK (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 130, d. 5). This letter, point by point, signalled in detail to the many existing shortcomings in the Gypsy kolkhozes, artels, schools, and even at the Theatre *Romen*, and called for all the perpetrators to be “put to rights” by NKVD. Surprisingly, however, this letter, although written precisely in the midst of the so-called Great Purge, also did not lead to any action by the Soviet state against the accused (fortunately for them). Moreover, the author of this letter reaches a fundamental problem that continues to be relevant to this day for Roma activists, namely whether it is necessary to pursue a special policy regarding the Roma or whether their problems can (and should) be solved within the framework of the mainstream policy in the countries in which they live. This is, for example, the problem of the form of mother tongue education of Gypsy children, whether it should be the only language of instruction, or whether separate Gypsy-only schools are needed (Marushiakova & Popov, 2017b, pp. 48–59). G. M. Andreev was adamant in this regard, as he raised the issue of privileges and wrote: “to give less of all kinds of benefits [...] which have just the opposite results as intended” (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 130, d. 5).

It is very difficult to determine what exactly was the impact of the Soviet state policy on the Gypsies' lives in general. It was the two-dimensionality of the Soviet policy

towards the Gypsies (as an integral part of Soviet society and as a separate nationality) that allowed the ordinary Gypsies to perceive the change of the overall paradigm in Soviet national politics in the second half of the 1930s without much upheaval (which was not the case of the activists). This change, which de facto puts an end to the overall national policy of affirmative action, was not a one-off act, but a process stretched over several years. It was not a radical and complete reversal, a number of the achievements of the previous nationalities policy have been preserved or modified according to the transformed realities and the initial stated aims were gradually realised (although sometimes in adjusted forms).

A turn in the USSR nationalities policy was, in fact, a predetermined end of Gypsy activism from the interwar period. After the Second World War, the Gypsy activists had made many unsuccessful attempts to restore the pre-war policy towards the Gypsies by sending letters to the top Soviet party and state leaders – the letter of Ivan Rom-Lebedev, Alexander German and other Gypsy activists to Stalin in 1946, Nikolay Pankov's letters to Petr Pospelov in 1953, to Nikita Khrushchev in 1954, the letters of Nikolay Pankov and Andrey Taranov (two letters) to the TsK KPSS, the Council of Ministers of the USSR and the newspaper *Pravda* in 1954, and finally, Nikolay Pankov's letter to the new First Secretary of the TsK KPSS Nikita Khrushchev in March 1956, and to Marshal Kliment Voroshilov, then Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR in August of the same year. All these letters plead for a return to the active policy of affirmative action towards the Gypsies from the interwar period (and, accordingly, for raising the social position of the Gypsy activists themselves). These letters remained unanswered but ultimately lead to an unexpected and undesirable end result by their authors themselves. On the 5th of October 1956, the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR *On the Admission to Labour of the Gypsy Vagrants* was issued. At first glance, it seems that Gypsy activists, after more than three decades, were finally able to convince the Soviet state of the need to eradicate the nomadic way of life of the Gypsies. However, the ban on nomadism did not entail any other elements of the old Gypsy policy of the previous period. Thus, with one blow, the Soviet authorities deprived the Roma elite of its main argument (the need to fight the nomadic way of life), which they have constantly used in trying to convince the authorities of the need for pro-Gypsy special affirmative action policies.

The endpoint of all these attempts of the old Gypsy elite from the interwar period came with the activities of Nikolay Satkevich in the 1960s. Nikolay Satkevich was the last representative of the old generation of Gypsy activists from the interwar period. He was born in 1917 in a nomadic Gypsy camp, was raised in an orphanage from the age of 8, graduated from the Gypsy Pedagogical College in Moscow and became a teacher in Bryansk. During World War II, he fought in the Soviet Army and reached Berlin. His two brothers were killed in the war at the front, his mother, sister and niece were burned by German soldiers during the occupation of Bryansk in their house (LANB, f. Nikolay Satkevich, d. Nikolay Satkevich; Друц & Гесслер, 1990, p. 307; Бессонов, 2010, p. 250.)

After the war, he moved to Irkutsk, where in the 1963/1964 school year he was given the opportunity by local authorities to set up a Gypsy class with 17 children of different ages in a boarding school but, at the beginning of the following school year, the parents withdrew their children and moved them to a mainstream school (GARF, f. A 259, op. 45, d. 2943, l. 22–23).

In 1964, Nikolay Satkevich sent a letter to Anastas Mikoyan, President of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR (Ibid., P. 26), in which he described the entire Soviet state's experience of working with Gypsies and proposed the creation of special boarding schools where Gypsy children would be educated. The answer from the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR was quick and unambiguous: "The experience of creating a special class of Gypsy children [...] has not justified itself ... Parents spoke in favour of educating their children in mainstream education schools by place of residence" (Ibid., l. 26–27). After this unsuccessful experiment, Satkevich moved to Tula as a teacher (Друц & Гесслер, 1990, pp. 307–308). According to the oral history of Roma in the region, Satkevich's attempts to establish a special Gypsy boarding school have been met with strong resistance by Roma women in Tula and Kaluga who accused him publicly of wanting to take away their children. This reaction should not surprise us; moreover, it was through the forms and mechanisms of mainstream (and not special) education in individual Gypsy schools, that the illiteracy of Roma in the USSR, as a whole, was eliminated. One can argue a lot about the advantages and disadvantages of general and special education for Roma children, but nowhere in the world did education in segregated schools (or classes) lead to better results compared with general mainstream education. Moreover, the rejection of Nikolay Satkevich's ideas is in full consistency with the contemporary vision of the Roma movement, which categorically rejects segregated education for Roma children (Rostas, 2012; Matache & Barbu, 2019). The paradox, in this case, is that the closure of the special national Gypsy schools in 1938 continues to be interpreted in academic works unequivocally and unconditionally as "evidence" of the Soviet state's repressive policy towards the Gypsies, but this is another matter.

The case of Nikolay Satkevich clearly shows how a situation was reached, in which the community rejected the ideas of its own elite and made this elite entirely meaningless because community representatives whose ideas are not supported by their community cannot be defined as an elite. This was, in fact, the final end of the Gypsy elite formed in the early Soviet era and also the end of this part of its visions of community development, which contradicted the visions of the community itself. And an elite that does not have the support of its community is doomed and cannot be an elite. In its place, a new, quite different Gypsy elite began to emerge, the predominant part of which is connected in one way or another with the Theatre *Romen*, i.e. this new elite, although without direct continuity with the old one, still builds on what was achieved in the early USSR.

As it is clear from all that has been said thus far, the attempts of the Gypsy elite formed in the 1920s and 1930s in the early USSR to become an active subject in the policy of the Soviet state regarding Gypsies, through an active dialogue with the state institutions,

ultimately proved to be unsuccessful. This was because the two sides of this dialogue were from the very beginning in unequal positions, with one of them (the Soviet authorities) being the leading and determining one, and the other (the Gypsy elite) being placed in the former's dependence. Thus, in the end, Gypsy activism proved to be a loser in its relations with the Soviet state; however, whether the Roma community itself was a loser or a gainer, in this case, is a question that deserves another, separate study.