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International Charitable Organization

“Roma women fund “Chiricli”.

Yulian Kondur

Working Session

Participation of Roma in Ukraine

Distinguished colleagues, let me first express my gratitude to the ODIHR for the opportunity to be here.

My name is Yulian Kondur and I represent the International Charitable Organization “Roma Women Fund “Chiricli”.

The situation of Roma in Ukraine is ambivalent: on the one hand communication between the Roma civil society and State authorities has improved but its effectiveness is still of limited scope; on the other hand, the rise of violence and anti-Roma discourse in the media space, including statements by public figures, persist and undermine the effective implementation of State policies on Roma inclusion.

As of now, the situation with regard to the public and political participation of Roma in Ukraine can be marked with a positive tendency, particularly since the enactment of the National Roma Strategy, its respective Action Plan in 2013, and the establishment of the inter-Ministerial Working Group on implementation of the aforementioned documents in 2015. However the National Roma Strategy, as such, is ill equipped to ensure the effective and meaningful participation of Roma in political, social, and economic life. After four years since the Strategy’s enactment, it still lacks strategic objectives, dedicated budgets and a gender component. These and other shortcomings have been identified by the OSCE, the ERRC, and local NGOs, including Chiricli. Nevertheless, the Ukrainian Roma civil society is utilizing the Strategy to remind the State authorities about their commitments to improve the overall situation of Roma and to keep this issue in focus.

When it comes to the effectiveness of the participation of Roma, certain tendencies can be highlighted. Namely: while Roma NGOs are actively participating in the consultative mechanisms relating to the issues of social inclusion of Roma, in reality the decision making process can hardly be characterized as meaningful. Secondly, there are certain barriers preventing Roma from effective and equal participation in public and political life, such as the extreme poverty, lower level of education and lack of identity documents, which also precludes them from exercising their rights as voters and candidates, as well as makes them easy targets for attempts to exert undue influence during elections, including vote-buying and other forms of pressure. In addition, Roma women and youth are still underrepresented and are far from enjoying equal participation in public and political life.

Having said this, we put forward the following **recommendations**:

To the Ukrainian Authorities

1. To ensure that the effectiveness of the existing inter-ministerial coordination mechanism for the implementation of the National Roma Strategy and NAP is improved and expanded;
2. To revise the National Roma Strategy and the Action Plan, articulating clearly-defined objectives, indicators and a realistic budget, as well as paying particular attention to the representation of Roma women and their needs;
3. To maximize ownership of Roma in policies affecting them at the national and local levels and to promote the active role and participation of Roma communities in decision-making processes;

4. Organize election-awareness campaigns so as to increase participation of the Roma electorate in electoral processes.

To the OSCE ODIHR

1. To support education programs targeting both Roma voters and candidates;
2. To proceed with the technical assistance for the effective implementation of the Odesa Declaration on access to identity documents by Roma;
3. To support political development programs that enhance Roma women and youth participation as voters and candidates, as an investment in future generations.