



# NEW KNOWLEDGE about Hungary

This briefing note highlights NEW KNOWLEDGE about Hungary.  
We present here new knowledge and key messages for policy makers and civil society.

On-going project

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## ACCOMMODATING ETHNIC AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN HUNGARY

Questions about tolerance in Hungary need to be understood in the larger context of Hungarian nationalism. The 'Nation' has figured prominently in Hungarian political and social life over the last century and a half; it has even overshadowed to a certain extent traditional left-right political cleavages in various east European contexts. In recent years, nationalism has manifested itself in **negative attitudes towards foreigners (xenophobia)** and the **increasing prejudice, rejection, and negative attitudes towards internal minorities (mainly the Roma)**. This is accompanied by claims of cultural supremacy and the rejection of 'difference'.

The most significant tolerance challenges in Hungary today are related to the situation of the Roma. Their 'otherness' has been constructed differently from other groups for a variety of complex historical and social reasons. At present, Roma are the target of intense xenophobia, prejudice, and racism in Hungary. This is due in part to the **rise of the extreme right** who have turned new (and negative) attention on the Roma, further **legitimizing the radicalization of more mainstream discourses** in the process. But the extreme right is both cause and consequence of this: anti-Roma prejudices can and also should be viewed more generally as a 'cultural code' shared to varying degrees and with different interpretation in mainstream political discourse and indeed at a societal level more generally as well. In different ways, a wide range of political processes contribute to the ethnicisation of Hungary's social, political, and economic problems by making a scapegoat of the Roma.

In the ACCEPT PLURALISM project we investigated how ethnic and cultural diversity is accommodated in two very important areas: **education** and **political life**. In each domain we concentrated our investigations on the Roma.

- In **education**, we examined two issues that are of major importance from the point of view of 'tolerance' and 'diversity' in present day Hungary. The first dealt with the complex and multifaceted issue of the segregation of Roma children in the education system. The second focused on the curriculum: how diversity questions related to the Roma minority were manifested in the content of the curriculum.
- In **politics**, we studied the radicalisation of media discourse related to the rise of the far right by examining the media coverage of two murders, one in which the Roma were the perpetrators and in the other in which they were the victims. We also reviewed public debate on the question of Roma integration and the end of political correctness as it appeared in the mainstream media.

### Evaluation of discourses and practices in our case studies:

	Institutional and legal framework	Public discourses	Practice
Segregation of Roma children and desegregation/integration policies	tolerant	blurred meaning of tolerance/'reverse respect' (exclusion)	intolerant
Cultural accommodation of the Roma in the education system	(changing paradigms) 'real respect'/tolerance/ 'reversed respect'	(no dominant discourse) 'real respect'/tolerant/ 'reversed respect' (exclusion)	(no dominant practice) 'real respect'/tolerance/ 'reversed respect'
The radicalization of the media discourse and the rise of the far right	tolerant/respect	dominantly intolerant or 'reverse respect' (exclusion)	intolerant

## SEGREGATION OF ROMA CHILDREN AND DESEGREGATION/INTEGRATION POLICIES

The **most important educational issue for the Roma** in the last decade has been the **desegregation of the school system** and the **integration of Roma pupils** into mainstream education. The Hungarian school system is highly selective in a way that leads to severe inequalities in the education system. Due to various structural and attitudinal reasons, children of higher social status end up in much better schools than their peers from lower social status. The selectivity of the system is further exacerbated by the fact that the proportion of Roma among the low status children is significantly high.

In 2002 the government launched a set of policy initiatives designed to tackle school segregation. The implementation of these initiatives was accompanied by three different kinds of discourses by different policy actors:

- A **'firm advocacy'** discourse was a clear-cut case of **tolerance** insofar as it emphasised **acceptance of the 'other' as the ultimate goal**. This acceptance could only be achieved by teaching Roma and non-Roma (disadvantaged and middle-class children) in the same classrooms and schools.
- An **'unintentional segregation'** discourse similarly stressed that learning to accept others required early socialisation. Segregation was, however, interpreted as a 'natural' and irreversible process. From this perspective, segregation could thus be justified and even be beneficial to the children. As such, the **meaning of tolerance was blurred** since it is not clear how the distant other would be or should be viewed or treated.
- A third discourse that **'justified segregation'** is an example of what we have termed **'reverse respect'**. In the name of respect for cultural diversity, proponents of this view endorsed separate education for Roma so that the Roma may better preserve their customs, language and identity. It is questionable whether those articulating such views had the best interests of the Roma in mind. To the contrary, they may have been more interested in protecting the cultural integrity of the majority nation against encroachments from the Roma; hence the term, 'reverse respect'.

Desegregation policy initiatives have been formally integrated into the current system, but the **overall social and political reception of the policy has been negative**, either stressing the unintentionality of school segregation or justifying it.

## CULTURAL ACCOMMODATION OF THE ROMA IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

The cultural accommodation of Roma in the Hungarian school system also pertains to the question of **how the Roma culture and history is represented in textbooks**, whether there is a **need for separate minority education** and **how 'tolerance issues' with regards to the Roma is manifested in schools**, especially in pedagogical methods.

The discourse analysis of the issue of the cultural accommodation of Roma in the school system revealed three types of formulations of the problem. The **essentialist-culturalist** type sees Roma cultural difference basically in essential terms. Although well-intended, this approach results in promoting a type of curriculum **that treats Roma not as an integral part of the society but as a group apart** characterized by specific cultural traits. This approach can be contrasted with the second type, the **multiculturalist**, that also emphasises the cultural distinctiveness of Roma but it starts from a **constructivist understanding of culture**. It underlines that Roma culture should be seen as a social historical construction. The **social integrationist** perceives Roma cultural difference also from a constructivist point of view but it ascribes **difference to the 'culture of poverty'** arguing that **Roma otherness is a result of their historically low social status**.

The different understandings of Roma culture have implications as to the 'tolerance framework' devised in the Accept Pluralism project. We have found a case of **'reversed respect'**: the essentialist-culturalists argue for a type of 'respect' that has the **intention to keep the other at a distance**. Cultural difference is glorified as long as it remains intact and **does not assimilate to the mainstream culture**. The argument lacks references to human rights or excluded the possibility of cooperation between the majority and the minority cultures. The multiculturalists, on the other hand, stress recognition of cultural difference along with the respect of human rights and **mutual understanding** of majority and minority. Finally, the social integrationists could be seen as promoters of **'tolerance'** by drawing on such values as **human rights and cooperation** between groups without giving importance to culture and cultural difference. Currently, the Hungarian education system can be characterized as a mixture of these three different approaches.

## THE RADICALIZATION OF THE MEDIA DISCOURSE AND THE RISE OF THE FAR RIGHT

In Hungary in the last couple of years we have witnessed the **rise of radical racist discourse**. The **radical rightwing party succeeded** in setting the terms of political debate and bringing the Roma question back to centre stage. This resulted in calls to **'break taboos'** to allow for a sincere **biologically** and a **culturally informed discussion of difference**. Both forms of discourse lead to exclusion.

Our interest throughout the ACCEPT PLURALISM project has been in examining the ways in which both radical and mainstream discourse have contributed to the reproduction and legitimation of anti-Roma attitudes and actions in Hungary. Our analysis considered **the radical right's discourses** on these issues and how they **ultimately fed into more moderate or mainstream political and public debate**.

In our case study we analysed media representations surrounding two murder cases (with the Roma as the perpetrators in the first one and the victims in the second one); we then concluded with a debate on 'Roma integration and the end of political correctness' as it appeared in left orientated papers. Our main purpose was to show the **range of reactions to the radical right** and how the Roma issue was thematised through engagement with these two murder cases. This shed light on the ways in which radical right discourses spread to mainstream discourses.

Our analysis revealed **intolerant discourses** not only from the **radical right** media but from the **conservative media as well**. In these media, the Roma were often characterised as **biologically different**: their **innate inclination for crime** means that they **cannot be**

tolerated.

The **leftist** media in contrast emphasized **tolerance through norms of human rights and non-discrimination**. It was revealed, however, that the leftist media was also influenced by the intolerant radical discourses. In the debate on Roma integration we found the emphasis switching to the Roma's purported cultural distinctiveness. This more **culturalist interpretation** was nevertheless still **exclusionary in its effects**, even if it was coming from the left. The main distinction between the left on the one hand and the right and radical right on the other was in the **degree of their exclusion**.

We also considered how these discourses related to our non-tolerance–tolerance–acceptance model. We have argued that both the **radical right and the conservative** media displayed **intolerant** discursive strategies that invoked the **putative biological differences** of the Roma: “The Roma are not deserving of toleration given their genetically innate inclination to crime.” The **leftist daily** in contrast used discursive strategies that emphasised **tolerance** through a respect of basic human rights and non-discrimination. In the integration debate we found that the **‘end of political correctness’** and **‘peculiar Roma culture’** were used to stress the cultural distinctiveness of the Roma (not in genetic but cultural terms). The **recognition of this distinctiveness**, however, does not point to the integration of the Roma but on the contrary, to their **continued exclusion**.

These findings point to a **growing tendency of non-tolerant public discourse** in Hungary that spread to almost all corners of the political spectrum. There are several political and social processes that contribute to this trend of non-tolerance:

- The rise of radical racist discourses which has accompanied the political successes of the **radical right wing party**, Jobbik, has **set the political and media agenda** by **thematizing the ‘Roma question’**.
- **Non-radical political and public figures from both the left and right** have responded to this thematisation of the ‘Roma question’ in a way that **has not excluded non-tolerant racist discourses**. Indeed, they have often been **complicit in legitimating non-tolerant discourses**. By acting as **partners in ‘breaking taboos’**, they have simultaneously been **breaking with the tolerant language** that supposedly accompanied those taboos.
- In the current non-tolerant climate, **accepting the (cultural) difference** of other ethnic groups has become **impossible**. **‘Roma cultural difference’** instead was ‘accepted’, though in a somewhat ambiguous way: its **existence was acknowledged, but as grounds for deliberate exclusion**.
- In Hungary as in some other post-socialist countries, **non-tolerance** has troublingly become a rally cry of a good number of **political and public actors, often irrespective of political affiliation**. **State institutions, political parties and the media have joined forces** to fuel suspicion of Roma difference, be it biological or cultural. As a result, tolerance as a value and discourse has suffered, embraced by only a handful of actors increasingly marginal to the political mainstream.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Various social actors from the field of education have claimed that **segregation of the Roma is legitimate and justified under certain circumstances**. Typically, these actors invoked **culturalist arguments** about ethnic difference, claiming that the Roma are a culturally distinct group with a desire to remain separate from the majority society. Therefore, it is in their best interest to segregate them, that is, to let them live as they wish. Although different stakeholders expressed different views, this undercurrent of cultural distinctiveness (and its justification of segregation) was dominant and widespread.

At the same time, **cultural distinctiveness in the curriculum** was treated either as **unnecessary** (there was no need to mention Roma in textbooks) or **if acknowledged the**

**Roma were presented as 'outsiders'**. As a result, topics related to the Roma were taught only in classrooms with exclusively Roma pupils; majority pupils therefore are not exposed to anything having to do with Roma culture, or history. This educational phase of socialisation goes by without any opportunity to learn about or appreciate the 'difference' that exists in society. Pupils do not learn how to relate to other ethnic groups.

The **media**, in contrast, presented both tolerant and intolerant discourses. The main question that concerns us is which discourses were more dominant or influential: those that were tolerant, or those promoting intolerance. As we observed, over time, the **radical racist discourses became increasingly common and accepted**. This was due in part to a number of incidents that led to the **abandonment of political correctness**. Ultimately, the mainstream media started using discourses that could be joined with the more racist versions favoured by the radical right. In the mainstream media, cultural differences were presented and understood as unchangeable and therefore deterministic: Roma desire to remain outside of majority society by refusing to embrace its norms and values. The **radical right** used **both biological and cultural explanations of difference** whereas the **mainstream media** distinguished itself by claiming that **its cultural interpretations protect it from the sorts of accusations of racism** that the extreme right have faced. Nevertheless, the logic and aim of biological and cultural racism is the same: to maintain social distance and hierarchies by excluding certain groups.

The common denominator in all of these questions is **'Roma cultural difference'**. This is not only found informing these various discourses, it also explains the ways in which different positions of non-tolerance, tolerance, and acceptance/respect are formulated with respect to the Roma in Hungary. The most important feature of the Roma's distinctiveness is presented as their **deliberate outsider-ness**. This is only one of their supposed traits, but it has become the dominant one. This understanding of Roma difference appears in all areas of public life in Hungary. It is repeatedly invoked to **legitimise exclusionary practices and policies** with respect to **education** and as found in the **media**. We labelled this discourse **'reverse respect'**, and we identified it as contributing to the spread and growth of intolerance in Hungary. Under the **pretext of 'respect' and 'tolerance'**, the proponents of 'reverse respect' are actually **promoting exclusion**. Moreover, the genuine respect we identified in multiculturalist discourse is negligent in its influence on the wider public.

Hungary is thus a **paradox**. It **recognises the Roma as culturally distinct**; indeed, it reifies and **essentialises their cultural distinctiveness**, observed both in the field of education and political discourse. But this **recognition is not based on respect**, as we see in the ACCEPT framework. Rather, it is **based on racism**: the Roma are not just culturally distinct, they are **culturally inferior**, and that cultural inferiority prevents their full incorporation into Hungarian society. This is **intolerance, feebly masked as cultural recognition**. This intolerance may have the radical right as its strongest advocates, but what is perhaps most disturbing from our analysis is the extent to which **the racism voiced by the radical right is used by the mainstream media and political actors** as well. There is widespread consensus that Roma problem is just that: a problem, and the problem is with the Roma, and their deficient culture. This in a sense relieves majority Hungarians of the responsibility to accommodate the Roma. Indeed, it becomes an argument for the non-tolerance of the Roma: **their cultural deficiencies must not be tolerated any longer**.

This **profound intolerance** raises important questions about the relationship between racism and intolerance. To be sure, racism can be found in countries of immigration as well. But whilst this racism typically only becomes explicit on the fringes in these other countries (claimed by the radical right or voiced on extremist websites), the Hungarian case shows **how racism has gone mainstream in Hungary**.

## FURTHER READINGS

To read more on the research findings presented here, see:

### **Tolerance and Cultural Diversity Concepts and Practices in Hungary**

By Zsuzsanna Vidra, Jon Fox, Anikó Horváth (Central European University and University of Bristol)

Download your copy from:

<http://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/23402>

Other relevant publications include:

### **2012/02.2. Handbook on Tolerance and Diversity in Europe**

Anna Triandafyllidou (EUI)

Download your copy from:

<http://www.accept-pluralism.eu/Research/ProjectReports/Handbook.aspx>

## PROJECT IDENTITY

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>ACCEPT PLURALISM</b>
<b>Title</b>	<b>Tolerance, Pluralism and Social Cohesion: Responding to the Challenges of the 21st Century in Europe</b>
<b>Short Description</b>	<p>ACCEPT PLURALISM questions how much cultural diversity can be accommodated within liberal and secular democracies in Europe. The notions of tolerance, acceptance, respect and recognition are central to the project. ACCEPT PLURALISM looks at both native and immigrant minority groups.</p> <p>Through comparative, theoretical and empirical analysis the project studies individuals, groups or practices for whom tolerance is sought but which we should not tolerate; of which we disapprove but which should be tolerated; and for which we ask to go beyond toleration and achieve respect and recognition.</p> <p>In particular, we investigate when, what and who is being not tolerated / tolerated / respected in 15 European countries; why this is happening in each case; the reasons that different social actors put forward for not tolerating / tolerating / respecting specific minority groups/individuals and specific practices.</p> <p>The project analyses practices, policies and institutions, and produces key messages for policy makers with a view to making European societies more respectful towards diversity.</p>
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<b>Web site</b>	<a href="http://www.accept-pluralism.eu">www.accept-pluralism.eu</a>
<b>Duration</b>	March 2010-May 2013 (39 months)
<b>Funding scheme</b>	Small and medium-scale collaborative project
<b>EU contribution</b>	2,600,230 Euro
<b>Consortium</b>	17 partners (15 countries)
<b>Coordinator</b>	European University Institute, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies
<b>Scientific Coordinator</b>	Prof. Anna Triandafyllidou
<b>EC officer</b>	Ms Louisa Anastopoulou, Directorate General for Research and Innovation, European Commission