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ROMANIA, BULGARIA JOIN EU; HUMAN RIGHTS IN QUESTION. “Fireworks, VIP guests, street parties, and live music are taking over Bucharest and Sofia on Sunday night, December 31, as two more states make the historic step of joining the European Union (EU), but many of the perks of EU membership are to stay on hold for years,” the news service EUObserver reported, noting that EU’s population has grown from 463 million people to 493 million, thus creating the biggest single market in the world. But, the independent news service added, the two new members, increasing membership to 27 states, are poorer than “the old EU15” and “have right-leaning views on issues such as immigration and gay rights. Corruption is so acute and the civil service so far behind EU norms that for the first time in enlargement history, Brussels has threatened to impose ‘safeguard clauses’ that could see the newcomers shut out of EU justice and home affairs co-operation and will force them to submit ‘progress reports’ every six months.”

In both Romania and Bulgaria, members of the Roma (Gypsy) minority, estimated to number several million, live in conditions comparable to the worst slums of the Third World. The news agency points out that one of the EU's fundamental principles -- freedom of movement -- “will be put under a question mark” as EU states Italy, Germany, France, the UK, the Netherlands, Austria, Denmark, Hungary, Ireland, and Belgium impose restrictions on Romanian and Bulgarian workers heading west. It is assumed that many if not most of the migrants would be Roma.

In Romania, there is the additional issue of the Hungarian minority, 1.5 million strong. They remain second-class citizens, and their autonomy and church properties have not been returned despite Romania’s EU treaty obligations and occasional official promises. The latest example of the harassment is the firing of two ethnic Hungarian professors -- Peter Hantz and Lehel Kovacs -- at Babes-Bolyai University because they placed Hungarian language inscriptions under Romanian signs at the formerly Hungarian and now supposedly multicultural institution. The EU requires bilingual signs in areas where a minority population is above 20% of the total -- which is the case in more than 1,000 localities in Transylvania.