Online Discursive (De)legitimation of the Roma Community

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Abstract: *European Union has started to use online platforms in order to decrease the democratic, symbolic and communication deficits with which it has been associated. The online subsidiarity adopted by EU has allowed a new form of European citizenship where the EU citizens turned into active content producers. Alongside with Futurum or EU-ROPA, the 'Debating Europe' platform is a transnational communicative space where citizens engage themselves in debates on various EU issues alongside with other EU citizens and policy-makers. In this paper the discursive online power-holders will be the EU citizens who will debate upon the inclusion aspects of the Roma community in Europe. The network analysis will provide an insight into the online participation of the EU policymakers and citizens debating on the Roma community. The main topic of this online debate will clearly highlight a polarization between a positive other-presentation and a negative other-presentation of the Roma community and thus the EU citizens will become legitimators and delegitimators of this ethnic community. The integrated model of discursive (de)legitimation developed in this article will reveal the most relevant discursive structures and strategies of legitimation and delegitimation used in the online representation of the Roma community.*

Keywords: *inclusion, education, legitimators, delegitimators, discursive structures, discursive strategies.*

I. Introduction

Throughout the years, attempts have been made to bridge the gap between EU organizations and European citizens: the European Capital of Culture (Aiello and Thurlow 2006), the European Years (Cmeciu and Cmeciu 2014), or EU's online platforms (Hoppmann 2010). The main aims of these attempts have been to adopt a 'bottom-up' strategy of communication. Subsidiarity and decentralization are the governing principles (Pütz 2002) on which the 2005 *Action plan to improve communicating Europe by the Commission* relied. Since 2005, the Commission has released policy documents on communication. These documents focus on three principles[1]: (a) listening to the public, and taking their views and concerns into account; (b) explaining how European Union policies affect citizens' everyday lives; (c) connecting with people locally by addressing them in their national or local settings, through their favorite media.

The e-platforms have gradually introduced the debate within the European public sphere focusing on Bakhtin's participatory dialogue and heteroglossia (Koller and Wodak 2008). European Union has adapted to the new social formations that have been greatly influenced by the evolution of mass-media and the internet-based technologies (Castells 1996) which have held "the promise of reviving the public sphere" (Papacharissi 2002) by shaping "a network society". This new form of social formation has "an infrastructure of social and media networks enabling its prime mode of organization at all levels (individual, group/organizational and societal)" (van Dijk 2006). Nowadays online subsidiarity through which the European citizen is empowered, has become more salient within the context of digitalization and it allows the development of a new form of European citizenship.

Alongside with *Futurum* or *EUROPA*, the 'Debating Europe' platform is a virtual public sphere where three principles rule: inclusiveness, diversity, and citizen participation. Launched in 2011 and having the European Parliament as a strategic partner, the 'Debating Europe' platform claims to foster a two-way debate and to target a more involved and critical European citizen.

This study focuses on the way in which the two-way communication on 'Debating Europe' platform was achieved in the debate over a sensitive issue in Europe, namely the Roma community. The main aims of the this study are (1) to

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1 http://www.europarl.europa.eu/atyourservice/en/displayFtu.html?ftuId=FTU_5.13.8.html (accessed March 10, 2015). As a consequences of these principles of the policy documents on communication, several main initiatives have been taken: *the Europe for Citizens Programme*, *Communicating Europe in Partnership*, *Engaging the Citizens* (communication about Europe via de Internet); *Debating Europe*; *the European Radio Network (www.euranet.eu)* or *Presseurop* (www.presseurop. eu).

provide an insight into the network of communication between European politicians, experts and EU citizens debating on the Roma community; (2) to highlight the most visible EU citizens involved in the online dialogue; (3) to identify the most relevant discursive structures and strategies of legitimation and delegitimation used in the online representation of the Roma community.

I chose the debate issue on the Roma community for two main reasons: on the one hand, the ongoing social exclusion, discrimination and intolerance towards this community, and on the other hand, the scarce scientific literature on citizens' opinions regarding the Roma community. Being the EU's largest ethnic minority group (six million Roma in Europe[2]) and mainly living in Romania, Bulgaria, Spain and the Balkans, this community has had a history of severe persecution from the Middle Ages to the Second World War. Even nowadays their living in very poor socio-economic conditions and certain stereotypes with which its members are labelled make this community to be discriminated and excluded.

The studies on the Roma community have focused so far on two main strands: (a) the media coverage of Roma discrimination (Erjavec 2001; Jovanović 2014) and (b) insights into the inclusion of this community (NGOs' campaign discourses on Roma inclusion - Patrut, Cmeciu and Miron 2011; Schneeweis 2013; EU Roma policies - McGarry 2012; Roma cultural identity - Tavani 2012).

II. The Framework of Online Discursive (De)Legitimation

Ruth Breeze (2012) has argued that "legitimation aims to create an ideological space within which the institution can operate, enjoying sufficient social acceptance to pursue its activities freely". Legitimation applies to those groups which position themselves as power-holders. I consider that "legitimation as a form of collective action" (van Dijk 2000) should be associated with three types of power-holders. First, there are the political groups, governments or multinational companies which try to legitimate themselves downwards to voters, citizens, or clients and to justify their actions within what Teun van Dijk (2000, 256) labels as "prevalent moral order". Second, there are the disadvantaged groups (e.g. the ethnic groups) which try to legitimate their actions in a situation of inequality with respect to the dominant group. The voice of these groups is an instance of a shift from a top-down direction to a bottom-up direction of legitimation which allows various ethnic groups in a society to have different interpretations of the historical, social, political or cultural contexts. Third, there are the online users who are active information prosumers. The online platforms, as it is the case of the 'Debating Europe' platform, have provided another instance of bottom-up direction of legitimation, namely the EU citizens as power-holders through the online content

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2 http://www.debatingeurope.eu, accessed March 10, 2015.

generated. This online empowerment turns EU citizens into discursive (de)legitimators of various issues that have been debated in the European context. The 'Debating Europe' platform allows EU citizens to become active social actors eager to support or to challenge the dominant national or European groups.

Both Teun A. van Dijk (2000) and Ruth Breeze (2012) make a connection between legitimation and ideologies. R. Breeze identifies the aim of legitimation as being the shaping of an ideological space and T.A. van Dijk considers that ideologies are an instrument of legitimation. The integrated model of legitimation used in this analysis is a blending of the socio-cognitive approach to ideologies, specific to critical discourse analysis (CDA) and of the grammar of legitimation (van Leeuwen and Wodak 1999; van Leeuwen 2008).

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) provides a discursive perspective to legitimation by placing an emphasis on the role of discourse in the social shaping of power relations and the structures of domination in the contemporary society (Fairclough 1989; van Dijk 2000). An analysis of these power relations involves a blending of three levels (Fairclough 2003): text (microlevel textual elements), discursive practices (the production and interpretation of texts) and social practices (the situational and institutional context). Since a critical perspective on legitimation deals with broader social practices and power relations of the social actors involved, we consider that the socio-cognitive approach to ideologies (van Dijk 2000) is appropriate in this context. The novelty of this approach lies in the inclusion of the social practices of a particular group (dominant or dominated groups) within the study of ideologies. According to Teun A. van Dijk (2000), an ideology is "the foundation of the social beliefs shared by a social group. Ideologies consist of those general and abstract social beliefs, shared by a group that control or organize the more specific knowledge and opinions (attitudes) of a group". It is obvious that ideologies embed those elements which provide a group legitimation, identification and cohesion. Teun A. van Dijk (2000) identifies six categories which supply the structure of ideologies: membership, activities, goals, norms, position (group-relations), resources.

The grammar of legitimation (van Leeuwen and Wodak 1999; van Leeuwen 2008) distinguishes four types of semantic-functional strategies used in legitimation: *authorization* (legitimation by reference to the authority of tradition, custom, law etc.), *rationalization* (legitimation by reference to the goals and uses of institutionalized social action), *moral evaluation* (legitimation by reference to value systems) and *mythopoesis* (legitimation conveyed through narratives).

A. The Integrated Model of (De)legitimation, Method, Research Questions

I will employ a discursive analysis of the comments posted by EU citizens on the 'Debating Europe' platform over the issue 'How can Europe end poverty and

exclusion in the Roma community?'[3], launched on January 7, 2014. The sample will include 184 comments and the primary units of analysis will be words and syntagms. The study employs both a deductive and an inductive method. I used a deductive method by seeking to find how the six ideological structures and the four semantic-functional strategies were used in order to (de)legitimate the Roma community. By combining the ideological structures and the discursive strategies we generated an integrated model of (de)legitimation which encompasses three forms of (de)legitimation:

- (de)legitimation through membership and position,
- (de)legitimation through goals, activities and resources,
- (de)legitimation through norms and values.

The inductive method was used for an in-depth analysis of the EU citizens' comments in order to find out the discursive specificity beyond the three types of (de)legitimation of the Roma community.

The integrated model of (de)legitimation of the Roma community will embed the following three instances of (de)legitimation:

- *(de)legitimation through membership and position (group-relations)*. It refers to the origin, appearance, belonging and social position of the organization. The following questions delimit the two structures (van Dijk 2000): *membership* (Who are we? Who belongs to us? Who can be admitted?) and *position* (Who are our friends or enemies? Where do we stand in society?).

In the content analysis these two structures will be adapted to the online debate over the Roma community. In the category of *membership* I will identify three types of participant roles: a micro-group (members of the Roma community), a mezzo-group (members of the MS countries where the Roma community is present) and a macro-group (other EU countries). In the category of *position* we will include two types of relations: *positive relations* (legitimators of the Roma community) and *negative relations* (delegitimators of the Roma community).

The major semantic-functional strategies that may prevail within this type of (de)legitimation are *authorization* and *mythopoesis.* The members of the three groups mentioned above may use the categories of personal authority (people who have a certain status or role in a community), the authority of tradition (community practices carried on by its members), or the expert authority (persons used for their expertise rather than for their status) to (de)legitimate this ethnic community. The *mythopoesis* strategy relies on the important role played by storytelling in (de)legitimating one group. These stories are often told by community members

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3 http://www.debatingeurope.eu/2014/01/07/eu-push-inclusion-roma-people/#.VdQox_mqqko, accessed March 17, 2014.

or persons who interacted with these members and they may be moral tales or cautionary tales.

Two other important aspects that I would like to address within this type of legitimation are (1) to what category (pro or against the Roma community) the EU citizens taking part in the debate belong to and (2) the degree of interaction between the EU online citizens. I will use the Node XL Pro software program to provide an insight into the network of the debate on the Roma community.

- *(de)legitimation through goals, activities and resources*. It refers to the processes performed by the social actors, their final outcomes, the means used in their performance. The following questions delimit the three categories (van Dijk 2000): *goals* (Why are we doing this? What do we want to achieve?); *activities* (What are we doing, planning? What is expected of us?); *resources* (What do we have that others don't? What don't we have what others do have?).

In the context of the Roma community, these three categories (aims, activities and resources) mainly rely on the strategy of *rationalization*. Thus the (de)legitimation of the Roma community is obtained through reference to the goals and uses of the Roma community members' social actions within a specific context and to the perceptions that society has constructed to endow the Roma community with cognitive validity. In the case of this community, validity is provided by its members' past activities which may constitute a reason for future investment in this ethnic community.

- (*de*)*legitimation through norms and values.* It refers to one's own evaluation and others' evaluation, changes to be brought within the system of beliefs of a certain community. The following questions delimit this last category of a group self-schema (van Dijk 2000): What is good or bad, allowed or not in what we do?

The norms and values expressed by the EU citizens will be analyzed through the three categories of the moral (de)legitimation strategy: *evaluation* (evaluative words), *abstraction* (abstract practices (de)legitimating qualities of engagement, cooperation etc.) and *analogy* (positive or negative comparisons and intertextual references which may activate some well-known past historical or social contexts).

The following research questions are to be addressed in this article:

RQ1: Which category (legitimators or delegitimators of the Roma community) is the most active in the online debate?

RQ2: What is the degree of interaction among the EU officials and the EU citizens debating on the Roma community?

RQ3: What types of (de)legitimation structures do the legitimators and delegitimators use when talking about the Roma community?

RQ4: What discursive strategies do the legitimators or delegitimators draw upon in their online representation of the Roma community?

III. Findings

A. Network of Communication - Debate over the Roma Community

The network analysis provided the visibility and interaction (RQ1, RQ2) among the EU citizens who participated in the debate over the ending of poverty and exclusion of the Roma community. Using the NodeXL Pro software I divided the EU online citizens into two major clusters: the *legitimators of the Roma community* (the group members who support this ethnic community – marked with a green vertex) and the *delegitimators of the Roma community* (the group members who are against this community – marked with a red vertex). As observed in Figure 1, the number of delegitimators outscored the number of legitimators. Although in terms of visibility (RQ1), the delegitimators are more visible than the legitimators, the network shows that the most interactional node (Ruth) belongs to the legitimators' group. EU citizens of both groups either respond to her comments or interact with her. Another important aspect shown in Figure 1 is the degree of interaction
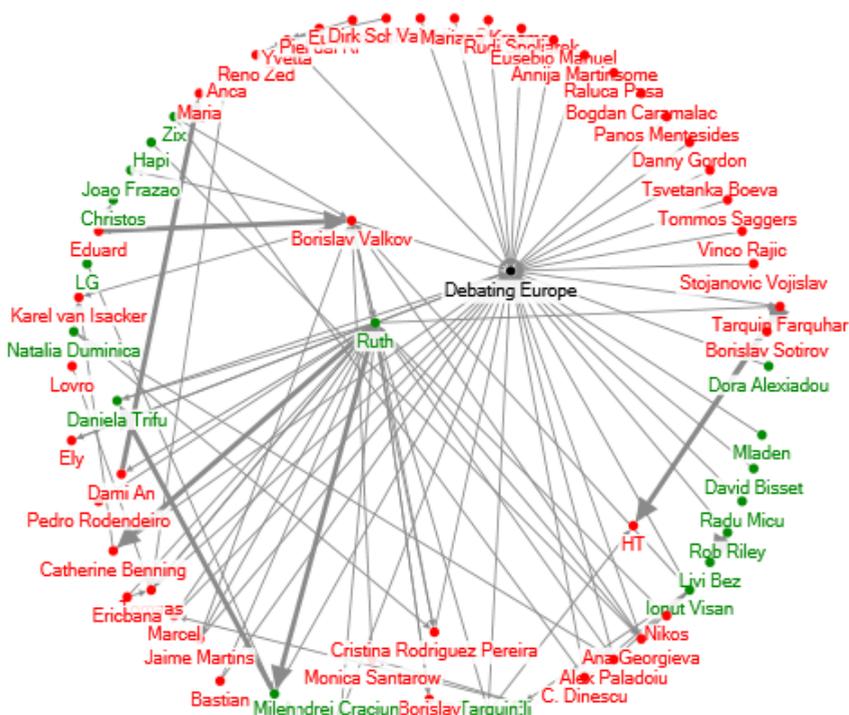

Figure 1. The network of EU online participants in the debate
"How can Europe end poverty and exclusion in the Roma community?"

(RQ2). As observed, there was a high interaction degree among the legitimators and delegitimators of the Roma community and a scarce interaction among the members of the same legitimating or delegitimating group.

The number of bidirectional arcs clearly shows that the EU online participants in the debate over the Roma community were not highly involved in a two-way communication. There were only several instances of two-way communication (bidirectional arcs). The bidirectional connections (marked by wider edges) were the following: Ruth (legitimator) - Milen (legitimator), Ruth (legitimators) - Catherine Benning (delegitimator), Milen (legitimator) - Daniela Trifu (legitimator), Tarquin (legitimator) - Borislav (delegitimator), Tarquin (legitimator) - HT (delegitimator), Rob Riley (legitimator) - Livi Bez (legitimator), Dami An (delegitimator) - Maria (delegitimator), and Borislav Valkov (delegitimator) - Eduard (delegitimator). In our opinion, this scarce number of bidirectional communication instance among EU citizens shows that, at least for this debate, the 'Debating Europe' platform served more as a unidirectional communication where EU citizens' role was to provide a comment to previous comments. Another important aspect of this network analysis is to be found at the level of the vertex labels. As observed, all vertex labels belong to EU citizens and none to EU policymakers or experts. The communication among the EU citizens and the policymakers was mediated by the platform managers: the policymakers answered the EU citizens' comments during an interview carried out by the platform managers. For this debate on ending the poverty and exclusion of the Roma community, the policymaker interviewed was: Andrey Kovatchev, a Bulgarian MEP who sits with the Centre-Right in the European Parliament and who has authored a report on the EU Strategy on Roma Inclusion.

The frequency of comments by EU online citizen (Figure 2) also illustrates the scarce use of bidirectional communication: 62% of the participants provided only one comment in this debate. Despite this high percentage of EU citizens who preferred to give only one comment, there were several online participants who were very active. For example, Ruth (legitimator) provided 45 comments and Borislav Valkov (a delegitimator) gave 24 comments and they were actually the two main strong components who maintained a constant interconnectedness among the EU online citizens.

B. (De)legitimation through Membership and Position

The main topic associated with the discursive legitimation of the Roma community is the possibility of European integration of Roma community through education and tradition. The legitimation of the Roma people is expressed by members belonging to all three types of groups (micro, mezzo and macro). The online EU citizens mainly used two categories of authorization: personal authority and authority of tradition.
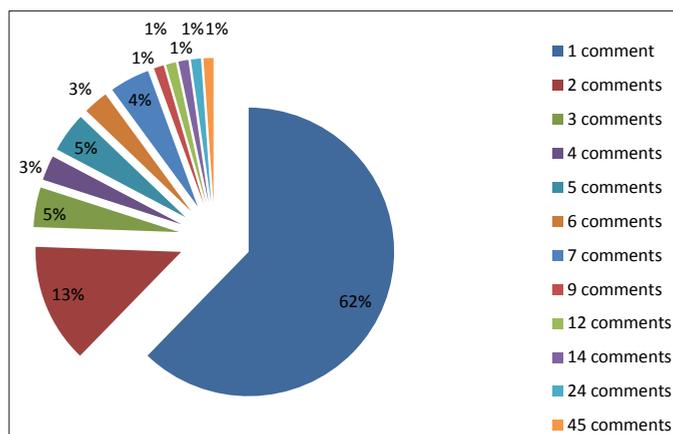
Figure 2. The frequency of comments by EU online citizen

At the level of the micro-group, legitimate authority is vested in people who are members of the Roma community and who have succeeded in their lives through education. Natalia Duminica plays an important role in this debate because of her role in the community: being a Moldavian Roma woman, she graduated the university thus setting up an example that education may change an ethnic community. In her comments she uses a local strategic move from an apparent exclusion from the micro-group to an assumed inclusion in this community. This discursive shift is obtained through pronouns: the pronominal exclusiveness (the pronoun "they" draws a clear demarcation line between her and the Roma community) is later on turned into pronominal inclusiveness (the pronoun "I" assigns the speaker into the in-group of the Roma community).

1. "The school is for free because Roma have limited access to education! Roma are not working because *they* are discriminated when *they* try to get a job! (...)" (Natalia Duminica, Jan. 8, 2014)

2. "*I* am Roma from Republic of Moldova and *I* see that our government does insignificant actions to integrate Roma (...)." (Natalia Duminica, Jan. 9, 2014)

At the level of the macro-group, the most active legitimator of the Roma community is Ruth (Barnett) and as the network analysis (Figure 1) showed, she was the main strong component who interacted with the highest number of online participants. In her comments she activates the personal authority category emphasizing her status as a UK speaker and writer challenging stereotypes, prejudices, and human rights. Using the argumentative scheme of part-whole relationship, Ruth makes a plea for two topics: Roma community members' willingness to be integrated (Extract 3) and bonding with this community members (Extract 4).

3. "Please tell me as *all the Roma and Travellers* I have met or talked with *WANT to be accepted as part of society*! Do you live on a different planet????" (Ruth, Jan. 8, 2014)

4. "Try getting to know some of the Roma, Nikos, I mean really becoming *friends*. (...)" (Ruth, Jan. 8, 2014)

At the level of the mezzo-group (members of the MS countries where the Roma community is present), the most powerful legitimation through membership comes from a delegitimator. Borislav Valkov (a Bulgarian), a strong delegitimating vertex in the network analysis (see Figure 1), also uses the personal authority category through a part-whole argumentative scheme. But unlike Ruth who pleads for an integration relationship between part (Roma community members) and whole (society, EU), Borislav Valkov uses the part-whole exclusion argumentative scheme. His appreciative note is oriented towards a part of this community (his positive experience with Roma co-workers, Extract 5). Within his comment he uses his co-workers as indirect discursive instances of personal authority. Vested with credibility gained through education, his Roma co-workers indirectly mention a breach within the cohesion of the ethnic community: not all parts ('other gypsies') are accepted within the Roma in-group (the whole).

5. "And finally I had *gypsy co-workers and I am OK with them*. I can see how jobs and work atmosphere change individuals and *they are talking about other gypsy(and their lifestyle) with disgust*. (Borislav Valkov, Jan. 8, 2014)

The authority of tradition is used to legitimate Roma persons as a long-lasting ethnic group in Europe. The causal scheme oriented towards the past helps to construct a positive presentation of the Roma community and to justify its craftsmanship and longevity (Extract 6). This emphasizing of their good things is achieved by means of word selection (nouns related to their musical tradition, Extract 7).

6. "*Many craftsmen, skilled people*. Don't push them, don't sell them lies." (Radu Micu, Jan. 8, 2014)

7. "The Roma are Europeans and in most cases they are also EU citizens. They have been living among us *for centuries*. People forget their influence and contribution in *European culture and heritage*, like our *music* for example. In Spain, Greece, Hungary and Romania their *music* has been adding to these countries' heritage for centuries now. What would Spain be without a *flamenco*, a music that the gypsies gave their soul into? " (Christos, Jan. 10, 2014)

The delegitimation of the Roma community through membership and position is mainly framed around the topic 'problems with inclusion'. This topic is related explicitly to Roma people through the category of personal authority and implicitly to national and EU organizations through the category of expert authority.

The personal authority category is used by members of the mezzo group (EU citizens who live in countries where this ethnic community reaches a high number of persons). The emphasis on their bad things is conveyed through the strategy of mythopoesis (narratives) and polarization. The personal experience as justification makes storytelling a powerful argumentative scheme: 'they do not belong in our country because I was bullied and because they are actually perceived as victims'. Borislav Valkov's negative position (Extract 8) towards the Roma community as a whole (the pronoun 'their') illustrates this type of delegitimating:

8. "*I* had faced *their* "friendship" as result *I almost quit school* because of *bulling* and my pleas for aid by school authorities are like your thoughts: they are *victims in society*, so cut 'em some slack)!" (Borislav Valkov, Jan 8, 2014)

It is interesting to observe that Borislav Valkov (a Bulgarian) employs a position shift in (de)legitimating the Roma community through membership. He actually legitimates members of the Roma in-group ('his co-workers', see **Extract 5**), but he delegitimates the Roma micro-group as a whole, assigning them the 'fake' social position of victims. Borislav Valkov's implicit suggestion of a reversal of victim roles between the ethnic community members and the majority members is explicitly rendered by Alexandru Paladoiu (a Romanian). He uses comparative polarization between the native population and the Gypsy community:

9. "In Romania the gypsy (roma) community have *more rights than the native population*, who is discriminated ?" (Alexandru Paladoiu, Jan. 8, 2014)

Alexandru Paladoiu's discursive delegitimating position may coincide with what Veronika Kalmus (2003: 676) identifies as "endangered majority" (the empowered nation presenting itself as threatened by a dominant ethnic group). In Extract 9, this argumentative position is emphasized by a rhetorical question which implies the following proposition: Romanians have less rights than Roma persons.

The analysis of the EU citizens' comments showed that national and EU organizations are another important actor whose delegitimation through membership and position should be taken into account. Members of the macro-group (EU countries where Roma community is not a sensitive issue) delegitimate their expert position by using a causal argumentative scheme. The de-emphasizing of their good things (EU funds for Roma persons) is rendered through word selection of negative terms ('failure'). Extract 10 presents the EC fund fraud at the local level as the cause of the failure of the Roma social inclusion:

10. Hence, why punish EU member states, since the Roma problem is rather a *massive EC fund fraud problem* to start with. …. Overall, EU funding for Roma social inclusion is a *failure*. (Karel Van Isacker, Jan. 9, 2014)

Indeed, enough money wasted on them. Even people on the field acknowledge the EC funding was a disaster with most money left behind in non-Roma (read *NGOs set up by local politicians*) pockets or in the pockets of Roma leaders. (Karel Van Isacker, March 19, 2014)

A member of the mezzo-group (a Bulgarian) employs the expert authority category by making reference to Western countries as experts. In Extract 11, this discursive position is emphasized by a sarcastic polarization between Eastern countries and Western countries:

11. *The West is very worried about the rights of the roma*, so I suggest they take all of them there! *You are better people then us*, take them! *Hypocrits*! (Ana Georgieva, Jan. 8, 2014)

B. (De)legitimation through Goals, Activities, Resources

The ethnic in-group's way of living has been used as the starting point of the argumentative scheme both for legitimating and delegitimating the Roma persons' social practices. In both instances 'obstacles to their inclusion' constitute the most pervasive topic. The legitimators of the Roma communities' activities enact an instrumental rationalization of diversity and resistance to inclusion through the proposition 'Roma people do not want to integrate because they are a nomadic tribe'. The interesting aspect of the legitimating of Roma's integration as a clear danger to their way of living and being is the type of online legitimators. Catherine Benning (Extract 12) and Borislav Valkov (Extract 13) play a dual role: they legitimate the existential activities of this community but they delegitimate the Roma persons' particular activities.

12. They *enjoy being free to wander*. Freedom is the essence of their well being and they feel life in one place without that option to up and move on 'anytime' is akin to imprisonment. They are a *nomadic tribe*. (Catherine Benning, Jan. 8, 2014)

13. People don't realize that majority of them refuse to integrate out of sheer *fear* that *they will not exist*! *But MUST we tolerate criminals and social care abusers so they can keep their livestyle/culture*? (Borislav Valkov, Jan. 8, 2014)

Borislav Valkov's rhetorical question (Extract 13) encompasses the dilemma beyond this debate: an ethnic group's activities framed either as cultural differences or as societal dangers. This latter type of framing triggers a delegitimating of their way of being through an instrumental rationalization of intolerance. A juxtaposition of their unaccepted activities is the discursive strategy used by delegitimators:

14. Look they *create human traffic, pickpocket groups* and etc. If we want to help them then we have to show them that such a life is intolerable! (Borislav Valkov, Jan. 8, 2014)

15. (…) *they steal, they kill old people for money, they torment us all*! (Ana Georgieva, Jan. 8, 2014)

(De)legitimating the Roma community's access to social resources brings forth two important aspects of the obstacles to inclusion: on the one hand, the benefits and drawbacks of education and on the other hand, a reversal 'victim-agent' polarization.

Education is the most pervasive word used in framing a viable solution to Roma people's social inclusion. Legitimators emphasize the priority to include the Roma children into the education system by selecting the words ('laptops', 'projects', 'English', 'literarcy') that belong to this semantic field:

16. The laptops can only be used for educational purposes and will teach young Roma children from the ghettos the benefit of working together on projects, perhaps a bit of English and general computer literacy. (Milen, Jan. 8, 2014)

Delegitimators agree that education might be a solution to social inclusion but they embed it within a larger context and they add extreme solutions (Extract 17) which brought up heated comments. It is the case of Borislav Valkov's proposition: 'To take Roma kids away from their parents is a way of social inclusion'. This proposition presupposes the following polarization: *Roma parents are bad versus Roma children may turn to be good*. He assigns responsibility to the Roma parents and provides a drastic solution for their children.

17. (…) *take the children out of their families* if their families cannot give them a social inclusion! *These children are not wrong* but what they learn from their parents is wrong! (Borislav Valkov, Jan. 8, 2014)

The take away children is not something I said lightly because I had seen *how children are stoped from educating and SOLD into mariage*! Tell me how can parents who sell their children be treated? (Borislav Valkov, Jan. 8, 2014)

Whereas the access to free education of Roma children seems to be accepted by both legitimators and delegitimators, their access to other social resources (housing, welfare) is highly contested. The main proposition used by delegitimators for this latter type of access is the following: 'Roma community refuse to have the same duties as the majority population'. The argumentative scheme of polarized comparison between the ethnic minority's lack of duties and the majority's fulfillment of duties brings forth again the issue of 'endangered majority' (see A.). In their comments, the delegitimators emphasize a reversal 'victim-agent' polarization (Extract 18): the proposition 'The Roma community is discriminated' is shifted into 'The dominant group (native Romanians or Bulgarians) is discriminated'.

18. We pay their electrisity, from the taxes, *they do not pay taxes*! *I am discriminated, not them*! (Ana Georgieva, Jan. 8, 2014)

EU funds for the Roma community is another significant resource that is mentioned in the EU citizens' comments. The description of the solicharity

phenomenon (Extract 19) is used by delegitimators through a polarization between Western countries and Eastern countries.

19. The *EU should restrict* dole, *sorry solidarity payments* to those countries that have treated the Roma so badly historically eg Bulgaria, Czech, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary etc. BTW, don't cite EU legislation to me as if I should agree to it – I, like ALL UK citizens have never voted to be a member of the EU and I like many *UK citizens want to stop paying SOLICHARITY to countries like yours*. (Tarquin, Jan. 14, 2014)

The legitimators agree with delegitimators upon the EU shortcomings and the way in which the EU funds are distributed. Their argumentative causal scheme also takes a form of polarization but this time the pair is formed of rich countries versus poor countries. The cause of this discrepancy is actually maintained by rich countries because an ethnic group will always constitute the best entity to be blamed in the self-presentation of a rich country as a victim.

20. The EU has a problem of serious 'dry rot' in its foundations – capitalism! The ever-widening *gap* between the *greedy rich individuals, companies and countries* one the one hand and the *poorer individuals and countries* the rich prey upon is the root of most EU problems. *The rich, of course, like to have a vulnerable group – Roma and Travellers – for the poor to vent their anger against instead of turning on them* (the rich). (Ruth, Jan. 8, 2014)

C. (De)legitimation through Norms and Values

The main topic of this type of (de)legitimation focuses on the subjective restrictions to integration of the Roma community under the form of moralizing statements. The meaning of the positive self-presentation and of the negative other-presentation was discursively achieved by the implicit 'good versus evil' polarization. At the level of the lexicon, the moral delegitimation is more pervasive and it is achieved by means of evaluative adjectives and/or nouns which qualify the other's practices as evil. The juxtaposition of negative evaluative adjectives emphasizes a moral delegitimation of the Roma community and of the EU organizations or rich MS countries. The delegitimators use emotionally loaded adjectives which refer either to the Roma persons' decaying physical condition (Extract 21) or to the MS countries' exploitative authorial intention (Extract 22).

21. (…) it is simply that people do not like being around *dirty, messy* beggars who show no respect for the culture, property of those whose areas they move into. (Ericbana, Jan. 18, 2014)

22. The *hypocrites* are the *greedy preying* rich who exploit 'the poor' and like the poor to have vulnerable minorities, like the Roma … (Ruth, Jan. 8, 2014)

Analogy through positive or negative comparisons is used to express moral (de)legitimation. The most striking comparison is that between the Roma com-

munity members and the Jews. The legitimators of the Roma community use this type of intertextual reference for two purposes: to legitimate the Gypsies as victims just as Jews were the victims of the Nazis (Extract 23) and to delegitimate a solution proposed by delegitimators (to take away the Roma children from their families - Extract 23 or to assimilate the community into the dominant culture - Extract 24).

23. Taking children from their rightful parents and raising them outside their rightful culture is an element of *genocide* – the destruction in part or whole of a people and their culture . (…) *The Nazis took their own citizens children*, plus Aryan looking children from other countries – including quite a few *Jews*, and *raised them in top Nazi families and sent them to special Napoli schools to brainwash them*. (Ruth, Jan. 8, 2014)

24. That is what happened to *the Jews in China* – they were revered and welcomed and *they 'disappeared' into the community*. (Ruth, Jan. 8, 2014)

The comparison between the Roma people and the Jews obviously refers to a sensitive and very controversial historical context and Borislav Valkov's extreme solution clearly emphasizes the representation of the EU and the MS countries as dominant groups with a colonial mentality.

III. Conclusion

The analysis of the online debate on the Roma community integration revealed two significant aspects:

    a. (a) the online interaction among the legitimators and delegitimators of the Roma community (RQ2) was barely characterized by a two-way communication. The supporters and opponents of this ethnic community preferred to simply add their comments to a discursive seed thread launched by a EU citizen who did not reply. The network analysis showed that despite the higher visibility of delegitimators (RQ1), the most interactional node belonged to the legitimators' group and the unidirectional interaction was rather among the supporters and opponents of this ethnic community. Another significant finding of the network analysis of 'Debating Europe' platform revealed that EU policymakers or experts are not directly involved in the online debate alongside with EU citizens.

    b. (b) the legitimators' and delegitimators' discourses about the Roma community include a number of differences and resemblances in the use of (de)legitimation structures and discursive strategies.

All three (de)legitimation structures (membership & position; goals, activities & resources; norms & values) are used by both the supporters and opponents of the Roma community (RQ3). At the same time a resemblance of some discursive strategies is noticed in the discourses of the both parties involved. The main dif-

ference lies in the way in which the legitimators and delegitimators discursively framed these structures and strategies (RQ4).

Personal authority and authority of tradition are the discursive strategies provided in the (de)legitimation structure of membership and position. This ethnic community members as legitimators emphasize their experience as educated Roma persons through pronoun inclusiveness by setting themselves as examples of personal authority. This type of discursive strategy is also used by delegitimators but this time the personal authority is combined with mythopoesis. The storytelling instances of the majority members being bullied by the Roma persons are powerful discursive strategies because these personal examples serve as justification for the delegitimators' lack of acceptance the Roma community. In their positive other-presentation, the legitimators use thematical elements of the discourse of tolerance. The causal argument schemes are oriented towards the past and they include intertextual reference to the historical and cultural context of the Roma community. The authority of tradition (craftsmanship and music) is mostly mentioned by the proponents of this ethnic community and they make a plea for cultural diversity. But tradition is also used by delegitimators as a causal argument scheme in their discourse of intolerance. Unlike the legitimators who use the discursive strategy of tradition to legitimate the Roma membership, the delegitimators link tradition to downplay the Roma people's way of living. Within this delegitimation structure through the strategy of tradition, they emphasize the bad aspects of Roma people's customs and the negative consequences of their social practices. Andrey Kovatchev, the Bulgarian MEP, interviewed by the 'Debating Europe' platform moderators, also uses tradition as the causal factor of Roma people's lack of integration. He admits that 'not all traditions are good traditions' and he rejects this ethnic community's isolated way of living and the Roma members' blind acceptance of some family tradition which does not comply with the EU values. Thus tradition seems to have been a common discursive strategy used both by the legitimators and delegitimators of the Roma community. The difference lies at the level of interpretation: the legitimators associate tradition to the discourse of tolerance whereas the delegitimators link tradition to the discourse of difference and intolerance.

Instrumental rationalization is the discursive strategy used in both the legitimation and delegitimation structure of goals, activities and resources. As mentioned above, social practices of this ethnic community constitute the starting point of the comment exchanges between the supporters and opponents of this community. Although instrumental rationalization of their activities is the common discursive strategy used by both parties involved, the difference lies in the framing aspect: whereas the legitimators frame the Roma group's social practices as cultural diversity (they are a nomadic tribe), the delegitimators frame their activities as societal dangers. The most interesting aspect of this online debate is that

Andrey Kovatchev, the Bulgarian MEP and the author of a report on the EU Strategy on Roma Inclusion, also supports the delegitimators' discursive framing. As mentioned above, he rejects the Roma community's traditional way of living and he makes a plea for a mentality change.

In order for this change to take place, resources should be reconsidered. Free education of Roma children was mentioned both by legitimators and delegitimators but the opponents associate this educational resource to an extreme solution (taking away the Roma kids away from their parents) which is highly condemned by the legitimators who use the intertextual reference of the Nazis' genocide to label such action.

The other resources (welfare, housing, EU funds) mentioned in their comments revealed two discursive positions of the legitimators and delegitimators: discriminated majority versus privileged minority, and rich/ Western EU countries versus poor/ Eastern EU countries. The first discursive position plays a significant part in the negative other-presentation, especially when the debate focuses on ethnic inclusion. The issue of 'endangered majority' (Romanians, Bulgarians etc.) was emphasized by delegitimators through a reversal 'victim-agent' polarization (the dominant group is discriminated because the ethnic group does not fulfil its social duties). EU funds for the Roma community is another significant resource that is mentioned in the EU citizens' comments. Delegitimators and legitimators agree on a misuse of these funds. But whereas the opponents brought into discussion the solicharity phenomenon through a polarization between Western countries and Eastern countries, the proponents of the Roma community inclusion emphasize the polarization between rich countries and poor countries. The legitimators argue that this discrepancy is maintained by the rich Western countries because they may use the ethnic group as a scapegoat in their praising self-presentation.

(De)legitimation through norms and values is actually implicit in all the other structures of (de)legitimation: membership, position, goals, activities or resources. The comments upon the Roma community's way of living and activities reveals a covert 'good versus evil' polarization. The descriptions of the Roma persons' social practices ("*they steal, they kill old people for money, they torment us all*" - Extract 15 or "*they do not pay taxes*" - Extract 18) implicitly qualify such activities as antisocial and at the same time provide a negative evaluation of the members belonging to the Roma community. This last type of (de)legitimation through norms and values was used both by supporters and opponents. The discursive difference was at the level of strategies provided for the overt negative or positive other-presentation. Whereas the delegitimators selected negative evaluative adjectives to emphasize the Roma persons' bad features and practices, the legitimators used analogy to create a meaning potential of victimhood achieved through a mental transfer from the Jews' past oppressive experiences unto the Roma community's present way of being treated in the European Union.

Is the Roma community's inclusion in Europe possible? The analysis of the EU citizens' online comments shows that a new interpretative context of interethnic relations with Roma community members is needed. Both legitimators and delegitimators agree that this context is highly dependent on activities which include educational practices targeted towards Roma children. The difference between the two sides lies in the means through which these educational practices are achieved: the legitimators make a plea for personal authority (Roma educated persons to set an example for other community members) whereas the delegitimators try to change the authority of a tradition (to take away the Roma children from their illiterate parents). Despite this discrepancy of solutions for the same end (education) and despite the lack of a greater interaction between the participants in this online debate, I consider that the solutions and problems expressed in the discursive (de) legitimation of the Roma community suggest a high interest of EU citizens in the issue of Roma inclusion in Europe and their willingness to change the majority's and the minority's mentality towards this ethnic community.

Acknowledgement

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