In recent years, widely reported clashes around the 'Gypsy question' have exploded one after another in connection with the enforced segregation - not infrequently the outright 'ghettoization' - of Roma within the framework of a number of local initiatives. These attempts at segregation were not confined to individual regions or types of settlement: there have been scandals in Transdanubia [the more 'advanced,' western part of Hungary], as well as in northern Hungary and in the Alföld [the Great Plain, a primarily agricultural area]; there have been attempts at 'ghetto-building' in urban areas just as often as in village locations, and in the declining countryside as often as in places which, despite the shocks resulting from the transition, have more or less managed to remain on their feet. These apparently local conflicts, which nevertheless seem to have nationwide ramifications, were in every case centered around the majority group - sometimes 'pulling strings,' sometimes relying on local organs of authority or coercion - physically forcing Roma into clearly separated places of residence, institutions, and different kinds of 'closed systems.' In the face of this compulsion applied by the majority Roma themselves have resorted

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1 The spatial diffusion of these attempts at segregation is evident even from a reading of the newspapers. We only need to mention a few incidents which have had nationwide resonance: the events of forceful removal of the Roma in Székesfehérvár in autumn 1997 (which extreme story has since taken on symbolic significance); the prevention of the settlement of Roma in Satoraljaujhely; the case of 'separate' graduation in Tiszavasvár. And if we extend the list with accounts from the local press concerning 'separate' pubs for 'Gypsies,' 'separate' school classes for 'Gypsy' children, public works program 'for Gypsies only,' and so on, it only becomes clearer that similar conflicts may be found more or less all over the country, and that their appearance is independent, not only of the proportion of Roma in the local population, but also of the living standards of a given community, or of the area's economic potential. The form which these conflicts take, however, does show significant differences - less in accordance with geographical factors than with social ones. Behind these differences lies a combination of socio-historical, economic, social, cultural, and political determinants. For more detail on these determinants and on regional differences, see the following: Gy. Csepeli, A. Orkény, and M. Székelyi (eds), Kisebbségszociológia [The sociology of minorities], (Budapest: ELTE Kisebbségszociológia Tanszék, 1997); F. Glatz (ed.): A cigányok Magyarországon [Gypsies in Hungary] (Budapest: MTA, 1999).
to radical means of self-defense, sometimes in the form of protest campaigns, sometimes through calling for the statutory intervention of the ombudsman whose task is to defend and interpret the constitutional rights of minorities, and sometimes through extremist attacks with a touch of 'Robin Hood'-ianism in them. Not only has the territorial extent of these forms of extreme conflict widened, but their occurrence is becoming more frequent as well. This is signalled by the facts that: decisions on the part of the authorities to put Roma children in separate school classes are becoming ever more 'customary';² that Roma families are now being excluded from individual local-council welfare assistance schemes on the basis of a clearly worked-out 'ideology' and formalized official 'routines';³ and that, among other things, employment on the basis of skin color has become 'accepted' personnel policy and a daily occurrence.⁴

Taking into account that the overwhelming majority of the abovementioned attempts at segregation were imposed upon Roma not primarily because of their material or cultural status, but rather because of their ethnic difference, we may perhaps venture the assertion that not only has the Hungarian-Roma conflict become more intense and more profound throughout the 1990s, but also, in comparison with former times, its dimension has changed: tensions now are not social, but rather take the form of majority-minority fights. Of course, it is not at all the case that in recent years the economic and social situation of Roma has significantly improved, and that the social dimension has thereby been driven into the background. The available research data rather show the opposite:⁵ whether we look at employment opportunities, schooling, incomes, or housing conditions, the gap between the majority and the Roma communities has grown visibly in the course of the last decade.⁶ One might better say that the social conflicts accompanying the falling-behind of the majority of Roma are somehow imbuing and, in a way, reshaping the prevailing majority-minority relations which would be strained in any case. However, the fact that this 'reshaping' is taking place is not self-explanatory. We have to dig a little deeper in order to understand it. Such an in-depth analysis is all the more important, because the dissolution of the 'social' element in the 'minority' dimension has far-reaching consequences: it is having a considerable influence on the physiognomy and everyday utilization of the minority institutions now beginning to take shape; furthermore, it is of decisive importance also for the delivery of different – 'traditional' – social services, this way affecting the entire welfare system of society.

⁴ Interviews with Roma workers on 'workfair'-type schemes and unemployed Roma; for more details, see: P. Vagi: Szekszárd (Budapest, Manuscript, 1999).
⁵ See the articles discussing distinct aspects of the problem in the following two volumes: F. Glatz (ed.), A cigányok Magyarországon and Á. Horváth, E. Landau and J. Szalai (eds.), Cigányok születni [Born 'Gypsy'], (Budapest: Új Mandátum - ATA, 2000).
⁶ It is also important to understand that, in parallel with this process, the internal differentiation of Roma society has also intensified.