

Human Dimension Implementation Meeting Warsaw, 21 September 2 October 2015

Working session 16, 1 October 2015

Lack of Political Representation of Roma in Hungary

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Ladies and Gentleman,

Roma people should not be second class citizens. Roma should have the same rights and obligations as any other Europeans. Although, it can be easily learnt that rights do not necessarily mean equality. Roma in Hungary are exposed to discrimination and exclusion from society in socioeconomic and political terms (Varadi and Virag, 2014).¹ Roma people have been politically marginalized, economically and socially excluded from society, being the “*most socioeconomically disadvantaged minority in Hungary*” (Schafft and Brown, 2000, 202.).² Moreover, Roma people face with the problem of segregated education, Anti-Gypsyism and systematic racism.

I would like to highlight a crucial issue, which is the question of Roma political representation. Political marginalization of Roma is considered as one of the most longstanding phenomenon that Roma people are facing with. Roma people have equal citizenship “*supposing the same claim in the distribution, control and exercise of political power as any other member of the political community.*” (Rovid, 2013). However, Roma lack the effective guarantees of the group-specific political participation and representation (Rovid, 2013). Roma people remain significantly “*underrepresented in the local, national and European level as well*” (Rovid, 2013).³

A new electoral law was accepted by the Parliament in 2011 containing a specific section regulating minority political representation. According to the law, the National Roma Self-

¹ Varadi, Monika and Virag Tunde. 2014. “Faces and Causes of Roma Marginalization: Experiences from Hungary.” In *Faces and Causes of Roma Marginalization in Local Contexts*, edited by Julia Szalai and Violetta Zentai, 35-65. Budapest: Center for Policy Studies Central European University

² Schafft, Kai A. and Brown, David L. 2000 “Social Capital and Grassroots Development: The Case of Roma Self-Governance in Hungary.” *Oxford University Press. Social Problems* 47: 201-219

³ Rovid, Marton. 2013. “Roma Rights: Challenges of Representation: Voice on Roma Politics, Power and Participation: Options of Roma Political Participation and Representation.” *ERRC - European Roma Rights Center*, August 22.

Government has the extraordinary right to launch a specific nationality list at the elections (Act CCIII of 2011).⁴ The problem with this set up is the fact that the National Roma Self-Government is closely related to the ruling party. Furthermore, the previous President of the National Roma Self-Government is still an MP of the ruling party. In other words, the ruling party has significant influence and effect on the National Roma Self-Government. Thus, there is concern that only those candidates will be on the nationality list who share the same political views as the ruling party. In the case there is a conflict between the interest of the ruling party and the interest of Roma. Whose interest will be represented by the National Roma Self-Government?

Another factor that further complicates the issue is the introduction of nationality registry. Voters have to register themselves in order to have right to vote on the nationality list. As the consequence, if people are registered, they do not have right to vote on the mainstream party list. This is political exclusion.

The electoral regulations in Hungary result in political dependency and exclusion from the mainstream politics.

I would like to make some *recommendations* regarding this problem:

- Other Roma organizations should have the right to appoint candidates on the nationality list. By this set up, not only government related people will have to chance to represent Hungary's biggest minority. Roma organizations will not be excluded and the principle of equal chance will not be violated.
- Alternatively, I would propose to introduce quota system by which Roma people could be represented in a more equal and powerful manner. Such system is already in place in some OSCE participating states.

We, Roma people urgently need real, effective and powerful political representation by which we will not be secondary citizens anymore. Political representation should be about equal access to power, resources and decisions. Not about ethnicity and skin color. Thank you.

⁴ Act CCIII of 2011. *About the Election of Member of Parliaments*