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HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
Forum on Minority Issues
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Item III on the Provisional Agenda: „*Obstacles to effective political participation faced by minorities*”

Call to Reaffirm Efforts for reducing the Obstacles to

Roma Political Participation in Romania

=Written statement submitted by Romani CRISS- non-governmental organization in special consultative status=

Participation of Roma minority in elections in Romania, be it as individual voters or organized in political formations seeking representation, is seriously obstructed by numerous factors. Roma electorate is characterized by unequal access to education and is facing social exclusion, stigmatization and discrimination.

Unequal access to education is a main obstacle to developing political awareness. Phenomenon such as school segregation and discrimination practiced in schools cause the inequality in the field of education, concerning Roma. Another factor which leads to weak political participation of Roma is the lack of information on political matters- programs and ideologies of the political parties. Surveys indicate high rates for the Roma electors who vote according to the community's trends, local leaders' political options, material incentives, etc. The issue of lack of identity papers is an obstacle to Roma political participation also.

Regarding the political representation of Roma, we draw the attention on the fact that the Venice Commission has stated, in its opinion no 300/2004 on the Law for the election of local public administration authorities in Romania, that provisions of this Law violate the obligation of the state to guarantee to persons belonging to national minorities the right of equality before the law and of equal protection of the law (Art 4 par 1 Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities). The Law strongly restricts the possibility of more than one grouping of persons belonging to a national minority to be represented in authorities at local level and it also blocks political competition with one and the same national minorities, in violation of the principle of pluralistic democracy. In spite of the Venice Commission expressed opinion, the law wasn't modified and the debated article remains in force.

Anti-Roma remarks by Romania's political leaders

Romania's largest political parties have demonstrated a lack of political will in addressing the issues of Roma minority. Roma minority comes into the speech of politicians when using discriminatory or even extreme nationalist statements. For instance, starting with 2007, President Traian Basescu referred to a journalist as a „Stinky Gypsy“. Furthermore, ex Prime Minister, Calin Popescu Tariceanu talked about repatriation of Roma who commit crimes in Italy: „These Roma people commit all the possible crimes, burglary, prostitution, robbery and drug trafficking“. Recently, the vice-president of the Juridical Commission within the Senate, Iulian Urban, has started to post periodically anti-Roma messages on his blog site. On Sunday, 8th of November, Ludovic Orban, a member of a large political party in Romania, affirmed that president „Basescu's electorate are drunkards, prostitutes and Gypsies“.

Recommendations

- The international bodies must continue to hold the Romanian government accountable to the treaties it has ratified on human rights and freedoms.
- Political parties should develop strategies for effective outreach to supporters in order to develop long-term dialogue.
- Politicians should proactively react to human rights violation, when it comes to hate speech targeting Roma, promoted by colleagues from their parties.
- Disciplinary procedures should be put into practice when remarks and attitudes violating human rights principles are promoted.