



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, April 2006

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INTRODUCTION

Given the importance of minority participation in the election process, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) has dedicated significant attention to these issues, 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, in cooperation with the European Commission began the project “Roma, use your ballot wisely!” in order to promote participation of Roma in the electoral process. The project targets Roma representatives and NGOs, including Roma political parties in the South-Eastern European region. The following countries are included in the project: Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Moldova, Kosovo (FYROM) and Romania.

The overall aim of the RUBW project is 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 stabilisation and democratisation processes in the countries of South-Eastern Europe and region. To reach this goal, a two-fold objective 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 use of electoral mechanisms as tools for empowering Roma and for advocacy in view of enforcing and implementing 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 the local elections; Cluster II: Advocacy and lobbying the elected bodies (local and national) for implementation 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 various election-related activities, including as short term observers (STOs) to OSCE ODIHR Election Observation Missions, running information campaigns related to building 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* 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.

* The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the OSCE and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE ODIHR)

COUNTRY PROFILES

Albania

General Overview

The population of Albania is 3,544,841 people. Greeks, Macedonians and Montenegrins are officially recognized as national minorities, while Roma and Vlachs/Aromanians are recognized as linguistic (cultural) minorities.

The Assembly comprises 140 members. Of these, 100 will be elected in single-member constituencies (zones) in one round of voting, and the remaining 40 will be 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 estimates between 1,300 and 120,000. During the last 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 Montenegrins¹. Roma live in almost all areas of the country. However, the strongest communities are situated mainly in central and southeast Albania: Tirana, Durres and Berat. Roma live either in big towns, on the towns outskirts or in villages close to the respective towns. Roma live in four districts of Tirana, the largest of which is the “Kinostudio” neighbourhood².

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

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

¹ ERRC Report on “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”, is available at www.errc.org.

² Ibid.

OMONIA was declared illegal, declares itself as representing the interests of all minorities in Albania. A few candidates from this party had a program 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 program 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 school³.

Voters

The political participation of Roma on the last elections was very low. Lack of trust in the politicians was considered as 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 implies 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, all 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 of a 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 one candidate 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.
- Obstacles facing minority women in public participation are stressed. No figures are available, but the reality shows that many Romani women are not registered and therefore are not able to vote.
- Incomplete voting register (voting list).

Recommendations

³ ERRC Report on "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", is available at www.errc.org.

- Violation of Article 3 of the Framework Convention for Protection of National Minorities should be stopped. Minorities should not be classified in national and linguistic minorities.
- The Albanian authorities should improve voter registration among national minority populations, particularly the Roma and Egyptian communities.
- Trainings on enhancing capacities of the political parties 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.
- 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 people, 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). The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) is made up of two regions and a district: The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republika of Srpska (RS) and Brcko District. The FBiH is subdivided 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 juridical authority is the Constitutional Court of FBiH. The 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 the Republika of Srpska, mayors are elected on a straight majority/plurality basis. In the Federation of BiH 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.⁴

On the 2nd of 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 percent.

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 50-60.000 Roma living in BiH, although they noticed that many Roma declared themselves as Muslims or Serbs. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) speak of between 85.000 and 100.000 Roma living in BiH.

Roma Participation in Public and Political Life

In the summer of 2003 the first Roma political party was registered as the 'Democratic Party of Roma.'

⁴ OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report on Bosnia and Herzegovina Municipal Election, 28 June - July 2004. (Available at http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2004/07/3344_en.pdf).

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 2nd of 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 general feeling of the Roma in Visoko community on election day morning was that Roma will go to vote, despite the fact that they did not have a common favourite candidate or party.
- 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 (2) from Social Democratic Party (SDP) in Vitez community; one (1) in Banovici).
- A balance between Romani men and women with regard to participating in the voting process was noticed.
- Although the Roma voter turnout was low, it was reported that in the Vitez and Tuzla communities the majority of Roma did vote⁵.

Candidates

- Only a single candidate was registered in the Social Democratic Party (SDP) 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.
- 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 platform.
- There was not enough information about the candidates and the voting procedure.
- 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.

⁵ Magdalena Matache, Report on the Electoral participation of Roma in BiH October 2004 (available from the ODIHR CPRSI upon request).

- 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 in their platforms special focus towards Roma issues. 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 gave no opportunity to choose a Roma candidate even if they live in the Republic of Serbia or FBiH.
- Due to the fact that the government still uses the Roma population numbers given by the census in 1991, this makes it more difficult for the 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 to the election. Therefore, international organisations should consider funds for Roma programs in BiH, not only for election, but also for education, advocacy, and project management.
- Trainings and information sessions in Roma communities about elections, voting, political parties should take place.
- Involvement of Roma as full participants in the election means their representation in political parties, in the electoral commission, in the polling stations, and in international election observation missions.
- Activities related to legally registering Roma illegal settlements should be undertaken⁶.

⁶ Magdalena Matache, Report on the Electoral participation of Roma in BiH October 2004 (available from the ODIHR CPRSI upon request).

Bulgaria

General Overview

According to the 2001 census the population of Bulgaria is 8,194,772 people. The 1991 Constitution established a unicameral parliament (the National Assembly) whose 240 members are elected for a four-year term by secret ballot. 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 provisions⁷.

On the 25th of June 2005 parliamentary elections took place in Bulgaria. 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 4.7⁸ per cent (307,908) of these belong to the Roma community⁹. 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 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.

Voters

⁷ OSCE/ODIHR Election Mission Assessment Mission Report on Parliamentary Elections in the Republic of Bulgaria, 25 June 2005.

⁸ 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.

⁹ Report on “Local Elections Observation in Bulgaria, October 2003,” by Rubin Zemon.

Municipal elections, October 2003:

During the 2001 elections only 40 per cent used their right to vote¹⁰. 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 identification. As a result, they were not included on the voter lists. A majority of Roma voters does not use their right to vote.

Parliamentary Elections, 2005:

Roma generally vote parallel to the majority vote pattern. The most remarkable difference between mainstream and Roma voters is the very high level of support for MRF (Movement for Rights and Freedom- a Bulgarian Turkish party) by Roma voters. 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.¹¹ The Roma who live in middle to small-size towns were more likely to vote.

Roma voters were influenced by family and community opinion stronger than non-Roma voters. According to the NDI pre-election poll 14 per cent of Roma voters felt limited because of financial factors and outside pressure.¹²

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).¹³

Candidates

Municipal elections, October 2003:

Bulgarian'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.¹⁴ While most of the Roma were elected from ethnic-based parties or coalitions, in a few communities they were elected on the ballots of mainstream parties.¹⁵ Roma have participated most effectively at the local level, while national politics are still characterized by their absence.

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 governments of one

¹⁰ Report on "Local Elections Observation in Bulgaria, October 2003," Rubin Zemon.

¹¹ NDI polling conducted by Alpha Research in March 2005.

¹² NDI Public Opinion Research on Roma political Attitudes, March 2005; in NDI Report on Roma Participation in Bulgarian 2005 Parliamentary Elections.

(Available at http://www.accessdemocracy.org/library/1976_bg_roma_011806.pdf).

¹³ NDI Report on Roma Participation in Bulgarian 2005 Parliamentary Elections.

(Available at http://www.accessdemocracy.org/library/1976_bg_roma_011806.pdf).

¹⁴ NDI report on "Coalition Building and Political Inclusion of Roma in Bulgaria, 2004".

¹⁵ Ibid.

fourth of the district centers (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.¹⁶

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 northwest 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.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ 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 *Evrroma* organisation. The coalition had a higher number of candidates from national minorities (then other coalitions), but often on lower places on the list.¹⁹ 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).²⁰

Trainings for Roma candidates

ODIHR in cooperation with Human Rights Project, organised 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). It also attracted Roma who were not the candidates.²¹

¹⁶ NDI report on “Coalition Building and Political Inclusion of Roma in Bulgaria, 2004”.

¹⁷ NDI Report on Roma Participation in Bulgarian 2005 Parliamentary Elections.

(Available at http://www.accessdemocracy.org/library/1976_bg_roma_011806.pdf).

¹⁸ OSCE/ODIHR Election Mission Assessment Mission Report on Parliamentary Elections in the Republic of Bulgaria, 25 June 2005.

¹⁹ Compilation of References of Roma in the ODIHR Election Observation Mission.

²⁰ NDI report on “Roma participation in 2005 Bulgarian Parliamentary Elections”.

²¹ Report on “Local Elections Observation in Bulgaria, October 2003,” by Rubin Zemon.

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) in cooperation with the OSCE organised 12 weeks training which focused on coalition building. The goals of the trainings 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 different as they had different backgrounds and aims. However, a majority of them used music events and parties as one of their main campaign strategy. 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 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:

Evrroma'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. *Evrroma'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.²²

Challenges to Overcome

Despite the achieved advantages and 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.²³

²² NDI Report on Roma Participation in Bulgarian 2005 Parliamentary Elections. (Available at http://www.accessdemocracy.org/library/1976_bg_roma_011806.pdf).

²³ Ibid.

- The newly nationalistic political coalition *Ataka* gained about 8 per cent with a campaign based on an anti-minority platform.²⁴
- Roma voters experienced outside pressure and were subjected to vote buying.
- Low levels of political education among Roma political leaders were reported.²⁵
- Many Roma voters were not familiar with voting techniques.²⁶

Recommendations

- The government should reform the current election law 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.²⁷
- 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, party poll watchers. They should increase the training and recruitment of Roma members.²⁸
- NGOs should organize efforts to monitor elections, the portrayal of Roma in the media, and the work of the National Commission for Prevention from Discrimination and other relevant institutions.²⁹

²⁴ NDI Report on Roma Participation in Bulgarian 2005 Parliamentary Elections.

(Available at http://www.accessdemocracy.org/library/1976_bg_roma_011806.pdf).

²⁵ Report on “Local Elections Observation in Bulgaria, October 2003,” by Rubin Zemon.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ NDI Report on Roma Participation in Bulgarian 2005 Parliamentary Elections.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

Croatia

General Overview

The population of Croatia is estimated at 4,422,248 people,³⁰ 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 law (2003) 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 candidates³¹.

On the 23rd of November 2003 parliamentary elections took place in Croatia. A total of 5,105 candidates stood for election. In the diasporas 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 and 0.2 (9,700) per cent out of them identify themselves as Roma.³² 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 the analysis of the documents related to the Roma minority in Croatia and on the

³⁰ Rubin Zemon report on "Parliamentary Elections in Croatia (2003)."

³¹ OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Report on Parliamentary Elections in the Republic of Croatia, 23 November, 2003. (Available at http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2004/01/1897_en.pdf).

³² Some Roma NGOs give the 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 were cases of voter manipulation, especially of those who were illiterate.

During the parliamentary election in Croatia in 2003, only 700 Roma voted. In cooperation with the GONG, a domestic non-partisan election observation group, 15 Roma observed the election process in those areas with a high Roma population.³³ During the parliamentary elections in 2003, Roma were motivated to use their right to vote due to the new election law.³⁴ During the presidential election a large number of Roma people decided not to vote in the first round. For Roma communities this was a way to show disagreement with state policies towards them.

Candidates

According to new election law, Roma candidate 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).³⁵ 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.” However, 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).

Challenges to Overcome

- There is no training or any other activities to encourage Roma participation in the election process: no brochures in the Romani language about election process were published, no trainings were held;
- 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;

³³ Rubin Zemon Report on Parliamentary Elections in Croatia (2003).

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Rubin Zemon Report on Parliamentary Elections in Croatia (2003).

- Roma candidates did not have the background to organise 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 bodies³⁶.

Recommendations

- To organise training for Roma candidates on political education and coalition making.
- To encourage the establishment of a political party which will have influence and support in Roma communities.³⁷
- To encourage Roma NGOs to organise information campaigns about the election process (i.e. the right to vote, voter's registration, the procedure of voting).³⁸
- To involve elected Roma representatives in the decision-making process.
- To devise a way to permit national minorities to vote without creating separate registers of minority voters.³⁹

³⁶ Rubin Zemon report on "Parliamentary Elections in Croatia (2003)".

³⁷ Rubin Zemon report on "Political participation and capacities of Roma and related minority groups in Croatia (2005)".

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Report on Parliamentary Elections in the Republic of Croatia, 23 November, 2003. (Available at http://www.osce.org/documents/odhr/2004/01/1897_en.pdf).

former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

General Overview

The population of Macedonia is 2,022,547 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 reorganisation which had foreseen 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 decentralisation.

Roma in FYROM

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 the representatives of the Roma community- suggesting a far larger number.

Through attempts to build a high standard of respect for human rights in its legislation, the FYROM has presented itself as a political system that shows openness and acceptance of modern democratic processes. In this sense the new Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia of 2001, in its preamble explicitly states the Roma people among 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 previous, and now with the new Constitution, the 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 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.⁴⁰ 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.

fYROM 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 organisations (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 fYROM also influence Roma voters. Through local elections citizens can choose the bodies of the self-government units (council and mayor).

⁴⁰ 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 for decentralisation that will be put into force in July 2006. The education level of the Roma explains the lack of widespread knowledge regarding the new legal regulations (due to the complexity in the explanation).

Candidates

There was a total of 43 political parties of which four were Roma who submitted lists with mayor candidates and members of 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. Beside the engagement of Roma political parties, the Roma participated with their independent candidate lists in the communes: Shuto Orizari in Skopje, Kochani and Shtip.

Coalitions

Several Roma parties decided to build a coalition with other parties. In Macedonia and Shuto Orizari (United Party for Emancipation in coalition with 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, VMRO-Macedonian), with participation of their own candidate who joined lists, as well as with its own list in the commune of Shuto Orizari.

The Party of Democratic Forces of the Roma from FYROM 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 coalition agreements these two coalitions had Roma candidates on their mutual lists. The other parties did not have representatives in most cities in FYROM including Skopje. The Union of Roma had its candidates for councillors 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 organisation 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 LLE as well as the Regulations for equal media representation on Local elections 2005. This framework was adopted by the Parliament upon the proposition of the Council for radio-diffusion. These regulations define the obligations of the public broadcaster, and the limitations, which also refer to other media, regarding the coverage of the election and paid political propaganda.

The national MTV, program on Roma language only presented the Mayor Candidate from the RUM. Mayor candidates did not participate in a direct TV duel, despite the fact that one TV duel was organized by BTR TV- the Mayor candidate from UPER had canceled his presence two hours before the TV Duel was on.

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 pooling stations, and threats to the members of electoral boards;
- The secrecy of voting was disregarded in 52% of the pooling stations, through the phenomenon of family voting;
- Not all members of the electoral boards were completely acquainted with the voting procedure. One case of violation of the procedure for counting of the votes had also been registered;
- There was reported a high level of social exclusion and discrimination, especially of certain ethnic groups, like the Roma, but also of other groups (such as people living in institutions and people with special needs);
- Urban and rural planning (issue of permits for the construction of buildings was of particular importance, in accordance with the law that defines construction space and land); and
- Roma were not familiar with the new legislation concerning the participation of national minorities in the elections.

Recommendations

- To adopt more structured and clear policies for Roma Women NGOs for overcoming the double discrimination of Roma women, in terms of more organized approach towards this issue;
- To initiate additional programs for vocational trainings, education etc, as precondition for increasing the level of employment among Roma women;
- to initiate more aggressive methods for motivation and encouragement for more active involvement of Roma women in all social flows; Lobbying the political parties and their “male” fractions for more awareness on Roma women issues, for overcoming the stereotypes of Roma women as housewives and integrating their aspect in decision making processes;
- To develop initiatives for mainstream the issue of Roma women human/women rights – joint actions with Roma men and with representatives of other ethnic communities.
- The state should ensure complete implementation of the Lund recommendations for participation of minorities in decision-making processes at the national and international level;
- 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 to 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;
- (non) Roma political parties should establish their regional units in smaller cities in the country;
- 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 Roma population as part of the Initiative for Roma political participation through creative and pro-active approach;
- Monitoring over the events which stereotype and mark Roma;
- Providing the main media with new alternative sources on the Roma community;
- Vocational trainings for Roma to work in influential media positions; and
- 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 4,229,700 people, 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 6th 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. In 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 disadvantages 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 for 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.⁴¹

On the 6th of March 2005, the citizens of Moldova voted in the 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 blocks, 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.

⁴¹ OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report on Parliamentary Elections in the Republic of Moldova, 6 March 2005. (Available at http://www.osce.org/documents/odhr/2005/06/14919_en.pdf).

Local elections held on 25th of 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. Roma account for 0.2 per cent of the whole population. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) 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 culture and language.⁴²

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 participation in the local elections held on 25 of May, 2003.

Voters

- Roma voter turnout was higher 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 procedure and as a result, there were a high number of invalid ballots.
- Some Roma people mentioned cases of votes buying.⁴³

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 Mayor 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.⁴⁴
- In the commune of Cioressti (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

⁴² Report on "Roma and Local Elections in Republic of Moldova (2003)."

⁴³ Report on "Roma and Local Elections in Republic of Moldova (2003)."

⁴⁴ Report on "Roma and Local Elections in Republic of Moldova (2003)".

absence of the logo adversely affected his chances in the poll. The court rejected his appeal and declared the first round results valid.⁴⁵

Political Parties

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

Campaign Platform

- In the election campaign Roma candidates used mainstream strategies, based on 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.⁴⁶
- The candidates presented their programmes in Roma communities, although there was not enough material such as leaflets or posters in Roma communities.
- There was no media covering 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;⁴⁷
- Roma political participation is not supported by the majority;
- People in Roma communities do not get enough information about the election campaigns;
- People do not know how to fill in the ballots.⁴⁸

Recommendations

- Review of electoral system in order to secure a fair representation of regionally based minorities;
- Review of territorial and administrative law to encourage political and social participation of Roma minority;
- Trainings 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.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Report on Local Elections in the Republic of Moldova, 25 May and 8 June, 2003. (Available at http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2003/08/560_en.pdf).

⁴⁶ Report on “Roma and Local Elections in Republic of Moldova (2003)”.

⁴⁷ Report on “Roundtable on Roma Participation in Local Election in Chisinau, 2003”.

⁴⁸ Report on “Roma and Local Elections in Republic of Moldova (2003)”.

⁴⁹ Report on “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. Of 28 seats, from a total of 314 in the Chamber of Deputies, are occupied by the minority organisations. All minorities have been very active and have a total of 3283 candidates (out of a total of 6704 political party candidates in Romania).⁵⁰

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 between 1.1 and 1.5 million Roma (6 per cent).

Roma Participation in Public and Political Life

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

Political Parties

The 2004 elections saw the emergence of two Roma political organisations: 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 organisations were unequally distributed at the national level. The highest number of votes for the two parties was in Prahova, Mures, Alba, Galati counties.

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

Candidates

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.⁵¹ In the 2004 elections, the Alliance for

⁵⁰ The Political Participation of Roma in Romania (available from ODIHR CPRSI upon request).

⁵¹ Ibid.

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).⁵² 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 organisation in Roma communities;
- The lack of an open and fair environment that welcomes Roma political organisations and encourages vigorous participation.⁵³

Recommendations

- Develop a cadre of political leaders, managers and activists trained and skilled in political organisation 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.
- 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.

⁵² The Political Participation of Roma in Romania (available from ODIHR CPRSI upon request).

⁵³ NDI Assessment Mission Report on “Roma Political Participation in Romania”, February 2003.

Serbia and Montenegro

General Overview

On the 28 of 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 recommendations⁵⁴.

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 presidential election.

Previously, on the 28th of December 2003 parliamentary elections were held in the Republic of Serbia.

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 old Roma and Romani women were illiterate and had difficulty understanding the ballot.⁵⁵

Candidates

In the Nis area there were four Romani 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 the most active.

⁵⁴ OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Report on Presidential Election in the Republic of Serbia and Montenegro, 13 and 24 June, 2004. (Available at http://www.osce.org/documents/odih/2004/09/3620_en.pdf).

⁵⁵ Report on “Romani Political Participation and Observation of the Participation of Roma (as candidates and voters) in Parliamentary Elections in the Republic of Serbia”, M. Demirovski.

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 cooperation.
- 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 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.
- Roma NGOs were not active during the election period.

Recommendations

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

III. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

As parts 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 the OSCE Election Observation Missions 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 organisations. 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 observed countries 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 are proven disadvantageous toward minority candidates (i.e. such as in Moldova). In several observed countries (i.e. FYROM 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 coalition. However, due to lack of training and political education these coalitions are not effective for Roma. They do not sign any official documents to confirm their cooperation and as a result they cannot benefit from it (i.e. as is the case in Serbia).
3. *Small number of minority candidate*. In general, the numbers of minority candidates do not reflect their share of population. In Moldova 2004 parliamentary elections, only two Roma candidates were included on the list of mainstream parties, both in the position that make them unlikely to be elected. Generally, the level of organisation of minority parties is still weak (i.e. 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 began 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 voter*. 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 on the voter lists (i.e. in Albania). A number of Roma experienced difficulties accessing identification documents, some of them do not want to be register (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 technique 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 when people did not know how to fill in the ballots (i.e. in Moldova and Bulgaria). There is a general lack of information 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 usually are not 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 and Romania) Roma voters' 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 (i.e. in Serbia). In some countries Roma do not have language problems (i.e. 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 and community opinion (this was the case in Bulgaria). Cases of *vote buying* among Roma communities were reported in several countries (such as FYROM and Bulgaria).

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