

ROMA INCLUSION POLICIES BETWEEN EUROPEANISATION, DE-EUROPEANISATION AND TRANSACTIONALISM

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Abstract

The European Union (EU) has been developing a framework for Roma inclusion, equality and participation since the 1990s, and it has been urging the accession countries to follow these policies. While the EU accession process has been instrumental in prioritising Roma inclusion on the political agenda in Turkey, the broader changes in Turkey-EU relations have contributed to the limited progress the Roma inclusion initiatives have made over time. This article argues that rather than approaching it as an isolated event, reading it through the lenses of de-Europeanisation and the rise of transactionalism in Turkey's foreign policy helps us understand the stalemate that the Roma inclusion policies have reached.

Keywords: European Union, Turkey, Roma

JEL Classification: Z10, Z12, Z19

AVRUPALILAŞMA, AVRUPA'DAN UZAKLAŞMA VE İŞLEMSELÇİLİK ARASINDA ROMANLARIN SOSYAL İÇERMESİ

Öz

Avrupa Birliği (AB), 1990'lardan bu yana Romanların eşitlik, katılım ve sosyal içermesine ilişkin bir çerçeve geliştirmekte ve katılım sürecindeki ülkeleri bu politikalara uymaya çağırmaktadır. AB'ye katılım süreci, Türkiye'de Romanların sosyal içermesine siyasi gündemde öncelik verilmesine katkı sağlamakla birlikte Türkiye-AB ilişkilerindeki dönüşüm, bu girişimlerinin zaman içinde kaydettiği sınırlı ilerlemede etkili olmuştur. Bu makale, münferit bir olay olarak yaklaşmak yerine, ilgili gelişmeleri Avrupa'dan uzaklaşma ve Türkiye'nin dış politikasında artan işlemselçilik merceklerinden okumanın, Romanlara yönelik sosyal içirme politikalarının içine girdiği çıkmazı anlamamızda yardımcı olacağını savunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Avrupa Birliği, Türkiye, Roman

JEL Sınıflandırması: Z10, Z12, Z19

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1. Introduction

Often considered the largest minority in Europe, Roma face socio-economic problems and discrimination wherever they reside, and Turkey is no exception (European Commission, 2005). Starting from the 1990s, together with other international organisations, the EU deals with the issue because of the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs) enlargement process. The EU policies for Roma inclusion, equality and participation consist of several steps such as amendment of discriminatory laws, where relevant, amendment of existing anti-discrimination legislation or introduction of new anti-discrimination legislation, the introduction of public institutions such as equality bodies, adoption of national Roma integration strategies accompanied by relevant policies and appropriate resources, encouragement of institutionalisation of Roma civil society.

In this article, we first summarise the policies that the EU has developed for Roma inclusion. Second, we discuss the EU suggestions to Turkey and the policies developed by the consequent Turkish governments by focusing particularly on three areas that showed improvement; amendment of discriminatory legislation; adoption and implementation of national Roma strategy; and access to healthcare. We have conducted 14 in-depth semi-structured interviews between 2019 and 2020 with individuals who have experience in Roma civil society. We additionally conducted a documentary analysis of the EU legislation, progress reports and visa liberalisation documents for Turkey as well as relevant Turkish legislation.

Based on the EU and state documents and interviews, we argue that the EU accession process made the issue more visible but failed to lead to a comprehensive state program and institutionalisation of Roma inclusion. While Europeanisation occurred especially for the amendment of discriminatory legislation, only a selective Europeanisation occurred for the adoption and implementation of the national Roma strategy; and improvement in access to healthcare was not a result of Roma inclusion policies. We argue that selected Europeanisation in this particular case can be understood within the broader framework of the transactional approach that Turkey has increasingly been adopting in its foreign policy.

2. Europeanisation, De-Europeanisation, and the Rise of Transactionalism

Europeanisation has rarely been a linear process in any of the countries it affected (Yılmaz, 2016). While the EU accession process and conditionalities that came with it are credited for various initiatives tailored to support Roma inclusion in several countries (Müller and

Jovanovic, 2009; Bartlett, 2011), none of the initiatives has led to the successful elimination of discriminatory practices or complete social inclusion of the Roma (Brosig, 2010). Inefficiency in addressing underlying causes of discrimination, lack of coordination in efforts and the instrumentalisation of Roma issues by populist governments are cited in the literature as the primary reasons for the limited success (Kóczé and Rövid, 2017; Marushiakova-Popova and Popov, 2015; Kende et al., 2020). In that regard, the limited improvements that the "Roma Opening" enjoyed in Turkey are not unique. However, the broader context in which the changes happened as well as the patterns of change reflect the particular phases through which the Turkey-EU relations have gone through.

Turkey-EU relations are generally periodised into three phases (Yılmaz, 2016). Looking into these periods is useful not only in understanding the evolution of Turkey-EU relations, in general, but also in understanding the fate of the legal and policy changes that were initiated as a part of Turkey's desire to become a member of the EU. It needs to be acknowledged that neither the changes in Turkey-EU relations in general nor issues of minority rights, in particular, can be understood solely by looking at the impact of external factors in shaping Turkey's foreign policy orientation and priorities. Domestic developments, changes in the overall policy objectives of the governments as well as in the public perception play a role in the current state of Roma inclusion in Turkey.³ However, for the purpose of this study, we will focus on foreign policy, specifically towards the EU, and how the gradual instrumentalisation of various issues in foreign policy can explain the limited improvements that the legal and policy initiatives have enjoyed in the last two decades.

The period between 2002 and 2005 is considered to be the "Golden Age of Europeanisation" during which time the government was implementing economic and political reforms (Öniş and Yılmaz, 2009; Müftüler Baç, 2005). The Europeanisation process in this period was shaped by principles as well as the norms shaped by the EU institutions (Bashirov and Yılmaz, 2020: Diez, 2005). The belief in the possibility of the successful completion of the accession process also gave legitimacy to the EU conditionality which culminated in the Copenhagen Criteria (Yılmaz and Soyaltın, 2014). The pro-EU coalition that extended beyond the government was crucial in the successful introduction of some constitutional changes introduced in traditionally problematic and politically sensitive areas including those on minority rights as well as on freedom of expression and association (Keyman and Öniş, 2007; Aydın-Düzgüt, 2007).

³ For a discussion on different aspects of domestic factors see: Yılmaz, 2014.

The second phase (roughly between 2005 and 2011) is termed "Selective Europeanisation" during which the reforms continued but at a slower pace and with a limited scope (Yılmaz, 2016).⁴ The areas of reform were hand-picked (Yılmaz, 2016) by the government and as such while the reforms that would help the government consolidate its power through the elimination of military tutelage were pushed forward, issues considered to be politically sensitive, such as minority rights were left out of focus (Müftüler Baç and Keyman, 2012). The suggestions of alternative paths for the future role of Turkey in the EU such as one of a "privileged partnership" instead of a full-membership (Noutcheva and Aydın-Düzgit, 2012) as well as Cyprus' accession to the European Union in 2004 further complicated the process. The declining legitimacy of the EU conditionalities has contributed to the weakening and eventual breakdown of the pro-EU coalition that was instrumental in the previous phase (Yılmaz and Soyaltın, 2014).

The Turkey-EU relations have gone into a phase of de-Europeanisation in 2011 where we observed a distancing from the expectations about norms and policies that drove the Europeanisation process and resulted in the decreasing of the EU as the reference point of discussion in public debates (Aydın-Düzgit and Kaliber, 2016). While some legal changes continued to be initiated, mostly in the form of judicial reforms, rather than the anchoring role that the EU has been playing in varying degrees, it was mostly the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party) - AKP's political agenda and the image it framed for itself as the "sole democratising actor" that were guiding these reforms (Çınar, 2011). The majority that AKP held in the parliament eliminated the need for the continued support of a pro-EU coalition in shaping such reforms (Yılmaz, 2016). As a result, the "lock-in effect" that the earlier periods of Europeanisation were expected to have on the government's decision by increasing the costs of deviation were not realised (Schimmelfennig, 2005; Saatçioğlu, 2016).

The process of de-Europeanisation can be better understood if seen through the lenses of an increasingly transactional approach adopted in Turkish foreign policy.⁵ While the concept of transactionalism is not new, former US president Donald Trump's foreign policy decisions increased the salience of the concept.⁶ Transactionalism is an approach to foreign policy that prioritises bilateral relations over multilateral ones and focuses on short-term strategic gains that are based on a zero-sum understanding of politics (Bashirov and Yılmaz, 2020: 165).

⁴ This period is also referred to as "stagnant Europeanisation" and "slowing Europeanisation". See Beken Saatçioğlu (2016).

⁵ While some consider transactionalism as a separate phase of Turkey-EU relations that followed the de-Europeanisation, this article approaches transactionalism as a broader trend that has been increasingly shaping Turkish foreign policy rather than a distinct stage on its own. See Bashirov and Yılmaz 2016.

⁶ Joseph Nye (2020) argued that President Trump's policy was shaped by "transactional myopia".

Transactionalism does not appear in a political vacuum, it has a specific appeal to populist leaders as they are more likely to have an appetite for short-term sensational successes that can be advertised to local constituencies (Zoellick, 2017; Bashirov and Yılmaz, 2020: 168).

One of the most visible examples of transactionalism in Turkey-EU relations is the case of the Turkey-EU deal regarding the Syrian refugees. In exchange for halting the refugee flows to the EU, the EU agreed to cut back on visa restrictions that Turkish citizens face in addition to a 6 billion Euros aid package to Turkey to ease the financial burden of hosting Syrian refugees and a promise to reignite the accession talks between the EU and Turkey that were stalled for a considerable time (Terry, 2021). The deal provided a short-term solution to a larger issue by invoking immediate economic benefits, which would have been addressed differently if the solution were to be based on so-called “European norms and values”. Bashirov and Yılmaz explain the impact of rising transactionalism on Turkey-EU relations as a process of the prospect of EU membership losing its “former ideational or identity-related meaning” and being replaced with an approach that ties the continuation of the relations to its fit to the new Turkish foreign policy priorities rather than it having a value of its own (Bashirov and Yılmaz 2020: 175). Not only the apparent financial incentives attached to the deal but also the reoccurring rhetoric in Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s speeches that threatens to “ship refugees to Europe” if the EU were to not meet Turkey’s expectations (Panayırıcı and Duygulu, 2017) is a further testament of the transactional nature of the issue. It should be noted that the short-term benefits of such a transactional approach to the issue of Syrian refugees were not only favoured by Turkey but also by the EU, as well (Bashirov and Yılmaz, 2020). This paper argues that incorporating the discussions surrounding transactionalism allows us to provide a better explanation for Turkey’s Roma inclusion policies that are discussed in the following parts.

3. The EU Policies for Roma Inclusion

Despite having no common minority policy, the EU has been trying to develop a common framework for Roma inclusion policies since the 1990s due to the accession process of the CEECs. The high-level conference on Roma inclusion in Hungary in 2003 led the way to the “Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015” (Kirova, date not specified). 12 countries joined the decade and the European Commission was one of the supporters of the activities conducted. The main priority areas were health, education, employment, and housing whereas discrimination, gender mainstreaming and poverty were designated as the cross-cutting core issues that had to be taken into consideration while preparing policies.

In 2004, the European Commission published a report detailing the European Policy Framework for Roma inclusion. The main suggestions were expanding anti-discrimination laws in Europe; establishing a pan-European steering group; promoting political participation of Roma; raising awareness about antigypsyism; monitoring antigypsyism; capacity-building for Roma organisations; a collection of ethnic data; developing legislation at the EU level; prioritising social inclusion of Roma; policy mainstreaming; monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the EU and national policies; human rights monitoring (European Commission, 2004a; see also Sayan, 2019).

In 2008, the European Commission mentioned the need for overcoming the problems that Roma faced and introduced instruments for that purpose (European Commission, 2008a). Within the same year, a Roma Summit was gathered in Brussels for the first time with the participation of EU institutions, member states and civil society organisations (European Commission, 2008b). In 2009, “the European Platform for Roma Inclusion” was established to provide coordination and exchange among the actors through regular meetings (European Commission, 2009a). In 2010, the European Commission published another communication for the social and economic integration of Roma (European Commission, 2010a).

One of the milestones was in 2011 when the European Commission called member states to develop national Roma integration strategies until 2020 (European Commission, 2011a). The aim was to reach minimum standards across the EU until 2020 in four areas: access to education, employment, healthcare and housing (European Commission, 2011a). The European Commission suggested member states consider setting achievable goals; identifying the most disadvantaged regions; allocating a sufficient budget; including monitoring and evaluation mechanisms; incorporating Roma civil society; and appointing a national contact point while preparing their national Roma integration strategies (European Commission, 2011a). In 2011, the Council adopted “An EU Framework for National Strategies up to 2020”. Accordingly, the member states developed national Roma strategies to overcome the problems that Roma face in their own countries. The national strategies and their implementation were regularly assessed by the European Commission. Based on these assessments, the Council made further recommendations in 2013 (European Council, 2013).

However, none of the policies led to the expected outcomes until 2020. Therefore, in 2020, a new framework was suggested by the European Commission for the period of 2020-2030. The European Commission identified three horizontal and four sectoral objectives and provided a detailed guideline to realise them (European Commission, 2020a). The horizontal objectives

were fighting and preventing antigypsyism and discrimination; reducing poverty and social exclusion; promoting participation and the sectoral policy objectives were increasing access to education, employment, healthcare and housing (European Commission, 2020a). Within the same document, the European Commission underlined the EU's commitment to Roma equality, inclusion and participation beyond the EU particularly in the Western Balkans and enlargement countries (European Commission, 2020a). The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights published a monitoring framework for the renewed EU Roma strategic framework (2020).

4. Roma Inclusion Policies in Turkey

As discussed above, although the EU does not have a common minority policy, it has developed a framework for its member and accession states for Roma inclusion, equality and participation. Based on that framework, the EU analyses the situation in Turkey regularly and makes suggestions to target specific problems. In this part, we demonstrate selective Europeanisation and the reflection of de-Europeanisation and transactionalism in Turkey's Roma inclusion policies.

The EU has been publishing annual progress reports for Turkey to monitor its progress concerning the accession process since 1998 but it was in 2001 that the Roma was mentioned for the first time under the "Minority Rights and the Protection of Minorities" section. The progress report in 2002 mentions "the strong prejudice against Roma communities in Turkey" for the first time (European Commission, 2002). Since then, the reports have included the difficulties that Roma face in housing, education, health, employment and forced evictions (European Commission, 2003; 2004b; 2005; 2006; 2007; 2008c; 2009b; 2010b; 2011b; 2012; 2013; 2014b; 2015; 2016b; 2018; 2019; 2020b; 2021; 2022).

Attributing minority status to Roma does not fit the official minority policy of Turkey. Legally, only non-Muslims have a minority status in Turkey as a result of the Lausanne Treaty of 1923. It is also not very common for Roma in Turkey to identify as a "minority" either. As minority has a "non-Muslim" connotation in Turkish political culture, Roma often state that "they are not minorities, but they are Roma, Muslim and Turkish" (Akkan, 2018: 12; Özateşler, 2016: 67-77). They feel obliged to underline that they are not seeking minority rights but base their claims on equal and fair treatment as fellow citizens. The official minority policy is one of the reasons that Turkey did not join the Decade of Roma Inclusion. This issue is also emphasised by the interviewees:

“The state does not consider Roma as a minority. They do not want to frame Roma as a problematic community. If they accept [Roma being a minority], they will need to face other kinds of things. That's why they claim that other groups also have similar problems as Roma. They think that others will also demand positive discrimination if they accept it. It can be solved based on human rights” (Interview 11).

“They [state] have fears. The establishment of a political party for Roma confused them. They are afraid of the Roma issue evolving into something else... Of course, the state won't let it happen but it was not necessary [to establish a political party]... We need equal rights.” (Interview 6).

As the quotations above exemplify, the interviewees also emphasised how the state does not consider Roma inclusion policies as a minority rights issue.

4.1 Amendment of the Discriminatory Legislation

Between 2001 and 2006, each progress report mentioned the need to amend the discriminatory articles of the Law of Settlement (2510) which was dated back to 1934 (European Commission, 2001; 2002; 2003; 2004b; 2005; 2006). Article 4 was banning nomadic gypsies to be accepted into the country while Article 9 was listing the conditions for assimilating Turkish nomadic gypsies and expelling the foreign nomadic gypsies (TC Resmi Gazete, 1934). None of the articles was included in the new Settlement Law (5543) of 2006 (TC Resmi Gazete, 2006).

However, the Law of Settlement and Movement of Foreigners that is dated back to 1950 has a similar clause about expelling gypsies who are stateless, foreign or not devoted to Turkish culture (Erten, 2015: 7). The progress reports between 2006 and 2011 criticised this clause (European Commission, 2006; 2007; 2008c; 2009b; 2010b; 2011b) and it was amended in 2011 with the law no. 6097 (TC Resmi Gazete, 2011). In 2013, a new Law on Foreigners and International Protection (6458) was passed.

Another legislation that had a discriminatory clause towards Roma was the directive regulating the police, although not mentioned in the progress reports. While Article 134 of the original text from 1979 listed "gypsies who do not have a proper job" as one of the groups that the police had to be careful about (Foggo, 2006); that clause was removed in 2006 and new law no. 7068 on law enforcement was passed in 2018 (TC Resmi Gazete, 2018). Therefore, discriminatory

clauses towards Roma were removed from legislation between 2006 and 2011 per the EU suggestions. Furthermore, new legislation replaced the existing ones.⁷

4.2. Adoption of National Roma Strategy and Action Plans

In 2011, when the European Commission urged member states to prepare national Roma inclusion strategies, the progress report for Turkey also underlined for the first time that "a comprehensive policy to address the situation of the Roma is missing" (European Commission, 2011b: 39-40). The following year, the progress report called for the establishment of a comprehensive strategy (European Commission, 2012). In 2013, the progress report mentioned the first contacts between the Ministry of Family and Social Planning (MoF), Ministry of Labour (MoL), Ministry of Education (MoE) and Roma civil society to develop a national strategic action plan (European Commission, 2013).

The first workshop with Roma representatives was already organised in 2009 and the process called "Roma Opening" was initiated by the government. In addition to that, visa liberalisation between the EU and Turkey became a part of the agenda during that period. To obtain visa liberalisation with the EU, Turkey had to fulfil certain criteria among which were the improvements in the conditions of Roma. The Commission Review Document for Visa Liberalisation recommended Turkey to adopt a national Roma inclusion strategy and action plan; allocate sufficient resources for the implementation of the strategy and the action plan; gather data; support housing policies; and adopt anti-discrimination legislation (European Commission, 2014a).

The second review in 2016 underlined the need for the adoption of the national action plan and involvement of Roma civil society (European Commission, 2016a). Consequently, the 62nd (2014-2015) and 64th governments (2015-2016) mentioned Roma in the government programs for the first time. While the 62nd government program was stating the government's decision to improve the living conditions of Roma (TBMM, 2014); the 64th government program was arguing the elimination of all discrimination through accelerating the solutions for Roma citizens including education, employment and housing (T24, 2015). Moreover, Roma was mentioned in the 2016 action plan of the 64th government:

⁷ The EU also urges member and candidate states to pass anti-discrimination laws or amend the existing ones and establish public institutions such as equality bodies. As these suggestions are not solely targeting Roma inclusion but rather as a part of the general human rights framework, they are not included in this article. For further discussion on this topic see: Turanlı, 2021.

Table 1. Action Plan of 64th Government

Fundamental Rights and Freedoms					
Action No	Action	Responsible Institution	Related Institutions	Beginning and End of the Action	Explanation of the Action
7	New actions will be taken by evaluating the previous actions taken to solve the problems of Roma citizens	Prime Ministry	MoF, MoL, Ministry of Environment and Urbanization, MoE, Housing Development Administration (TOKİ), NGOs	21 December 2015 21 March 2016	Action will be taken to eliminate all discrimination grounds; primarily education, employment and housing, by speeding up the solution to the problems of our Roma citizens.

Source: Adopted and translated from (TUSEV, 2016).

In addition to that, the 64th government amended the national action plan for the EU accession in accordance with the action plan of the 64th government:

Table 2. National Action Plan for the EU Accession (2016-2019)

No	Institutional Structure/ Other Actions	Aim	Current Status	Responsible Institution	Implementation Period
2	Social Policy and Strategy Document and Action Plan for Roma Citizens	It is aimed to strengthen the social and political participation of Roma within the framework of EU Roma inclusion and integration objectives.	In preparation	MoF	2016 1. Period

Source: Adopted and translated from (EU Ministry, 2016).

In April 2016, "The Strategy for Roma People 2016-2021" was finally adopted (MoF, 2016). The strategy identified strategic goals for improving the conditions in education, employment, health, housing, social services and social assistance. However, the adopted document was different from the draft document that was developed in cooperation with Roma civil society (MoF, 2015). First of all, the strategic goals under these defined areas were significantly reduced. Table 3 below illustrates the number of adopted and left-out strategic goals:

Table 3. Number of Adopted and Left-out Strategic Goals

	Number of Adopted Strategic Goals	Number of Left-out Strategic Goals
Education	3	10
Employment	4	12
Health	3	3
Housing	3	0
Social Services and Social Assistance	2	3

Among the left-out strategic goals, there were items related to the extra support for courses; organizing extra-curricular activities; improving the infrastructure of the schools in disadvantaged neighbourhoods; giving training on anti-discrimination and fundamental rights; organizing vocational training; establishing traineeship programs for Roma youth; providing assistance for the preparation of public service entrance exams. In addition to the strategic goals, some of the policy areas and related strategic goals were also left out of the final document such as improving the efficiency of social inclusion policies; improving the access to public services; and fighting against discrimination and prevention of hate crimes.

Another subject that was left out in the final document was the horizontal policy areas. In the draft document, horizontal policy areas were defined as the goals that should always be taken into consideration while implementing the main policy areas. They were named as; fighting against discrimination and access to equal rights; providing gender equality; strengthening the social participation and development of civil society; building intercultural dialogue and employing Roma mediators; supporting families with children and protecting children's rights; protecting disabled rights and support to disabled persons; special policies for youth. This part was excluded from the final document but some of the items were moved to the next part of the

document, which was the fundamental implementation principles. Therefore, the fundamental implementation principles were also different in the draft and final documents.

The final document renamed anti-discrimination; improving social participation and civil society; and giving priority to disadvantaged groups as the fundamental implementation principles. The other fundamental implementation principles in the final document were policy-making and implementation based on data; a regional approach with a definite goal that does not lead to social exclusion; inter-institutional coordination and holistic political approach; creating policies and their activities based on local needs; effective monitoring system and re-designing; paying attention to the European experiences and European Union policies; promoting transparency, accountability and participation; establishing respect and dialogue for basic human rights and difference. The fundamental principles that were mentioned in the draft document but not in the final document were; aiming for mainstream public services and public life; coordination between the institutions and comprehensive policy approach; coordination with national policies and mainstreaming.

In the Implementation Process and Method part, the Ministry of Family and Social Policy was designated as the main institution responsible for the implementation of the document. However, timetables were different in the draft and final documents. While the draft document envisioned two-year implementation periods between 2015 and 2020 (2015-2016, 2017-2018, 2019-2020); the final document announced three-year implementation periods between 2016 and 2021 (2016-2018, 2019-2021).

Another major difference in this part was the budget provisions. The draft document envisioned that the 2015-2016 expenses would be covered by the EU's Instrument for pre-Accession Assistance II (IPA II) and the remaining activities should be allocated a sufficient budget by the state. Yet, the final document did not specify any budgetary allocation.

Both documents envisaged the establishment of a Monitoring and Evaluation Board among the representatives of relevant ministries, NGOs, academics and professional organisations to monitor the implementation of policies. The Board was supposed to meet every February. However, the monitoring and evaluation indicators that were listed in the draft document were completely excluded from the final document. The draft document identified structural, process-related, outcome related and verification-related indicators for all of the strategic goals. None of these was included in the final document.

Lastly, the draft document suggested making an action plan for each of the strategic goals that include the action, indicators, data sources, responsible institutions, implementation period, horizontal areas, explanations, budget source and budget. Nevertheless, the 1st Action Plan accompanying the national strategy only identified the action, responsible institutions, relevant institutions, action's start date and definition of action.

In the 2016 progress report, the adoption of the 2016-2021 national strategy and 2016-2018 action plan was praised as positive steps (European Commission, 2016b). On the other hand, the lack of sufficient budget allocation, measurable indicators, time-bound targets and effective monitoring mechanisms were criticised in the following reports (European Commission, 2018; 2019; 2020b; 2021; 2022).

In 2018, the 2nd Action Plan for 2019-2021 was adopted (Aile ve Çalışma Bakanlığı, 2018). The action plan this time was more detailed as it included action, responsible institutions, expected budget resources, and a short definition (aim, actions, expected outcomes, location, stakeholders, explanation) for strategic goals. Still, the budget resources were left vague as "general budget" and "international funding" rather than allocating specific funding. Moreover, monitoring and evaluation indicators were not included. Hence, similar to prior progress reports, 2020, 2021 and 2022 progress reports praised the adoption of the second action plan for 2019-2021 but criticised the effectiveness of monitoring mechanisms, budget allocation and inclusiveness (European Commission, 2020b; 2021; 2022).

The final document excluded some main policy areas, strategic goals, and horizontal policy areas. It also did not have monitoring and evaluation indicators, a clear budget or a sufficient action plan. The interviewees explain their disappointment as:

“The state does not have a policy. They do not have a favourable opinion of Roma. Only because of the visa liberalisation process, they published the strategy. ROMFO [Roma federation] prepared a 57-page long document, they cut it into 12 pages. They did nothing” (Interview 2).

“I do not think the state supports Roma. There was the Roma Opening, then the strategic plan, the parliamentarians. But no long-term policy was produced. It was more of a show off” (Interview 11).

“The strategy passed because of the visa liberalisation process. It did not have a budget, a timeline. It was only done on paper as a pragmatic choice” (Interview 13).

Thus, the differences between draft and final documents created a disappointment for Roma civil society, especially for those who had been involved in the consultation process to write the document.

4.3. Implementation of National Roma Strategy

Despite all the suggestions, the National Roma Strategy did not have a clear budget. Rather the financial aspect was connected to the accession process to the EU through IPA II and the project of "Promoting Social Inclusion in Densely Roman Populated Areas Operation (SIROMA)" with an 11.5 million Euro budget (Ministry of Labour and Social Security). SIROMA was supposed to be implemented between 2015 and 2017 to realise the strategic goals of the National Roma Strategy.

Initially, the project was designed for three years but the delays caused it to end in 20 months.⁸ 12 pilot cities (Ankara, Adana, Balıkesir, Hatay, Edirne, Eskişehir, İstanbul, İzmir, Kırklareli, Manisa, Mersin and Tekirdağ) were selected for implementation. As a part of the project, 20 Social Services Coordination Units were established and mediators were employed in 12 pilot cities. Social Services Coordination Units provided the coordination between public institutions for the education, vocational training, lifelong learning, health, social protection and social assistance sectors whereas the mediators aimed to increase the access of disadvantaged persons to those services. Within the scope of SIROMA; the largest quantitative research was conducted in 44 pilot schools in 12 cities and in total 6.201 people were trained while 3831 of them were Roma who attended the educational, vocational training and entrepreneurship courses (MoL).

However, the implementation of SIROMA had shortcomings. The first shortcoming of SIROMA is its late start and consequent short implementation period. Secondly, some of the interviewees are critical of the project design. They thought the Roma civil society should have been involved more by allocating more funds. Another criticism of the project design is about the selection of pilot cities and pilot schools within the cities. The critics argue that cities that have a larger Roma population and schools with a larger number of Roma students should have been selected. Another line of criticism is about the sustainability of the project. During the project implementation period, it was promised to continue the Social Services Coordination Units and mediators. Nevertheless, their duties ended with the project. Lastly, as the SIROMA website is not functional anymore, the activities or research findings are not easily accessible.

⁸ An interviewee says it was even 17 months as they could not work for 3 months after the July 15 coup attempt (Interview 7).

“SIROMA is successful on paper but I think they could do better with that kind of funding. It failed in sustainability. Social Services Coordination Units and mediators were supposed to continue but did not.” (Interview 5)

“Roma Opening could not be realised but it created an awareness. Roma became visible because of the EU process and visa liberalisation. SIROMA was really bad. If an NGO did it with that kind of budget, we would criticise it harshly. But it was the state and public institutions. We cannot reach the website of SIROMA right now. There were a lot of reports [we cannot reach]. There is no monitoring mechanism. It would be great to keep Social Services Coordination Units and mediators. It is better to involve more Roma. It would create more awareness. We need to strengthen this.” (Interview 9)

“SIROMA could be successful but the resources were wasted. It could not produce an outcome for the Roma community to transform itself. There is nothing for us, NGOs, to benefit from. The project design was not meeting the needs of the community. It could not reach the community.” (Interview 12).

Yet, some of the interviewees find SIROMA as an important first step. However, they expected to continue with a similar project by overcoming its shortcomings.

“I find SIROMA very important. At least, there was an action about Roma. It created a memory. But the downside was that the state wanted to do it easily. It was based on projects and continuity could not be provided” (Interview 2).

“SIROMA had many shortcomings but still it was the right project. For the first time, the state used Roma mediators. Social Services Coordination Units were opened and they have to be opened again. We learnt a lot. However, it was designed by people who did not have any experience in the field. Some cities were wrong. They included Hatay and Antakya but excluded Bursa, Çanakkale, and Kocaeli. Some of the pilot schools were wrong. They picked the closest schools sometimes, not schools with 100% Roma students. There was vocational training but they forgot to include a budget line for cleaning materials. We could not buy them. Another shortcoming was the duration, we only worked for 17 months. It was supposed to be three years... SIROMA cannot be the state's Roma policy. They asked us to do it and we did. But what has changed?” (Interview 7).

After the completion of SIROMA, no comprehensive action was taken. An agreement to have an EU-Turkey Roma Seminar was mentioned in the 2018 progress report (European Commission, 2018), but it has not taken place yet. In 2020, a new project called “Technical Assistance for Establishing Strong Monitoring, Evaluation and Coordination Mechanism for National Roma Integration Strategy (for the Action Plans) (ROMSID)” began, funded by the European Union with a budget of 1.827.250 Euro for 24 months (EuropeAid). Although the project identified 17 different actions, no detailed information can be reached through its website (ROMSID).

Hence, the visa liberalisation process with the EU became a catalyst for the adoption of the national Roma strategy and the action plans; however, the adopted documents and the implementation process fell short of expectations. This case demonstrates selective Europeanisation and the transactional basis of EU-Turkey relations.

4.4. Access to Healthcare

While healthcare was considered one of the most problematic areas where Roma face difficulties in terms of access and discriminatory practices (European Commission, 2005; 2006; 2007; 2008c; 2012; 2013; 2014b); improvements were noted in 2015 and 2016 reports (European Commission, 2015; 2016b). Similarly, access to healthcare is one policy area in which the interviewees say there was a progress (Interviews 4; 7; 12). As Turkey has universal healthcare, the improvement cannot be considered a result of the Roma inclusion process. Moreover, one interviewee claims although access to healthcare is improved, other problems such as discrimination in health services, environmental problems and housing continue (Interview 12).

5. Conclusion

In this article, we analyse how Roma inclusion was integrated into the political agenda of Turkey due to the EU accession process. Both the descriptive analysis of the legal frameworks and policy initiatives as well as interviews with members of Roma civil society revealed that while the Roma inclusion policies were instrumental in putting the discrimination that Roma face on the political and societal agenda, they fell short of creating tangible and durable change in the lives of the community. Moreover, as Turkey's relations with the EU deteriorated over time, the EU's ability to influence policy choices in Turkey has decreased. The rise of transactionalism in Turkish foreign policy contributed to EU-led initiatives to be treated as bargaining chips in Turkey-EU relations.

This in return, shifted government attention away from the issue and curtailed the civil society's ability to apply pressure for institutionalised change.

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