



*Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues*

**Briefing Paper**

**Joint European Commission and OSCE ODIHR Programme:  
“Roma use you ballot wisely!”**

**Country Profiles:  
Roma Participation in Elections in South-Eastern Europe  
2003 – 2005**

**Warsaw, December 2006**



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## INTRODUCTION

Given the importance of minority participation and representation in the political process of any country, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) has dedicated significant attention to these issues in the electoral context, both in terms of an analytical approach and through the practical work of election observation missions. The Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area (the *Action Plan*), under provision VI. *Enhancing participation in public and political life*, specifically highlights the necessity of integrating Roma and Sinti into the public sphere of majority societies:

*“Roma and Sinti people have an equal right to participate in public affairs. This includes the rights to vote, stand for election, participate in public affairs and form political parties without discrimination. Efforts made in recent years to foster Roma political participation should be encouraged, particularly those originating from the Roma groups themselves.”*

The OSCE/ODIHR Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues (CPRSI), in co-operation with the European Commission, began the project “Roma, use your ballot wisely!” (RUBW) in order to promote participation of Roma in the electoral process. The project targets Roma representatives and NGOs, including Roma political parties in South-Eastern Europe. The following countries are included in the project: Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Kosovo and Romania.

The RUBW project aims to promote participation of Roma in the electoral system as a means for effective implementation of Roma-related policies, and for mainstreaming Roma affairs in the stabilization and democratization processes in the countries of South-Eastern Europe. To achieve this, a two-fold strategy has been set: to facilitate mutual understanding and dialogue between local, regional and national authorities and Roma; and to empower Roma to become protagonists in the decisions involving them. The overall objective is for Roma to contribute to the democratic development and reconciliation of the society they live in.

The project promotes the full use of the electoral process as a mechanism for empowering Roma and for advocacy in view of policy measures adopted by OSCE participating States. The RUBW focuses on three main clusters of action: Cluster I: Increased participation of Roma in the election process, with focus on local elections; Cluster II: Advocacy and lobbying elected bodies (local and national) for implementation of specific measures of Roma policies; and Cluster III: Roma to Roma: exchange of experience and information at regional level.

This briefing paper draws on the findings of those Roma who participated in Cluster I activities during various elections throughout 2003 – 2005 in the RUBW target countries. The country profiles are drawn from reports submitted by various Roma consultants and NGOs working on election-related activities, including as short term observers (STOs) to OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Missions. Related activities include information campaigns aimed at building the capacity of Roma to engage in the electoral process, political party formation, and working with local authorities to include Roma as both candidates and

voters in the election process. Eight country profiles<sup>1</sup> are included in this paper. Each focuses on the general overview of the legislative framework, Roma participation as voters, candidates and elected representatives. It examines the challenges that must be addressed and overcome, and gives recommendations regarding Roma political participation.

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<sup>1</sup> The views expressed in the country profiles do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the OSCE and the ODIHR.

## COUNTRY PROFILES

### Albania

#### *General Overview*

The population of Albania is over three and half million. Greeks, Macedonians and Montenegrins are officially recognized as national minorities, while Roma and Vlachs/Aromanians are recognized as linguistic (cultural) minorities.

The Parliamentary Assembly comprises 140 members. Of these, 100 are elected in single-member constituencies (zones) in one round of voting, and the remaining 40 are elected in one state-wide multi-mandate constituency based on party or coalition lists. While the system of translation of valid votes into parliamentary seats (the electoral system) has been simplified by removing the second round of voting in the zones, it remains complex.

The 3 July 2005 parliamentary elections were the sixth since the establishment of multi-party politics in Albania in 1991.

#### *Roma in Albania*

There is an absence of current official data on national minorities in Albania. The official census in Albania has never mentioned Roma minorities. According to different sources the number of Roma are estimated to range anywhere between 1,300 and 120,000. During the 1989 census, Roma came into the category of “others” together with the Egyptians, Vlachs and other small minorities. Many of the Roma remained “hidden” within the figure given for other ethnic groups registered in the 1989 census: Albanians, Greeks, Macedonians, Serbs and Montenegrins.<sup>2</sup> Roma live in almost all areas of the country. However, the strongest communities are situated mainly in central and south-east Albania: Tirana, Dures and Berat. Roma live either in big towns, on the outskirts of towns or in villages close to the respective towns. Roma live in four districts of Tirana, the largest of which is the “Kinostudio” neighbourhood.<sup>3</sup>

The government is currently drafting a National Strategy for the Roma, working with Roma organizations and international actors. This strategy will include steps to fight the trafficking of Roma women and to recognize the role that Roma women play in society. The government is open to considering positive discrimination for minority women, and believes that minority women’s inclusion is important for Albania’s continuing democratization process.

#### *Roma Participation in Public and Political Life*

#### *Political Parties*

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<sup>2</sup> European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), “Roma and Egyptians in Albania: From Social Exclusion to Social Inclusion: Summary of the World Bank Needs Assessment Study on Roma and Egyptians in Albania”.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

The Roma in Albania do not have political representation in the form of a political party. The Unity Party for Human Rights (UPHR), formed in 1992 after the Greek-minority based party OMONIA was declared illegal, declares itself as representing the interests of all minorities in Albania. A few candidates from this party had a programme addressing Roma issues, especially concerning the official recognition of the Roma minority and the preservation of the Romani language and culture. In practice, UPHR's activities are based predominantly within the Greek community, thus it cannot be ruled out that including Romani issues in their programme was used in order to de-ethnicize their party. The continual political marginalization of the Roma within the party is due to the lack of actual power within the Roma community itself, and the vulnerability of the group as a whole. UPHR's chair Vasil Melo said in a Human Rights Project Interview, that Roma have very few demands, stick to their traditions and do not claim to study their mother-tongue in school.<sup>4</sup>

### *Voters*

The political participation of Roma in the last elections was very low. Lack of trust in the politicians was considered as the main reason for low turnout of the Roma in elections. In addition, large numbers of Roma are on the margins of existence, without any social aid or insurance. The poverty within the Roma community contributes to low levels of education and lack of a willingness to vote.

In preparation for the July 2005 parliamentary elections, the NGO *Romani Baxt* led four partner organizations in a voter education initiative in Tirana, Durres, Fier and Korca. They delivered leaflets, hung posters, and televised discussions in both Albanian and Romani, in an effort to increase Roma participation in the elections. Volunteers verified that 1467 Roma citizens were on the electoral registration list, and helped others register for the first time.

### *Campaigning in the Roma Communities*

There was no Roma candidate for mayor for a single municipality or commune. The main parties included some Roma candidates on the list for the local councils; The Democratic party included one candidate in Tirana, Election Unit 4, and single candidates in Devol, Levan and Morava were included from the Socialist party; The Human Rights Party had one candidate in the municipality of Ndernesas (region of Fier).

### *Challenges to Overcome*

- Significant numbers of Roma people are not registered; they do not have IDs or other personal documents. This is the main reason for low political participation/voting;
- Minority women in particular face obstacles to public participation. No figures are available, but the reality shows that many Romani women are not registered and therefore are not able to vote; and
- Incomplete voting register (voting list).

### *Recommendations*

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

- Violation of Article 3 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities should be stopped. Minorities should not be classified in national and linguistic minorities;
- In the context of ongoing civil and voter registration reform, the Albanian authorities should improve voter registration among national minority populations, particularly the Roma and Egyptian communities;
- Training programmes designed to enhance the capacities of the political parties representing Roma interests should be organized;
- The Government should change their policy toward Roma and Egyptians. Representatives from these minorities should be included/represented in state institutions/public administration as are other citizens of the country; and
- A national policy based on 'positive discrimination' should be developed.



## Bosnia and Herzegovina

### *General Overview*

The population of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is 3,724,582<sup>5</sup>, composed of Bosniaks, Serbs, Croats and others (estimations made in 1999). BiH was the most ethnically mixed country of the six republics of the former Yugoslav Republic (FYR). Bosnia and Herzegovina is made up of two regions and a district: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH), Republika Srpska (RS) and Brcko District. FBiH is sub-divided into ten cantons.

The legislative power at the state level is vested in a bicameral parliament, the 42-member House of Representatives and the 15-member House of Peoples. Two thirds of representatives are elected from FBiH and one third from the RS. The Head of State is a three-member presidency. The central government is the Council of Ministers. The highest legal authority is the Constitutional Court of FBiH. FBiH has its own indirectly elected President and Vice-Presidents, one from each constituency.

The new electoral law for local elections allows the direct election of mayors. In Republika Srpska, mayors are elected on a straight majority/plurality basis. In FBiH mayors are elected on a shortened preferential system. Citizens of BiH living outside their residence may vote by absentee ballot or by mail (this is the case for refugees).

The district of Mostar offers an interesting demonstration of an election being held under a special electoral system, imposed by the High Representative of the city's electoral body. The amendments to the Electoral law (chapter 19) ensure a minimum of 4 councillors from each constituency, and a minimum of 1 councillor from a group labelled "others". It also guarantees no one constituent will have a majority in the new council.<sup>6</sup>

On 2 October 2004, the citizens of BiH voted for municipal mayors. It was the first election fully funded and organised by the Bosnian authorities. It was also the first in which the mayors were directly elected and the first implemented under the new amendments to the electoral law. Seventy political parties, 18 coalitions and 180 independent candidates and 6 lists of independent candidates were authorised. The voter turnout was forty-six per cent.

### *Roma in BiH*

According to the last government census (1991) there are 8,100 Roma in BiH. As part of a fact-finding mission conducted in BiH in 1996, the Council of Europe's Specialists Group estimated a total number of 50,000-60,000 Roma living in BiH, although they noticed that many Roma declared themselves as Muslims or Serbs. Non-governmental organizations estimate that there are between 85,000 and 100,000 Roma living in BiH.

### *Roma Participation in Public and Political Life*

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<sup>5</sup> Magdalena Matache, RUBW report, "Electoral Participation of Roma in BiH October 2004".

<sup>6</sup> OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report for the municipal elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina on 2 October 2004.

In the summer of 2003, the first Roma political party was registered as the ‘Democratic Party of Roma.’

As part of the European Commission - ODIHR joint project “Roma, use your ballot wisely,” two consultants conducted research on Roma participation in the BiH municipal elections held on 2 October 2004. The consultants visited several Roma communities in Visoko, Vitez, Oskova settlement, Tuzla and Banovici, where Roma voters’ participation was closely monitored by election observers. The consultants met with Roma leaders to gather information on Roma participation in the election, both as voters and candidates.

#### *Voters*

- The Roma community in Visoko and Vitez communities did not have problems with registration and most of the Roma who wanted to register to vote did so, although there were some problems with registration for the Roma in Banovici and Tuzla communities. In Oskova settlement (Banovici community) 14 families were not registered for the last 2 elections;
- There were several Roma observers at the polling station (two from Social Democratic Party (SDP) in Vitez community; one in Banovici);
- A balance between Romani men and women with regard to participating in the voting process was noticed; and
- Although the Roma voter turnout was low, it was reported that in the Vitez and Tuzla communities the majority of Roma did vote.

#### *Candidates*

- Only a single candidate was registered in the Social Democratic Party candidates list and he did not declare himself as ethnically Roma. As such, the Roma community did not recognise him as a Roma political candidate; and
- There were three registered candidates in Tuzla community. They were on the following parties’ lists: SDA, SDP and Ecologists party.

#### *Campaign Platform*

- The representatives of the Social Democratic Party visited the Roma community in Visoko during the campaign in order to view the Roma’s living situation and also to present the SDP platform. In addition, the SDP, SDA, Party of BiH, HDZ visited the Roma community in Vitez to present their platforms;
- There was not enough information about the candidates and the voting procedure; and
- There was no election material in the Romani language in Roma communities.

#### *Political parties*

- There were a small number of Roma on the candidate lists of other parties;
- There was no Roma party registered. Due to the fact that the amendments to the electoral law regarding national minorities’ participation came too late, there was no “others” category of minority for party registration;

- Political parties did not include a special focus towards Roma issues in their platforms. In general, the political parties competing for the election did not include Roma representatives on their lists of candidates, or if they did, these were for non-eligible positions;
- Many of the political parties had a nationalistic tendency (Serbs, Croats and Bosnians) that excluded Roma candidates even if they live in the Republika Srpska or FBiH; and
- The fact that the government still uses the Roma population numbers given by the census in 1991 makes it more difficult for Roma to participate in the elections.

*Recommendations:*

- Recognition of Roma and other minorities as national minorities in the BiH constitution, due to the fact that Dayton Agreement recognises Serbs, Croat and Bosnians and “others” minorities;
- Amendments to the electoral law in order to enable minority representatives to become candidates at all levels;
- Capacity building of Roma civil and political society in order to increase their participation in elections. Therefore, international organizations should consider funds for Roma programmes in BiH, not only for voter education, but also for civic education, advocacy, and project management;
- Training and information sessions in Roma communities on elections, voting, political parties should take place;
- Involvement of Roma as full participants in the election process will require improved representation in political parties, in the electoral administration, and as domestic candidate and/or party observers and non-partisan civic observers; and
- Activities related to legally registering Roma illegal settlements should be undertaken.<sup>7</sup>

## Bulgaria

### *General Overview*

According to the 2001 census, the population of Bulgaria is 8,194,772. The 1991 Constitution established a unicameral parliament (the National Assembly) whose 240 members are elected for a four-year term. Parliamentary elections are held on the basis of a proportional representation system, with a four per cent national threshold for parties and coalitions. Bulgaria is divided into 31 constituencies and each is assigned between four and 14 seats in Parliament, depending on population data from the last census.

Candidate lists of parties or coalitions were completed separately for each constituency and there were only a few independent candidates in each constituency. Candidates on party lists were entitled to run in up to two constituencies for the same party or coalition. Those who won a mandate in both (26 candidates) were obliged to decide which one they would keep and were to be replaced with the next person on the list in the other constituency. Independent candidates nominated by initiative committees could run in only one constituency.

Prior to the elections in June 2005, the law on political parties and the election law were amended. The revisions to the law on political parties changed the required number of signatures to form a political party from 500 to 5,000 and outlined penalties for violation of the law, including party finance provisions<sup>8</sup>.

Parliamentary elections took place in Bulgaria on 25 June 2005. Fourteen parties and eight coalitions (as well as 13 independent candidates) were registered for participation in the elections, compared with 62 parties and coalitions that registered for the 2001 parliamentary elections. This trend was also evident in the registration of independent Roma parties, as only one party out of several known “movements”, “coalitions”, or “confederations” fulfilled registration requirements. The voter turnout was 55.8 per cent. Local elections had previously taken place in 2003.

### *Roma in Bulgaria*

Ethnic minorities comprise 14.7 per cent, and official figures designate 4.7<sup>9</sup> per cent (307,908) of these as belonging to the Roma community<sup>10</sup>. There are also Rudari, Millet and Egyptians in Bulgaria. There are no legal restrictions on the participation of minorities in politics; however, the constitution prohibits parties based on ethnicity, race, or religion.

### *Roma Participation in Public and Political Life*

As part of the European Commission/ODIHR joint project “Roma, use your ballot wisely,” a consultant conducted research on Roma participation in the Bulgarian local elections held on 26 October, 2003.

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<sup>8</sup> OSCE/ODIHR Election Assessment Report on Parliamentary Elections in the Republic of Bulgaria, 25 June 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Experts believe that the actual number of Roma is significantly higher (OSCE report on Parliamentary Elections, 25 June, 2005). NDI refers to some experts who estimate that Roma make up more than 7 per cent of Bulgarian’s population.

<sup>10</sup> Rubin Zemon, RUBW report, “Local Elections Observation in Bulgaria, October 2003”.

## *Voters*

### Municipal elections, October 2003:

During the 2001 elections only 40 per cent of Roma used their right to vote<sup>11</sup>. The level of illiteracy is quite high among Roma people. It was the main reason for a large number of invalid ballots. About 20 per cent of Roma people have problems with not having identification documents. As a result, they were not included on the voter lists. A majority of Roma voters do not use their right to vote.

### Parliamentary Elections, 2005:

Roma voters generally vote in keeping with the majority vote pattern. The most remarkable difference between mainstream and Roma voters was the very high level of support from Roma voters for MRF (Movement for Rights and Freedom), which is known to be primarily representing the interests of Bulgaria's Turkish minority. The official turnout was 55.7 per cent, although, it was indicated that voter turnout was highest in districts with mixed ethnic populations, indicating a strong political mobilization by the Bulgarian Turks and Roma. The Roma voter turnout was not determined; however, 64 per cent of Roma declared that they would vote in the parliamentary elections, whereas 24 per cent identified themselves as undecided.<sup>12</sup> The Roma living in middle to small-size towns were more likely to vote.

Roma voters were influenced by family and community opinion more than non-Roma voters. According to the National Democratic Institute (NDI) pre-election poll, 14 per cent of Roma voters felt their participation was limited because of financial factors and outside pressure.<sup>13</sup>

The lack of a significant Roma participation in pre-election activities is attributed to a disappointment in the prior elected representatives (5.2 per cent), a lack of interest in politics (4.8 per cent), little improvement in the life of Roma communities (3.9 per cent), no confidence in parties and candidates (3.7 per cent), and/or a lack of Roma candidates (1.9 per cent).<sup>14</sup>

## *Candidates*

### Municipal elections, October 2003:

Bulgaria's October 2003 municipal elections marked the most significant electoral achievements yet for the country's Roma minority. In the 1999 local elections, only 50 Roma were elected to serve as councillors while in 2003 more than 125 Roma made it into office.<sup>15</sup> While most of the Roma were elected from *de facto* ethnic-based parties or coalitions, in a few communities they were elected on the ballots of mainstream parties.<sup>16</sup> Roma have participated most effectively at the local level, while national politics are still characterized by their absence.

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<sup>11</sup> Rubin Zemon, RUBW report, "Local Elections Observation in Bulgaria, October 2003".

<sup>12</sup> NDI polling conducted by Alpha Research in March 2005.

<sup>13</sup> NDI Public Opinion Research on Roma political Attitudes, March 2005, in NDI, "Roma participation in the 2005 Bulgarian Parliamentary Elections", [http://www.accessdemocracy.org/library/1976\\_bg\\_roma\\_011806.pdf](http://www.accessdemocracy.org/library/1976_bg_roma_011806.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> NDI, "Roma participation in the 2005 Bulgarian Parliamentary Elections".

<sup>15</sup> NDI, "Coalition Building and Political Inclusion of Roma in Bulgaria, 2004".

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

During the municipal elections of October 2003 Romani parties and coalitions registered candidates and lists in 149 out of 263 municipalities, and were elected in more than 40 municipalities (compared to 10 municipalities in 1999). While most of these are small towns (Samokov, Omurtag and Karlovo), Roma were also elected to local government office in a quarter of the district centres (Dobrich, Vratsa, Vidin, Shumen, Kustendil, Blagoevgrad and Strata Zagora). One of the positive phenomena was a relatively high rate of re-election of Romani incumbents. The first Rom, Nikolay Kirilov was elected chairman of a municipal council in Lom.<sup>17</sup>

#### Parliamentary Elections, 2005:

The number of Roma participating as candidates was relatively high. A majority of the mainstream parties appointed at least one candidate in their constituencies with a significant concentration of Roma inhabitants. Roma candidates were mostly concentrated in the north-west region of Bulgaria, where they had to compete among themselves for Roma votes.

Roma candidates were represented by three main categories: a Roma party running independently; a Roma party in a pre-election coalition with a mainstream party; and individual Roma candidates on a mainstream party list. The number of Roma candidates on the lists of mainstream parties and coalition increased from 10 to 18 (the total number of registered candidates was 6,000) in comparison to the previous parliamentary elections.<sup>18</sup> While the elections did not result in more Roma in parliament, they provided an opportunity for Roma to showcase their political skills on the national level.

#### *Political party formation*

Although the Bulgarian Constitution does not allow for ethnic-based political parties, there are some political parties that are widely perceived as representing the interests of certain minorities.<sup>19</sup> Since the first multi-party elections in 1990, national minorities have been represented in the Bulgarian Parliament.

In the Parliamentary elections in 2001, the coalition centred on the Movement for Rights and Freedoms and included a majority of national minority representatives in its candidate lists. The coalition contained representatives of Roma communities nominated by the Euroroma (*Evrroma*) organization. The coalition had a higher number of candidates from national minorities than other coalitions, but often on lower places on the list.<sup>20</sup> Newly elected Roma failed to build larger coalitions among themselves or with non-Roma counterparts.

In the 2005 parliamentary elections, two mainstream parties formed pre-election coalitions with predominantly Roma parties: BSP with the party Roma; and UDF with the Movement for the Equal Rights Societal model (DROM).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> NDI, "Roma Participation in the 2005 Bulgarian Parliamentary Elections".

<sup>19</sup> OSCE/ODIHR Election Assessment Mission Report on Parliamentary Elections in the Republic of Bulgaria, 25 June 2005.

<sup>20</sup> ODIHR CPRSI, Compilation of References to Roma in ODIHR Election Observation Mission Reports.

<sup>21</sup> NDI, "Roma participation in 2005 Bulgarian Parliamentary Elections".

### *Training for Roma candidates*

The ODIHR, in co-operation with Human Rights Project, organized three meetings with potential Roma candidates to prepare them for upcoming local elections. The meetings took place in three different cities (Lom, Plovdiv and Varna). They also attracted Roma who were not candidates.<sup>22</sup>

NDI, in co-operation with the OSCE, organized a 12 week training programme which focused on coalition building. The goals of the training were to introduce major Roma political parties to the principles of issue-based and electoral coalitions, and to position Roma to discuss coalition formations internally and externally with other parties.

### *Campaign Platform*

Municipal elections, October 2003:

The campaigns of Roma candidates were naturally different as they had articulated different aims. However, a majority of them used music events and parties as one of their main campaign strategies. The most widespread motto was “Roma people vote for Roma candidates.” One of the problems was that voters were not familiar with the role of “councillor” and “mayor,” and candidates did not sufficiently cover this issue in their campaigns. The parties made good posters with photos of the candidates, but some of them were missing a number corresponding to the number of the candidate on the voting ballot.

Parliamentary Elections, 2005:

Euroroma’s campaign failed to develop the image of a responsive party ready to play a role on the national political scene. It presented three separate documents on Roma education, health care and a system to provide land to Roma. Euroroma’s candidate selection was one of its campaign’s greatest weaknesses, as it placed on the top of its candidate list famous folk stars. It continued to rely on high visibility events and mass concerts, while ignoring substantive campaigning that involved direct voter contact. Mainstream parties in coalition with Roma parties – the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) – made their respective Roma partners visible in their campaign events and included them in coalition leadership body.

### *Roma in the Government*

A positive phenomenon is that the number of Roma appointed to senior government positions increased. Before 2005, a Roma had never been appointed to the position of deputy minister or higher. In 2005, the parties of the governing coalition appointed two Roma as deputy ministers to portfolios with significant direct impact on Roma. Yavor Dimitrov was appointed deputy minister of labour and social policy; and Aleksandar Filipov was appointed deputy minister of state policy on disaster management. Three other Roma were nominated by mainstream parties, though not appointed.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Rubin Zemon, RUBW report, “Local Elections Observation in Bulgaria, October 2003”.

<sup>23</sup> NDI, “Roma Participation in 2005 Bulgarian Parliamentary Elections”.

### *Challenges to Overcome*

Despite some positive changes in political participation, Bulgaria's Roma community still faces many challenges. These include the following:

- While political parties increased their attention to Roma issues, the policies outlined in their election platforms were vague and developed with little input from Roma themselves;<sup>24</sup>
- The newly nationalistic political coalition *Ataka* gained about 8 per cent with a campaign based on an anti-minority platform;<sup>25</sup>
- Roma voters experienced outside pressure and were subjected to vote buying;
- Low levels of political education among Roma political leaders were reported;<sup>26</sup> and
- Many Roma voters were not familiar with voting techniques.<sup>27</sup>

### *Recommendations*

- The government should take steps to safeguard against multiple voting and to detail penalties for vote buying. It should make efforts to significantly increase the number of Roma in public administration. Roma in public administration should not be confined only to Roma-related work, such as serving as experts on ethnic and demographic issues, but also included in mainstream departments when possible;<sup>28</sup>
- Mainstream political parties should be more open to the inclusion of Roma not only as voters, but also as party members, candidates, election commission representatives, and party/candidate and non-partisan domestic election observers. They should increase the training and recruitment of Roma members; and
- NGOs should organize efforts to monitor elections, the portrayal of Roma in the media, and to support the work of the National Commission for Prevention from Discrimination and other relevant institutions.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Rubin Zemon, RUBW report, "Local Elections Observation in Bulgaria, October 2003".

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> NDI, "Roma Participation in 2005 Bulgarian Parliamentary Elections".

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*



## Croatia

### *General Overview*

The population of Croatia is estimated at 4,422,248 people,<sup>30</sup> composed of Serbs, Bosniaks, Hungarians, Slovenes and others (as of 2003). Under the 2001 Constitution, the Croatian Parliament (Sabor) is a unicameral body which consists of between 100-160 members, directly elected on the basis of universal and equal suffrage through secret ballots. The Sabor consists of 140 members elected through proportional representation; eight representatives of Croatia's 22 recognised national minorities, and an additional number of members are elected in the constituency in which the votes of Croatian citizens who are not permanent residents of the country are applied.

In April 2003, the Croatian Parliament adopted a new law regarding the election of representatives to the Croatian Parliament. A review of the electoral system was recommended by the OSCE/ODIHR. The new law creates eight special mandates distributed to the following groups or combination of groups: Serbs (3); Hungarians (1); Italians (1); Czech and Slovak (1); Austrians, Bulgarians, Germans, Poles, Roma, Romanians, Ruthenians, Turks, Ukrainians, Vlachs and Jews (1); Albanians, Bosnians, Montenegrins, Macedonians and Slovenians (1). For the first three groups a deputy representative is elected together with the representatives, while for the other groups the candidates with the second-largest number of votes becomes the deputy.

According to the new 2003 law, representatives of minorities have to be registered in advance if they want to vote for a "minority candidate." Minority voters may choose whether to vote for the relevant minority representative or to vote instead in the regular constituency. Nine per cent of citizens have the right to vote for minority candidates.<sup>31</sup>

Parliamentary elections took place in Croatia on 23 November 2003. A total of 5,105 candidates stood for election. In the diaspora electoral constituency, 14 political parties, 5 coalitions and 4 independent candidates' lists registered for the elections. The voter turnout was 59.6 per cent.

### *Roma in Croatia*

Ethnic minorities comprise 10.4 per cent of which 0.2 (9,700) per cent identify themselves as Roma.<sup>32</sup> There are several Roma communities which differ in their religion and place of origin. The immigration of Roma from other parts of the former Yugoslavia, especially from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Kosovo has been very intense during the last ten years.

### *Roma Participation in Public and Political Life*

As part of European Commission - ODIHR joint project "Roma, use your ballot wisely," a consultant conducted research on Roma political participation in Croatia. The report was based on analysis of the documents related to the Roma minority in Croatia and on the

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<sup>30</sup> Rubin Zemon, RUBW report, "Parliamentary Elections in Croatia (2003)."

<sup>31</sup> OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Report on Parliamentary Elections in the Republic of Croatia, 23 November, 2003.

<sup>32</sup> Some Roma NGOs give a higher number: 40,000 (Nazif Memdov) and 100,000 (Union of Roma in Croatia).

interviews with the representatives of Roma NGOs, governmental authorities and other people involved in the field.

### *Voters*

According to the new law to vote for a minority candidate, people had to be registered in advance on a special “minority voting list.” The majority of Roma voters were not informed about this rule and as a result could not vote. There appeared to be cases of voter manipulation, especially of those who were illiterate.

During the parliamentary election in Croatia in 2003, only 700 Roma voted for Roma candidates or for the candidates that were supported by Roma in a minority-voting list.<sup>33</sup> In co-operation with the GONG, a domestic non-partisan election observation group, 15 Roma observed the election process in those areas with a high Roma population.<sup>34</sup> During the parliamentary elections in 2003, the new election law gave Roma some motivation to use their right to vote.<sup>35</sup> During the presidential election in 2005 a large number of Roma people decided not to vote in the first round. For Roma communities this may have been a way to demonstrate disagreement with state policies towards them.

### *Candidates*

According to new election legislation, Roma candidates may be registered as “Roma” together with candidates from Austrian, Bulgarian, German, Polish, Romanian, Ukrainian, Russian, Turkish, Vlach and Jewish communities. One deputy might be elected from this election unit. There were two Roma candidates for the Parliamentary election in 2003: Mr. Sead Hasanović (a candidate from the coalition “Third Croatian Bloc”) and Mr. Nazif Memedi (independent citizen candidate).<sup>36</sup> The candidates used printed materials for their campaigns, and campaigning took place by members of families spreading information from house to house. No Roma candidates were elected during the parliamentary elections in 2003.

### *Political party formation*

There is only one Roma political party, “Stranka Roma.” This party does not have elected representatives at any level. The party does not have strong support or influence among Roma populations. Roma NGOs have more power and influence.

### *Elected Candidates*

Twenty-six Roma Councils were established in regional and local self-governments. The members of the Councils did not complete secondary-school education. There were two elected Roma representatives in the local self-government (Mr. Juraj Orshush and Mr. Balog were elected in Medjumurska county).

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<sup>33</sup> Rubin Zemon, RUBW report, “Political participation and capacities of Roma and related minority groups in Croatia, January 2005”.

<sup>34</sup> Rubin Zemon, RUBW report, “Parliamentary Elections in Croatia (2003)”.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

### *Challenges to Overcome*

- There is no training or any other activities to encourage Roma participation in the election process: no brochures about the election process were published in the Romani language;
- Roma were not informed that they have to be registered on the special “minority voting list” in order to be able to vote for a Roma candidate;
- Roma candidates did not have the background to organize successful political campaigns and to attract more voters; and
- In some municipalities the members of Roma Councils were not invited to participate in the sessions of the local and regional representatives bodies.<sup>37</sup>

### *Recommendations*

- To organize training for Roma candidates on political education and coalition building;
- To encourage the establishment of a political party that will support policies important to Roma communities;<sup>38</sup>
- To encourage Roma NGOs to organize information campaigns about the election process (e.g. the right to vote, voter registration, the procedure of voting);<sup>39</sup>
- To involve elected Roma representatives in the decision-making process; and
- To consider a way of permitting national minorities to vote without creating separate registers of minority voters.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Rubin Zemon, RUBW report, “Political participation and capacities of Roma and related minority groups in Croatia (2005)”.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report on the Parliamentary Elections in the Republic of Croatia, 23 November 2003.

## Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

### *General Overview*

The population of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is approximately two million people. Roma comprise 53,879 or 2.66%. Compared to the 1994 census (43,707 or 2.2% of the population) there is a significant increase in this group's number.

The local elections were organized according to the new territorial reorganization into 84 municipalities and the city of Skopje, instead of 120. Local elections were held in the period from March to April 2005. These local elections produced great interest and concern among the majority citizens and the Roma, because they were seen as providing a basis for the functioning of the local authorities. This would take place under conditions of decentralization.

### *Roma in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*

One of the initial challenges that became apparent was the discrepancy between the officially published number of Roma living in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and the unofficial statements given by representatives of the Roma community that suggested a far larger number.

Through attempts to build a high standard of respect for human rights in its legislation, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has presented itself as a political system that shows openness and acceptance of modern democratic processes. In this sense the new Constitution of 2001, explicitly cites in its preamble the Roma people alongside the other majority population living in the state as the carriers of the independence and sovereignty of their common state. More concretely it states:

“The citizens of the Republic of Macedonia, the Macedonian people, as well as the citizens living within its borders who are part of the Albanian people, the Turkish people, the Vlach people, the Serb people, the Roma people, the Bosniac people..., undertaking the responsibility for the present and the future of our fatherland, ...., equal in their rights and obligations towards the joint good- Republic of Macedonia- ... decided to constitute the Republic of Macedonia as an independent, sovereign state, with the aim to establish and strengthen the rule of law, to guarantee the human rights and freedoms, to provide peace and coexistence, social justice, economic well-being and progress in their personal and community life... .”

With the new Constitution, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is the first state where the Roma are mentioned and constitutionally recognized as a constitutive people. In accordance with the existing provisions, they are equal in their legally guaranteed rights and obligations to all the other citizens of the Republic.

Among the basic values of the constitutional order in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is the “free expression of national belonging, adequate and just representation of the citizens belonging to all the communities in the organs of the state government and other

public institutions at all levels.”<sup>41</sup> In addition, the “Republic of Macedonia guarantees protection of the ethnic, cultural, language and religious identity of all the communities...” and “the members of the communities have the right to form cultural, artistic, educational institutions, as well as scientific and other associations to express, preserve and develop their identity.”

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has a multi-party system, with numerous parties which must work with each other to form coalition governments.

The majority parties include:

- Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (*Socijaldemokratski Sojuz na Makedonija*)
- Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization–Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (*Vnatrešno-Makedonska Revolucionarna Organizacija-Demokratska Partija za Makedonsko Nacionalno Edinstvo*)
- Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization–People's Party (*Vnatrešno-Makedonska Revolucionarna Organizacija-Narodna Partija*)
- Democratic Party of Albanians (*Partia Demokratike Shqiptare/Demokratska Partija na Albancite*)
- Democratic Union for Integration (*Demokratska Unija za Integracija*)
- Liberal Democratic Party (*Liberalno-Demokratska Partija*)
- Liberal Party of Macedonia (*Liberalna Partija na Makedonija*)
- Party for Democratic Prosperity (*Partia e prosperiteti demokratike /Partija za Demokratski Prosperitet*)
- Socialist Party of Macedonia (*Socijalisticka Partija na Makedonija*)

The minority parties include:

- Democratic Alternative (*Demokratska Alternativa*)
- Democratic League of Bosniaks (*Demokratska Liga na Boshnjacite*)
- Democratic Party of Serbs (*Demokratska Partija na Srbite*)
- Democratic Party of Turks (*Demokratska Partija na Turcite*)
- Democratic Union (*Demokratski sojuz*)
- National Democratic Party (*Nacionalna Demokratska Partija*)
- New Social Democratic Party (*Nova socijaldemokratska partija*)
- United Party of Romas in Macedonia (*Obedinita Partija na Romite na Makedonija*)
- Workers Party (*Rabotnicka Partija*)

### *Roma Participation in Public and Political Life*

The Roma political organizations (Party for Total Emancipation of Roma from Macedonia-PTERM, Democratic Party of Roma, Roma Union, United Party of the Roma), as well as the civic associations, put great efforts to educate the Roma about their participation in the elections. It should also be mentioned that the international associations and institutions present in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia also promote Roma participation as voters. Through local elections citizens can choose the bodies of the self-government units (council and mayor).

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<sup>41</sup> Article 8, line 2 of the Constitution, 2001.

### *Voters*

The Roma know their voting rights; however, they are not sufficiently acquainted with the new law on decentralization that came into force in July 2006. The low education level of Roma explains the lack of widespread knowledge regarding the new legal regulations (due to the complexity in the explanation).

### *Candidates*

A total of 43 political parties, of which four were Roma, submitted lists with candidates for mayor and the council. These included the following Roma parties: Democratic Integration of the Roma, United Party for Emancipation, Party of the Democratic Forces of the Roma from Macedonia and the Union of Roma of Macedonia. Besides the engagement of Roma political parties, Roma participated with independent candidate lists in the communes of Shuto Orizari in Skopje, Kochani and Shtip.

### *Coalitions*

Several Roma parties decided to build a coalition with other parties: the United Party for Emancipation was in coalition with the Social-Democratic Alliance of Macedonia, Liberal-Democratic Party, Democratic Party of Serbs in Macedonia, Democratic League of the Bosniacs in Macedonia, Democratic Party of the Turks in Macedonia, Democratic Alliance of the Vlachs, Green Party of Macedonia, and VMRO-Macedonian.

The Party of Democratic Forces of the Roma from Macedonia were in coalition with the following political parties: VMRO-DPMNE, Liberal Party of Macedonia, Socialist Party of Macedonia, Democratic Alliance, Democratic Alliance of the Serbs in Macedonia, European Party of Macedonia, VMRO-DOM, Party of the greens, People's movement for Macedonia, Party of the Vlachs from Macedonia, Democratic Party for Orthodox Unity of Serbs and Macedonians, Party of the Democratic Action of Macedonia, Bosniac Democratic Party, and the VMRO-True Macedonian Reform Option.

According to the coalition agreements, these two coalitions had Roma candidates on their mutual lists. The other parties did not have representatives in most cities including Skopje. The Union of Roma had its candidates for counsellors and a candidate for a mayor in the commune of Shuto Orizari and in Kumanovo. In Shtip there was a candidate for a mayor and councillors composed of a group of electors, and in Kochani there were only candidates for councillors. Some Roma candidates entered non-Roma lists proposed by non-Roma political parties. The Roma candidates did not have any solid organization which would have helped them achieve more successful performances in the elections.

### *Election campaign*

The legal framework for media campaigns consists of certain provisions from the Law on Local Elections as well as the 2005 regulations for equal media representation on local elections. This framework was adopted by the Parliament upon the proposition of the Council for Radio-diffusion. These regulations, which also refer to other media, define the obligations

and limitations of the public broadcaster regarding the coverage of the election and paid political propaganda.

The national MTV programme in the Roma language only presented the mayoral candidate from the RUM. Mayoral candidates did not participate in a direct TV duel, despite the fact that one was organized by BTR TV – the mayoral candidate from UPER cancelled his presence two hours before the TV duel was due to be broadcast.

### *Challenges to Overcome*

- Serious irregularities were registered in many cases, such as: family voting, proxy voting, inappropriate checking of the presence of invisible ink, a series of identical signatures in the Voting Lists, occasional tension in and out of the polling stations, and threats to the members of electoral boards;
- A high level of social exclusion and discrimination was reported, especially of certain ethnic groups, like the Roma, but also of other groups;
- Roma were not familiar with the new legislation concerning the participation of national minorities in the elections.

### *Recommendations*

- To initiate more aggressive methods for motivation and encouragement for more active involvement of Roma women in all social contexts; lobbying the political parties and their “male” factions for more awareness on Roma women’s issues, for overcoming the stereotypes of Roma women as housewives and integrating their input in decision-making processes;
- The state should ensure complete implementation of the national legislation which imposes equitable representation of all its citizens in decision making;
- Roma political parties should adopt certain strategies for further motivation and encouragement of young Roma in political participation;
- Roma political parties should adopt joint policies over crucial issues for Roma communities aimed at more organized approaches towards the institutions of the system;
- Roma should establish a Union of young and educated Roma as potential members of (non) Roma political parties;
- Roma should express their interest and suggest mechanisms for their engagement in political parties;
- (Non) Roma political parties should develop and implement policies which will address youth issues – created and implemented by youth;
- Urgent efforts for balanced coverage of the Roma population as part of the Initiative for Roma Political Participation through creative and pro-active approaches;
- Both Roma and non-Roma media to show higher interest in activities and initiatives organized by youth for youth, and to dedicate the necessary attention within their media.

## Moldova

### *General Overview*

The population of Moldova is approximately four and a quarter million, composed of Ukrainians, Russians, Gagauz, Bulgarian, Jews, Belarusians, Roma, Germans and Poles. Moldova is a parliamentary republic. The parliament, which also elects the President, is a unicameral body, consisting of 101 deputies for a four-year term.

The 6 March 2005 elections constituted the fourth competitive election of the Moldovan Parliament since the country's independence in August 1991. This election came at the end of the regular mandate of the Parliament elected in 2001, in which the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM) held a comfortable majority of 71 seats. Only two other political formations were represented in the outgoing Parliament: the Braghis Alliance and the Christian Democratic People's Party (PPCD). Following the 2001 elections, the PCRM formed a government headed by Prime Minister Vasile Tarlev, and in April 2001, the Parliament elected PCRM leader Vladimir Voronin as President of the Republic of Moldova.

Members of parliament are elected by proportional representation in one countrywide constituency. Political parties registered with the Ministry of Justice, electoral blocs of such parties, and independent candidates are allowed to stand in parliamentary elections. Independent candidates must submit between 2,000 and 2,500 support signatures to be registered.

While the Election Code does not impede the participation of minority candidates or voters in elections, registration requirements have proven difficult for minority candidates to overcome. The Law on Political Parties and Socio-Political Organizations, combined with the legal thresholds for eligibility to participate in allocation of parliamentary seats, has proven disadvantageous for the formation of parties representing minority communities and regionally based parties.

Mayors are elected through a two-round system. A candidate has to receive more than 50 per cent of the valid votes in order to be elected as Mayor. Should no contestant receive more than 50 per cent of the vote, a second round is held two weeks later between the two contestants who received the highest numbers of votes.

Councillors are elected through proportional representation based on party or bloc candidate lists. Independent candidates can also stand as councillors. Mandates for municipal and local councils are allocated using the d'Hondt formula and, unlike the parliamentary elections, there is no threshold requirement. The Election Code requires at least one third of the registered voters to participate for an election to be valid. There is no turnout requirement for run-off elections.<sup>42</sup>

On 6 March 2005, the citizens of Moldova voted in parliamentary elections. The number of contestants presented voters with a genuine choice from across the political spectrum. Candidates came from nine political parties, two electoral blocs, and 12 independent candidates ran. Of these 23 contestants, five were perceived as standing the most chance of clearing the electoral threshold. The voter turnout was 64.84 per cent.

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<sup>42</sup> OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report on Parliamentary Elections in the Republic of Moldova, 6 March 2005.



Local elections held on 25 May 2003 in Moldova, saw the Ministry of Justice registering 25 parties and socio-political organizations. Of these, 19 fielded candidates in the local elections; 11 parties ran individually, while the remaining eight were parts of two electoral blocs. In addition, over 1,500 independent candidates ran for office.

### *Roma in Moldova*

According to the census (1989) national minorities account for some 30 per cent of Moldova's population. According to official records, Roma account for 0.2 per cent of the whole population. Non-governmental organizations and Roma leaders claim that the real number is higher. The Roma minority is spread throughout the country. Many Roma have assimilated into mainstream society and have lost their Roma-specific cultural and linguistic identity.<sup>43</sup>

### *Roma Participation in Public and Political Life*

As part of the European Commission - ODIHR joint project "Roma, use your ballot wisely," a consultant conducted research on Roma participation in the local elections held on 25 May 2003.

#### *Voters*

- Roma voter turnout appeared to be high compared to the rest of the society. For instance, in the village of Vulcanesci (Roma account for 80 per cent in this commune) the turnout was about 80 per cent;
- Many Roma people did not know that they need an ID in order to be able to vote; However, the ID issue is not a problem for most Roma people in Moldova;
- Roma did not have language problems as they can speak other languages;
- There was no information on voting procedures and as a result there were a high number of invalid ballots; and
- Some Roma people mentioned cases of votes buying.<sup>44</sup>

#### *Candidates*

- Only a few Roma candidates appeared on the lists of other political parties;
- Only in the village of Raicula was a Roma elected Mayor in the 1999 local elections;
- During the local elections in 2003 one Roma independent candidate ran for the mayoral position;
- Six candidates participated in the local elections in 2003 for City Council seats. Four of them took seats in City/Village councils;
- During the parliamentary election in 2005, two Roma candidates were included on the lists of mainstream parties, both in positions that made them unlikely to be elected;<sup>45</sup> and
- In the commune of Cioresti (Nisporeni region), which has a substantial Roma population, the logo of an independent candidate for mayor was omitted from the ballot. The candidate argued that since many in the Roma community are illiterate, the

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<sup>43</sup> RUBW report, "Roma and Local Elections in Republic of Moldova (2003)."

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

absence of the logo adversely affected his chances in the poll. The court rejected his appeal and declared the first round results valid.<sup>46</sup>

### *Political Parties*

There are no Roma political parties or any other party which specifically represents the interests of the Roma minority in Moldova.

### *Campaign Platform*

- In the election campaign Roma candidates used mainstream strategies, based on relevant social and political issues. For example, Roma candidates from the communist party list used Soviet Union nostalgia during campaigning;
- The candidates did not refer to Roma communities in their election platforms;<sup>47</sup>
- The candidates presented their programmes in Roma communities, although there was not enough material such as leaflets or posters in Roma communities; and
- There was no media covering of Roma issues in the electoral period.

### *Challenges to Overcome*

- Roma minority remain underrepresented in local and national government administrations;
- Roma do not have an opportunity to participate in the discussions on the issues that affect them;<sup>48</sup>
- Roma political participation is not supported by the majority;
- People in Roma communities do not get enough information about the election campaigns; and
- People do not know how to fill in the ballots.<sup>49</sup>

### *Recommendations*

- Further consideration of the electoral system in order to review fair representation of regionally based minorities;
- Review of territorial and administrative law to encourage political and social participation of Roma minority;
- Training in Roma communities on elections, voting, and political parties;
- Published materials on voting procedure;
- Increase Roma presence in public life; and
- Encourage political parties to include minority candidates on their lists.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Report on Local Elections in the Republic of Moldova, 25 May and 8 June, 2003.

<sup>47</sup> RUBW report, "Roma and Local Elections in Republic of Moldova (2003)".

<sup>48</sup> RUBW report, "Roundtable on Roma Participation in Local Election in Chisinau, 2003".

<sup>49</sup> RUBW report, "Roma and Local Elections in Republic of Moldova (2003)".

<sup>50</sup> RUBW report, "Roundtable on Roma Participation in Local Election in Chisinau, 2003."

## Romania

### *General Overview*

In Romania's general elections in 2004, 24 parties and political alliances and 28 minority organisations enlisted. Only 28 seats, from a total of 314 in the Chamber of Deputies, are occupied by the minority organizations. All minorities have been very active and have a total of 3283 candidates (out of a total of 6704 political party candidates in Romania).<sup>51</sup>

### *Roma in Romania*

According to the recent national census about 535,000 (less than 2.5 per cent) Romanians identified themselves as Roma. However, NGO and Roma political activists, researchers as well as international institutions, believe that that this official number understates the country's Roma population. The Helsinki Commission report (1994) estimated that the Roma population exceeds 2,000,000 (or 9 per cent). The European Union estimates that there are between 1.1 and 1.5 million Roma (6 per cent) in Romania.

### *Roma Participation in Public and Political Life*

Although several Roma-based political parties emerged in the aftermath of the 1989 reforms, the political organization of Roma communities is underdeveloped. Compared to other ethnic minorities in Romania, Roma political organizations and parties are neither as influential nor as well developed.

### *Political Parties*

The 2004 elections saw the emergence of two Roma political organizations: the Social Democrat Party in Romania and Alliance for Roma Unity.

### *Voters*

A poll carried out from 5 to 15 October 2004 by a group of Roma students at the SNSPA University, found the following findings regarding Roma political party preference: 70 per cent of Roma preferred the Social Democrat Roma Party; 5 per cent would have voted with the Alliance for Roma Unity; 3 per cent with the Christian Roma Centre; and 1 per cent with the Roma Ethnicity Community.

The votes for Roma organizations were unequally distributed at the national level. The highest numbers of votes for the two parties were in Prahova, Mures, Alba, and Galati counties.

Roma voters were familiar with the voting procedure as they came prepared with their ID card or passport. Roma voters were young and old, male and female. However, in general, Roma males, or husband and wife families, were the first to vote.

### *Candidates*

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<sup>51</sup> RUBW report, "The Political Participation of Roma in Romania".

Roma minorities in Romania had the highest number of proposed candidates (4.03 per cent out of the total of candidates) at the national level. In the 2004 elections, the Alliance for Roma Unity had a total of 340 candidates enrolled (105 – Senate and 235 – Chamber of Deputies) and the Roma party 211 (only for the Chamber of Deputies).<sup>52</sup> The Roma Party had 5 candidates enrolled for each county (except Vrancea County, where there were 6).

### *Challenges to Overcome*

- Lack of political education and experience;
- Low level of political organization in Roma communities; and
- The lack of an open and fair environment that welcomes Roma political organizations and encourages vigorous participation.<sup>53</sup>

### *Recommendations*

- Develop a cadre of political leaders, managers and activists trained and skilled in political organization and campaigns, as well as prepared to govern;
- Establish traditions, structures and mechanisms that facilitate and encourage on-going community outreach and education to develop an informed constituency and a coherent political party;
- Put Roma issues into the mainstream agenda and broaden the constituency to increase the quantity and quality of Roma representation in governmental councils; and
- Enhance Roma sense of identity, both in public and community self-image through a series of careful political positions; policy agenda development; media outreach, training and integration.

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> NDI, “Roma Political Participation in Romania”, February 2003.

## Serbia and Montenegro

### *General Overview*

On 28 March 1990, the Constitution of Serbia was adopted, establishing a unicameral National Assembly with 250 members, elected for a four-year term. In addition to the Constitution, the Law on Election of Members of Parliament (“the parliamentary election law”), adopted on 8 October 2000, provides the legislative framework for the elections. The law is also supplemented by numerous instructions and decisions issued by the Republican Election Commission.

The 13 June 2004 elections for the President of the Republic of Serbia were called by the Speaker of the Serbian National Assembly on 4 April 2004. It was the fourth attempt to elect a President since 2002. All previous presidential elections held during 2002 and 2003 had failed because voter turnout fell below the prescribed 50 per cent threshold which required that repeat elections be held. This, in turn, created a cycle of failed elections. For this reason, on 25 February 2004, the newly installed National Assembly adopted significant amendments to the Presidential Election Law. These amendments abolished the 50 per cent voter turnout requirement for valid presidential elections, in line with previous OSCE/ODIHR and Council of Europe recommendations.

The June 2004 Presidential elections were held in the Republic of Serbia. A total of 15 candidates were certified by the Republican Election Commission to contest the first round of the presidential election.

Parliamentary elections were previously held in the Republic of Serbia on 28 December 2003.

### *Roma Participation in Public and Political Life*

#### *Voters*

Roma voter turnout was low. A large number of Roma people were not able to vote as they did not have any official documents. A number of elderly Roma were illiterate and had difficulty understanding the ballot.<sup>54</sup>

#### *Candidates*

In the Nis area there were four Roma candidates who were representing different political parties: Mr. Osman Balic (the Democratic Party), Mr. Nejaz Ramcevski (the Socialist Party of Serbia) and Mr. Rade Vuckovic and Aladin Jumerovic (Together for Tolerance).

#### *Political party formation*

There are several Roma political parties in Serbia; however, only three are active.

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<sup>54</sup> M. Demirovski, RUBW report, “Romani Political Participation and Observation of the Participation of Roma (as candidates and voters) in Parliamentary Elections in the Republic of Serbia”.

### *Coalition*

During the 2003 parliamentary elections, three Roma political parties did not participate in the elections. However, the Roma Congress Party, the Social-Democratic Party, and the Democratic Party of Roma were involved in coalition building with the mainstream parties.

The Roma Congress Party supported one of the mainstream coalitions called “Together for Tolerance.” This coalition had special programmes on national minorities. Their representatives visited several Roma settlements. The Roma Social-Democratic Party of Serbia supported a political coalition called the “Reformists.” This coalition was supported by 14 other national minorities. It had 8 Roma candidates on its list, including a young Romani woman.

Several weeks before the elections a New Roma Democratic Party was registered; however, it was too late to register its candidates and they supported the coalition “Together for Tolerance.”

### *Challenges to Overcome*

- Several Roma political parties entered political coalitions; however, they did not have any official documents confirming their co-operation;
- A large number of Roma voters were not able to vote as they did not have any documents;
- Lack of information on election procedures in the Roma community was an obstacle;
- A number of Roma did not vote as the polling stations were far away from their settlements;
- Lack of material on election procedures in the Romani language; and
- Roma NGOs were not active during the election period.

### *Recommendations*

- To organize training on elections for political parties and candidates;
- To encourage Roma NGOs to organize activities on political participation; and
- To inform Roma communities about the election process and their rights to vote.

## SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

As part of the European Commission - OSCE ODIHR joint project “Roma use your ballot wisely!” trained consultants conducted research in the target countries included in the project. A number of experts participated in OSCE Election Observation Missions (EOMs) to assess Roma participation in the electoral process. The EOMs and consultants collected material concerning minority issues to assess the following:

- Minority participation as voters, candidates and elected representatives;
- The participation of minorities in leadership roles within state institutions, electoral commissions and political parties; and
- Analysis of the legislative framework and its impact on minorities.

Statistics are usually available through a variety of sources including national and local government authorities, political parties and civil society organizations. Following the country reports the following main finding can be mentioned:

1. There exists a relatively common *absence of formal mechanisms* to ensure inclusion of national minorities in the election process. Only a few of the relevant countries have adopted election systems that give some form of preferential treatment toward minorities. In most of the observed countries, Roma minority communities are able to participate in the elections only through mainstream parties. Even if they form minority parties, their chances for election are limited by thresholds or methods of allocation of seats that have proven disadvantageous toward minority candidates (e.g. as in Moldova). In several observed countries (e.g. the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Croatia) Roma minorities are not familiar with the new legislation and as a result cannot vote (for example, in Croatia, they had to register on the special “minority voting lists” in order to be able to vote for minority candidate).
2. *Coalition-building problems*. In several observed countries Roma political parties join political coalitions. However, because of lack of training and political education, these coalitions are not effective for Roma. They do not sign any official documents to confirm their co-operation and as a result they cannot benefit from it (as is the case, for example, in Serbia).
3. *Small number of minority candidates*. In general, the numbers of minority candidates do not reflect their share of the population. In the Moldova 2004 parliamentary elections, only two Roma candidates were included on the list of mainstream parties, both in positions that made them unlikely to be elected. Generally, the level of organization of minority parties is still weak (e.g. in Serbia). However, there are positive achievements in several countries (such as in Bulgaria).
4. *Little attention to Roma minority issues in the campaign*. Although during the last years the mainstream political parties have begun to include national minority issues on the platforms, they still do little to attract support of national minority voters.

5. *Lack of registration* of minorities as voters. Lack of civil registration documents is widespread in Roma communities in all of the observed countries. Because Roma do not have civil and voter registration documents, they are not sufficiently recorded on the voter lists (e.g. in Albania). A number of Roma have experienced difficulties accessing identification documents, and some of them do not want to be registered (they do not want to pay for the registration process or to pay taxes). Roma are often not registered as residents in the communities where they live.
6. *Low level of political education* among Roma voters. A number of Roma voters are not familiar with the voting techniques and their right to vote. Lack of information on voting procedures in Roma communities results in a large number of invalid ballots. There are cases where people did not know how to fill in the ballots (e.g. in Moldova and Bulgaria). There is a general lack of information and material on election procedures in Roma communities throughout the target countries of South-Eastern Europe.
7. *Low interest in the elections*. The low voters' turnout was reported in almost all countries. As minority voters express little interest in political participation, mainstream political parties are not usually interested in attracting them. Lack of minority candidates on the party lists and election campaigns in Roma communities does not encourage or stimulate Roma to participate in the elections. However, in the countries with active Roma politicians (such as in Bulgaria, Romania and Moldova) Roma turnout was quite high.
8. Although, the ODIHR EOM reports often mention the availability of election material for national minorities, including ballots and voter information in minority languages, this is not the case for Roma minority (e.g. in Serbia). In some countries Roma do not have language problems (e.g. in Moldova) but they experience a *lack of information* on voting procedures, which results in a high number of invalid ballots.
9. Roma voters are more likely to fall a victim to offers of financial reward or political pressure. They are also influenced by family/group voting and community opinion (this was the case in Bulgaria). Cases of *vote buying* among Roma communities were reported in several countries (such as in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Bulgaria).



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All OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission reports are available online at <http://www.osce.org/odihr-elections>.

Compilation of References to Roma in ODIHR Election Observation Mission Reports is available from the ODIHR CPRSI upon request.

**The following documents from the RUBW project are available from the ODIHR CPRSI on request:**

#### **Albania**

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#### **Bosnia and Herzegovina**

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#### **Bulgaria**

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Asmet Elezovski, Conclusions of the visit to Serbia within the Project “Roma, use your ballot wisely” Implemented by ODIHR CPRSI, Financed by the European Commission. Time period of the project: 2003-2005, activity period: 9, 10, 11 May 2004.

#### **Moldova**

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