

Compilation of references of Roma in the ODIHR Election Observation Missions

These texts are extracted from some of the OSCE/ ODIHR Election Observation Missions. The excerpts come from chapters on women and (national) minorities and give a view of what issues the OSCE /ODIHR Election Observation Missions considers. Observers or elections researchers hired specifically by the ODIHR Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues often look in more depth; their reports are available at the ODIHR Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues. The present compilation is not an OSCE/ODIHR official document and is still in progress.

Local Elections – Republic of Moldova, May 2003

National minorities account for more than 30 per cent of the population of the Republic of Moldova. According to the last census (1989), the breakdown is: Ukrainians 13.6 per cent, Russians 13 per cent, Gagauz 3.5 per cent, and Bulgarians 2 per cent. Roma officially account for only 0.2 per cent of Moldova's population, but NGOs and Roma community leaders claim that real numbers are substantially higher.

In the Republic of Moldova, there are no parties representing national minorities. Nevertheless, with the exception of Roma, minorities are well represented in local governments. Only in the village of Raicula was a Roma elected Mayor in the 1999 local elections. In 2003, very few Roma ran for seats in local and municipal councils. Even in communes where Roma account for over 80 per cent of the population, there were few or no Roma candidates.

In the commune of Cioresti (*raion* Nisporeni), 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 absence of the logo adversely affected his chances in the poll. The second instance court rejected his appeal and declared the first round results valid.

Russian is the language predominantly used by national minorities. In accordance with the Law on Languages, ballots are provided in both Moldovan/Romanian and Russian, and the Election Code is available in both languages.¹ But a few substantive errors in the Russian text caused confusion.²

¹ According to Article 13 (1) of the Constitution, "the state language of the Republic of Moldova is Moldovan, and its writing is based on the Latin alphabet."

² Election Code; Article 55, paragraph 3 incorrect Russian translation of who is authorized to attend the poll caused confusion on Election day.

General Elections - Bosnia and Herzegovina, January 2003

Because of the unique construct of the BiH electoral system, candidates for certain offices must identify themselves as belonging to one of BiH's three constituent peoples, or as "others". "Others" are effectively barred from running for offices reserved for constituent peoples, such as the BiH and RS Presidencies. The Election Law does not provide any guarantees for representation for "others" in any directly elected national or entity level body. However, recent entity constitutional amendments require "others" to be proportionally represented in municipal and canton governments.

During the elections, minority groups which do not constitute one of the three constituent peoples played a marginal role. Only 169 certified candidates (2.24%) were "others". Many Roma, the largest minority group, registered to vote in the Tuzla, Travnik, Sarajevo, Bosanska Gradiska and Mostar regions. Otherwise, however, registration of Roma voters was apparently low. There was no Roma-based political party and most communities reported receiving little attention from political parties generally, although there were a few exceptions. The EOM received reports of a small number of Roma candidates and Roma members in the SDP, SBiH, SDA and the BiH Patriotic Party (BPS). There were fewer reports of Roma observers or polling station members.

Roma voter turnout was difficult to assess. Before the elections, two Roma leaders indicated their communities would spoil ballots in protest of their marginalization. An EOM short-term observation team for Roma issues reported low Roma turnout in Zenica, Kakanj, Gorica, Buca Potok (Sarajevo) and Bosanska Gradiska. However, greater numbers of Roma voted in Visoko. There are indications that many Roma did not understand the complicated ballot or the elections system generally. The small Jewish community slated several candidates with five Bosniak-based political parties in Federation and Cantonal races. A small number were members of Polling Station Committees.

Parliamentary elections - Hungary, April 2002

In Hungary, there are 13 recognized national minorities including Germans, Slovaks, Croats, Romanians, Polish, Bulgarians, Greeks, Armenians, Ruthenians, Serbs, Slovenians and Ukrainians. Roma represent the largest minority population generally estimated between 400,000 and 600,000³. Germans are estimated to number about 200,000, followed by Slovaks at 100,000. All others are significantly smaller. The figures are only estimates because identification of minority status is based solely on self-declaration. The imprecise numbers and the vast differences in the populations estimated to represent each minority have caused proposals for proportional set-aside seats for minorities, or the allocation of a single parliamentary seat for each registered minority to be rejected. Additionally, several political party interlocutors indicated that such formulations were at odds with Hungary's party-driven election system.

In 1998, MSZP and SZDZ backed a proposal which would have lowered the existing 5% threshold requirement for minority-based parties. Roma NGOs also submitted proposals that would call for the inclusion of minority representatives in a subordinated capacity with all the rights of elected MPs to serve on committees, propose legislation, etc., except the right to vote in Parliament. This proposal has never advanced to the Parliament. While most of Hungary's minorities have been integrated into the mainstream of public life, the Roma population remains marginalized in the political arena. In fact, not a single seat in the 386-member Parliament elected in 1998 was held by a representative of the Roma minority.

The new Parliament, however, will have four Roma MPs, three from the Fidesz-MDF national list and one from the national list of the MSZP. Of the ten registered Roma political parties, five registered for these elections. The major development in these election was the first formal agreement between a major political party (Fidesz) and a Roma party (Lungo Drom). While this agreement was seen as an important event, the Roma community was divided on the issue. Some critics among a broad spectrum of Roma NGOs expressed concern that Lungo Drum had simply become an extension of the Fidesz party.

Presidential Elections - France, April/May 2002

Voter registration is obligatory to exercise the right to vote: voter lists are revised and updated regularly by administrative commissions formed by a representative of the municipality, the *préfet* and a representative of the judiciary. The electoral legislation establishes a residency requirement according to which a voter can be registered in the voter list of a municipality if he/she has resided in that municipality for at least six months. Longer residency requirements have been set for a specific population group, the so-called *gens du voyage*¹ or "nomads". The authorities and civil society organizations have recognised that these legal provisions, introduced in 1969, should be reviewed to reflect the changes that have occurred in the meantime. Discussions on possible revisions to the legal provisions that govern the registration in the voter lists for the *gens du voyage* are underway.

In addition to the Electoral Code (Art. L11), other legislation also applies to voter registration. In particular, the Law 69-3 of 3 January 1969 that regulates itinerant activities and people circulating in France without domicile or fixed residence establishes particular procedures for the so-called *gens du voyage* (or "nomads"). According to this law, the *gens du voyage* receive a circulation permit, issued by the administrative authorities. Those who apply for a circulation permit have to declare to the authorities a municipality to which they wish to be *rattachés* (connected to). According to Law 69-3, the number of people who can be *rattaché* to a given municipality cannot exceed 3% of the total population of that municipality.

The law also establishes that the registration in the voter lists of the *gens du voyage* is authorised after three years of uninterrupted *rattachement* (connection) to a particular municipality. In addition, *gens du voyage* who have become sedentary are excluded from the application of the special procedures. The requirements established in ordinary law apply to them. The residency requirement for *gens du voyage* is longer than the normally required six months prescribed by the Electoral Code. In addition, the threshold of 3% set by the Law 69-3 on the number of people that can be *rattaché* to each municipality is perceived by some as a requirement that places higher criteria on the registration of this group of the population.

It must be noted however that the specific legislation regulating the registration of the *gens du voyage* is in no way linked to ethnicity, but tries to respond to some concerns of the authorities in regard to the participation of this group in the electoral process. These concerns include the fact that the high mobility of this group could have an influence on the results of an electoral process as well as exposing the *gens du voyage* to undue manipulation. Nevertheless, during the past years, awareness has been heightened among human rights groups, associations of the *gens du voyage*, as well as the authorities, regarding the discriminatory effects that these legal provisions could have on the participation of this group in elections.

¹ Roma in France are considered to be part of the category defined by the term *gens du voyage*

Considering that some changes have taken place in the meantime in the overall situation of the *gens du voyage*, discussions have been initiated between the authorities and civil society on possible modifications to the law. In particular, these discussions have analysed the requirements for registration in the voter lists of the *gens du voyage* and proposals to change them, with a view to foster the political participation of this group, while responding to concerns. During a meeting in January 2002 organized by the National Consultative Commission on the *gens du voyage*, different proposals for modification of the procedures were discussed, including the possibility of lowering the length of the required *rattachement* to a municipality. The meeting concluded that, prior to any reform of the procedures, it would be advisable to review the notion of *gens du voyage* and to know the conditions of different groups of *gens du voyage*.

Parliamentary elections - Czech Republic, June 2002

Under Czech legislation, national minorities enjoy the same rights and freedoms as the majority population and may not be discriminated against. They may freely develop their culture, use their language, and form parties and associations. According to the election law, notices on the locations of polling stations and the time of voting must be announced in minority languages in municipalities where a Committee for National Minorities has been established (i.e., in municipalities where at least 10% of the population identified itself as belonging to national minorities in the last census).

In addition, the Act on Rights of Members of National Minorities of 2001 states that "members of national minorities living traditionally and for a long time on the territory of the Czech Republic" also have the right to receive "other information for voters" in their languages. The Ministry of Interior published information on the manner of voting in five languages: Czech, Slovak, Polish, German and Romanes. Election-related information was also published in minority languages at the district and local level where minorities live. Apart from these provisions, the election law and other election-related legislation does not specifically refer to national minorities. There are no provisions guaranteeing representation of minorities, such as set-aside seats or quota systems.

The 1 March 2001 census lists 17 nationalities apart from Czechs, as well as "others." According to the census, non-Czechs account for 9.7% of the population, based on self-identification. The biggest group are the Moravians (3.7%; Moravians are not officially recognized as a national minority and therefore not represented on the Council for National Minorities), followed by Slovaks (1.9%), Polish (0.5%), German (0.4%) and Ukrainian and Vietnamese (0.2% each). Other minorities account for less than 0.1% of the population each. There is, however, widespread agreement that the official figure for Roma is substantially smaller than the actual Roma population in the Czech Republic. Officially, 11,859 people identified themselves as Roma in the census, but estimates put the figure closer to 200,000.

Studies indicate that while most national minorities are well integrated and the level of their political participation and their voting behavior do not differ significantly from that of the majority population, the situation is different among Roma. Roma are generally less integrated and face prejudice and sometimes discrimination. The education level among Roma is generally lower than average, and they face more social problems. At the same time, they tend to be less active in society and especially in politics, and voter turnout among Roma also tends to be substantially below the national average. Civic and voter education programs targeting the Roma would be desirable and could help address the situation.

Only one party, the Romani Civic Initiative (ROI), clearly represented a national minority. However, ROI ran only in one election region (Moravia-Silesia), which effectively eliminated all chances for success. In the end, ROI received just 523 votes (0.01%). Apart from ROI, very few parties nominated Roma candidates. Many parties had not a single Roma candidate on their lists, while others said they did not collect information on their candidates' ethnic background. The Party for Life Security and the party Choice for the Future each said they had two Roma candidates, while the Czech National Social Party had one. However, none of these parties received enough votes to be represented in the Parliament. Consequently, for the first time since 1990 there will not be a single Roma in the Chamber of Deputies.

Parliamentary elections - Bulgaria, June 2001

Since the first multi-party elections in 1990, national minorities, in particular the ethnic Turks, have been represented in the Bulgarian Parliament. In the 17 June elections, the coalition centered around the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS) included a majority of national minority representatives in its candidate lists. Apart from ethnic Turkish candidates, the DPS coalition also contained representatives of the Roma community nominated by the "Evromoma" organization, which was part of the coalition. In contrast, the lists of the Coalition National Movement "Simeon II", the Coalition for Bulgaria, the Euro-Left, and the Gergyovden-VMRO coalition included very few members of national minorities. The ODS had a higher number of candidates from national minorities, but often in lower places on the lists.

Ultimately, over 20 members of national minorities were elected into the new Parliament, mainly from the DPS coalition. In the outgoing Parliament, 27 deputies (11%) were women. In these elections, the six main parties and coalitions fielded a total of 526 women as candidates, or 24% of the total number of candidates. Around half of them were in the top half of the respective candidate lists, and 29 women headed regional lists of the six major parties and coalitions. These percentages in the candidate lists were determined by the political parties and coalitions which freely decided how many women they would introduce in their election tickets, without being bound by a quota system to promote women's participation.

The 17 June elections featured a sharp rise in the number of women elected to Parliament. A total of 63 women gained seats, accounting for 26% of all deputies in the newly elected National Assembly. Of these, 48 were elected on the tickets of the Coalition National Movement "Simeon II" (40% of all deputies for that formation), nine will represent the United Democratic Forces (18%), five are from the Coalition for Bulgaria (10%), and one from the Coalition Movement for Rights and Freedoms (5%). These figures could vary slightly, depending on the final settlement of the disputes concerning those candidates who appealed their removal from the lists for alleged collaboration with the former State security services. Furthermore, the composition of the Parliament may change, since members of Government may not be members of Parliament during their term in office.

Parliamentary elections - Slovakia, September 2002

Under the Slovak Constitution, everyone has the right to freely decide on his or her nationality, and discrimination based on nationality is prohibited. National minorities have the right to develop their own culture, to disseminate and receive information in their mother tongue, the right of association, and the right to establish and maintain cultural and educational

institutions. In addition, national minorities have, "under conditions defined by law", the right to education in their own language and the right to use their language in dealing with the authorities.

According to Slovakia's 2001 census, 14.2% of the population identified themselves as belonging to national minorities. Of these, 9.7% identified as Hungarians, while 1.7% identified as Roma. Other national minorities, including Czechs and Ruthenians, each made up less than one percent of the total population. Hungarians, who live predominantly in the south and south east of the country, have been represented in national politics since the 1990 elections. Currently, the principal party representing ethnic Hungarians is SMK-MKP. It has been a member of the government coalition since 1998. Although there are other ethnic-Hungarian political parties, the SMK-MKP was the only party representing the Hungarian national minority in the 2002 parliamentary election. With a solid base of support, and given the high level of education and political participation among ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia, the SMK-MKP had no problem entering the parliament.

While the official census puts the Roma population at 89,920 persons, there is general agreement that the actual figure for Roma living in Slovakia is substantially higher. Various estimates place the true Roma population at from 380,000 to 500,000, or 7-9% of Slovakia's total population. While Roma live in most parts of the country, they are concentrated in the East, around Kosice, Presovo, and Spis. Often, Roma are not well integrated into mainstream society but live in separate settlements, of which Slovakia has over 600. Education levels among Roma are below average, while their unemployment is substantially above the national average. Prejudice against Roma is widespread, and in some communities Roma and non-Roma lead a completely separate existence.

Apparently, many Roma are not registered as residents in the places where they actually reside and therefore have difficulty voting. Analysis suggests however, that numbers falling into this category are not high, and that lack of registration is generally not due to discrimination but to the fact that many Roma fail to re-register when they change their place of residence. Unlike ethnic Hungarians, who have political representation at the national level, and the country's smaller minorities, which are generally well integrated and tend to vote as does the majority population, the Roma situation is different. Roma are less involved in national politics, and among those who are politically active, with around 20 registered Roma political parties, fragmentation is high. Slovakia has several Roma mayors and municipal councilors, but there is no Roma representation in the new parliament, nor were there any Roma deputies in the outgoing National Council. Voter turnout among the Roma community is substantially below the national average. Partial election observation by non-governmental organizations in Roma settlements suggests that turnout in this election varied between 10 and 50%.

Two parties representing the Roma, the Political Movement of Roma in Slovakia (ROMA), and the Roma Civic Initiative of the Slovak Republic (ROISR) participated in this election. Several other parties included Roma on their candidate lists, but placed them in positions too low to qualify for a parliamentary seat. Neither Roma party gained a significant share of the vote; ROISR received 8,420 votes (0.29%), and ROMA 6,234 (0.21%). In none of the country's 79 districts did the combined Roma parties' vote exceed 4%. It is notable that Roma membership on electoral commissions at all levels was higher than in previous elections, indicating heightened attention to one of the building blocs leading to greater political involvement.

Presidential Elections - Slovakia, 3 April 2004

The Assessment Mission looked into the question of Roma participation in the election, since there have occasionally been concerns surrounding this issue in previous elections. While

the official census places the Roma population at about 90,000 persons, it is generally believed that the actual figure is substantially higher, perhaps around 400,000 persons. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some Roma are not registered as residents in the communities in which they live, and would therefore have trouble voting. However, this problem does not appear to be systematic or due to discrimination, but rather because some Roma may fail to reregister when they change their address. In general, Roma participation in elections is estimated to be somewhat lower than that of the general population. This is generally attributed to the social marginalization of some Roma communities.

In February 2004, there were mass protests and looting in several Roma communities of central and eastern Slovakia as a result of a newly implemented system of social allowances. This was followed by the deployment of additional police and army troops to those regions. A member of the Assessment Mission visited several of the towns where disturbances had taken place (e.g., Trebisov, Caklov, and Levoca) and found that the security force deployment did not discourage Roma participation. On the contrary, Roma turnout appeared higher in these towns, especially for the referendum, as Roma citizens took their grievances to the ballot box. Outside these towns, however, Roma participation appeared lower. Roma leaders and political parties have diverse views and did not unite behind a single candidate in the presidential election, although it appeared that many Roma supported the referendum.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Presidential election, 14 and 28 April 2004

As in previous presidential elections, there were candidates from the large ethnic Albanian minority. While, given the established patterns of ethnic voting in the country, neither Mr. Ostreni nor Mr. Xhelili expected to proceed to the second round, their political parties (DUI and DPA, respectively) had other reasons to participate in the election. These included offering support to the ethnic Macedonian parties with which they are in coalition in return for concessions, and to consolidate support ahead of the upcoming municipal elections. DUI also indicated that it was important for the country that ethnic Albanians play an active role in choosing the president.

No candidates from other national minorities were nominated, but several parties representing various minorities aligned themselves with one candidate or another. The candidates also made efforts to reach out to non-Albanian minorities. These minorities, particularly the Roma, Turks and Vlachs, were also represented on some MECs and EBs. The primary issue affecting the participation of ethnic minorities was the disproportionate impact of election day irregularities on the ability of members of some minority groups, particularly ethnic Albanian and Roma communities, to express their will through voting. The ethnic Albanian community suffered the majority of observed electoral irregularities in the second round, probably due to the perception that Albanian votes held the key to meeting the 50 per cent threshold.

Roma were the other minority group most affected by election irregularities. Prior to both rounds of voting, there were persistent allegations of vote buying and pressure on Roma voters in the towns of Stip and Strumica. Roma leaders reported to the EOM that the major parties had engaged in such practices in the eastern part of the country in the past.

A Roma NGO claimed that many Roma voters are missing from the Voter List, but no complaints were filed by voters. Such a situation could be compounded by the relative lack of education, identity documents, and permanent housing in the Roma community. During the first

round election, members of the Roma community in Suto Orijari, north Skopje, complained to domestic observers that their votes had been cast for them. Evidence of ballot stuffing at this large polling center was directly witnessed by OSCE/ODIHR observers. During the second round of voting there was some improvement in the conduct of the election in this area – perhaps related in part to the focus by international and domestic observers there during the first round – but similar problems reportedly occurred in other voting centers in Roma areas.

Presidential and Parliamentary Elections - Romania, 28 November and 12 December 2004

With the exception of the Roma minority, most national minority interlocutors seemed satisfied with inter-ethnic relations and recent legal changes improving the status of minorities and did not expect ethnicity to be a campaign issue. Contrary to some mainstream parties, national minority organizations generally expressed a high level of confidence in the election process. Most commented that political competition is now largely intra-minority in nature, citing the proliferation of national minority organizations seeking to win a single seat in Parliament. Some groups have cited concerns regarding the authenticity of these newer organizations. For example, the Cultural Union of Bulgarians from Banat claimed that two other Bulgarian NGOs competing for the mandate available to the Bulgarian minority could not have gained the necessary number of signatures to register; they noted that in Mehedinți county, where only four ethnic Bulgarians were registered in the 2001 census, the new organizations managed to collect some 600 signatures.

The inclusion of national minority groups on the Chamber of Deputies ballot was impressive, with 28 organizations participating in the elections. The OSCE/ODIHR EAM heard of only one case where a national minority organization's candidate list was refused. In this case it appears the BECJ in Iași prevented the chairman of the local branch of the Alliance for Roma Unity (AURR) from modifying the list to withdraw incomplete candidatures. The AURR

PARTICIPATION OF ROMA

According to the last census, the Roma minority numbers some 535,250, making them the second largest minority group. However, some interlocutors estimate the Roma minority to number more than 1.5 million. Unlike the Hungarian minority and some other minority groups, Roma are geographically dispersed throughout the country. Many reports indicate that, despite official efforts to improve their situation, Roma remain widely discriminated against in public life, including education, employment, and access to public services. Such reports also note police brutality, harassment, as well as social exclusion and marginalization. The mainstream parties did not manifest particular interest toward this group, and as a rule did not target them in their campaigns.

The Roma minority has been represented in Parliament since 1992. In 2000, two Roma were elected to Parliament, representing the Roma Party (since renamed the Roma Social

Democratic Party – PRSD) and the PSD. In 2004, two Roma organizations registered candidate lists, the PRSD and the AURR. Both organizations complained about lack of media access during the campaign, and also stated their interest in having more Roma members on Polling Boards, indicating that the state should ensure their participation in BESVs. Organizations representing the Roma often appear to lack political experience, and subsequently fail to understand the election process adequately. Thus, in the 2004 elections, neither Roma organization had a written electoral platform. Some interlocutors told the EAM that Roma parties do not enjoy much support among Roma, who prefer to vote for mainstream parties.

Some Roma leaders expressed concerns regarding individual local government officials and party activists who allegedly used their positions to influence and manipulate the Roma electorate. In some communities, mayors reportedly threatened Roma voters that their eligibility for social benefits depended on their voting behavior. The EAM also received reports, for example from Iași county, that the Roma vote would be bought through promises and gifts. However, such allegations could only be substantiated in isolated cases (e.g. in Medgidia, Constanța county). Voter turnout among the Roma community is estimated to be lower than the national average, one of the causes being that they often lack identity documents. There are estimates that, for a variety of reasons, as many as 20% of Roma do not have identity documents and are therefore unable to vote, although some interlocutors said the overall situation had improved compared to 2000.

In some localities, the problem is compounded by the fact that Roma communities were relocated to new settlements but remain registered in their old place of residence, thus encountering difficulties in exercising their right to vote. While under Romanian legislation the onus for registering a new place of residence lies with the citizens concerned, it appears that the authorities did little to help these citizens to re-register. Limited analysis suggests that the number of invalid ballots in predominantly Roma communities was above the national average, indicating a lack of understanding of election procedures. Voter turnout among Roma appears to have dropped on 12 December compared to the first round of 28 November.

Parliamentary Election, Republic of Moldova – 6 March 2005 Statement of Preliminary Findings & Conclusions

National minorities account for around 30 percent of Moldova’s population, according to the 1989 census (the relevant results of the latest census held in October 2004 have yet to be released). The largest minorities are the Ukrainians, Russians, Roma, Gagauz and Bulgarians. Despite the significant share of the total population they represent, issues of national minorities were not high on the agenda in these elections. The registration requirements of the Law on Political Parties, combined with the minimum representation thresholds stipulated by the Election Code, have proven extremely disadvantageous for the formation of ethnic and regionally-based parties.

Most interlocutors from political parties said that their candidate lists included representatives of registered national minorities. It appears, however, that the Roma minority in particular was underrepresented in these elections; only two Roma candidates were included on the lists of mainstream parties, in ineligible positions. Some electoral competitors are perceived as representing the Russian minority’s interests, namely the Republican Socio-Political Movement “Ravnopravie” and, to a lesser extent, the Electoral Bloc “Patria–Rodina” and the Labour Union “Patria–Rodina”. The platforms of these contestants focused largely on the status of the Russian language and cooperation with the CIS states. Issues of the Ukrainian minority, the

largest minority according to the 1989 census, were not present in the public debate, except the right to use Ukrainian in education and public administration institutions.

Municipal Elections, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
13 and 27 March, and 10 April 2005
OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report

The marginalized conditions of the majority of the Roma population resulted in this community being especially targeted by vote-buying schemes, by both incumbents and opposition. Furthermore, Roma were vulnerable to threats of losing employment and social benefits. Lack of proper identification documents was another source of abuse, since political parties allegedly paid fees for obtaining IDs in exchange for votes.

In addition, there are a number of Roma residents without Macedonian citizenship. Such noncitizens, often qualified as *long-term habitual residents*, are individuals born in other parts of the former Yugoslavia, who after the break-up of the country found themselves without proper documents, and afterwards have not been able to acquire them.

In the municipality of Suto Orizari, one of the largest Roma communities in Europe, there were particularly widespread reports of pre-election irregularities. The two major candidates for mayor were accusing each other of manipulative actions, including bribery and forceful dispossession of IDs, as well as intimidation and physical maltreatment of voters. The significant irregularities in Suto Orizari, especially in the first round voting, combined with the surprisingly high vote for the DUI and DPA-PDP in the council election, fuelled suspicion among Roma that the council contest had also been marred by irregularities.

After the first round, the voting results in four polling stations in Suto Orizari were invalidated due to irregularities. Repeated irregularities in further rounds resulted in new complaints and, in two polling stations, re-runs of the second round were conducted on 24 April. A new mayor was elected on 24 April. However, since he is currently serving a prison sentence, his mandate was withdrawn. Thus, new mayoral elections in Suto Orizari must be organized within 70 days of the withdrawal of the mandate.

XV. RECOMMENDATIONS

D. PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN AND NATIONAL MINORITIES

29. The authorities should establish the actual number of the non-citizens, as well as the number of the Roma citizens lacking identification documents, so that adequate measures can be taken to ensure they possess relevant documents.

30. Well-prepared and focused voter and civic education programmes for Roma and other smaller communities should be carried out throughout the country, through the involvement of local NGOs.

Parliamentary Elections 2005, Bulgaria, 25 June /ODIHR EAM - Press release

Bulgarian election confirms credible process but voter turnout efforts introduce a degree of uncertainty, Sofia, 26 June 2005

The lack of adequate safeguards to prevent unauthorised duplication of such certificates, combined with complaints to the CEC on the organized transport of voters by bus in some parts of the country, compounded concerns about the potential for multiple-voting. The extent of this concern should be clarified during the national review of the voter lists, to be undertaken by the civil registry authorities. OSCE/ODIHR observers directly confirmed widespread concerns related to organized attempts to influence the vote of Bulgaria's Roma communities, including vote-buying.

Parliamentary Election, Republic of Albania – 3 July 2005

International Election Observation Mission
Statement Of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions

While more consideration was given to issues related to national minorities by a number of contestants, further efforts are needed to improve voter registration of minority populations, especially among the Roma community.

Participation of National Minorities

The 2001 census did not include questions relating to respondents' ethnicity. Hence there is an absence of reliable current official data on national minorities. Nevertheless, Greek-speaking communities reside in some areas of the south of Albania and Roma and Egyptian communities are resident in cities and villages across Albania.

The position of some minorities has improved, partly through their own initiatives to create or develop political associations and their advocacy efforts. Nevertheless, obstacles remain to the full participation by Roma and Egyptian minorities in the election process and there has been little progress concerning their registration as voters. Observers received credible allegations that attempts were made to influence their electoral choices in certain communes, these allegations referred to pressure, vote buying and bribery.

Traditionally, the HRUP has sought the political support of minority populations. In 2005, the party fielded a high number of candidates from minority populations, although the large majority were from the Greek minority. In its election campaign, the HRUP devoted little attention to minority issues. The Movement for Human Rights and Freedom was the only party whose platform included calls for the enactment of minority rights. The EOM noted that the DP commented on the social problems faced by Roma and Egyptian populations during their campaign.