



OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR)  
Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues (CPRSI)

## **SUMMARY REPORT OF THE WORKSHOP**

### **Strengthening Diverse Leadership, Participation and Representation of Roma and Sinti, including Women and Youth, in Public and Political Life**

Hosted by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights in co-operation with the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (U.S. Helsinki Commission)

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### *Disclaimer*

*This report should neither be interpreted as official OSCE recommendations based on a consensus decision, nor as opinion of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights or of any particular OSCE participating State. The content of this report reflects opinions expressed by participants at the workshop on 27 and 28 March 2017 and no additional information has been included since then.*

## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| ARDI                     | European Parliament Anti-Racism and Diversity Intergroup                           |
| CoE                      | Council of Europe  |
| CPRSI                    | Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues  |
| EC                       | European Commission  |
| ENAR                     | European Network Against Racism  |
| ERGO Network             | European Roma Grassroots Organizations Network                                     |
| EU                       | European Union   |
| fYROM                    | The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia  |
| LGBTQI                   | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex                            |
| MEP                      | Member of the European Parliament  |
| MP                       | Member of Parliament   |
| NGO                      | Non-governmental organization  |
| NRIS                     | European Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies                        |
| OSCE                     | Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe                               |
| OSCE Action Plan         | OSCE Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti Within the OSCE Area |
| OSCE/ODIHR               | OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights                           |
| OSCE PA                  | OSCE Parliamentary Assembly  |
| PACE                     | Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe                                    |
| PM                       | Prime Minister   |
| US                       | The United States of America   |
| U.S. Helsinki Commission | U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe                              |

## I. INTRODUCTION

### *1.1. Background*

Results of various policies and programmes addressing the social exclusion of, or racism and discrimination against Roma and Sinti have had limited impact. Much still needs to be done to close the gap between marginalized communities and the mainstream to overcome the impact of discrimination against Roma and Sinti in areas such as education, housing, health care and employment. Mainstream and targeted policy mechanisms, including its funding, monitoring and evaluation schemes, should be critically reviewed in view of the mid-term review of the European Union (EU) Framework on National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS) and the discussion for a post 2020 mechanism and in view of other policy commitments made by states relating to Roma and Sinti in other regional and international fora. The need for more consolidated support for Roma and Sinti civil society, including women and youth, has to be fully considered in the review and future planning processes. Effective participation of civil society plays an essential role in consultation processes towards needs-based policy-making and implementation.

The participation of Roma and Sinti men and women in national and local decision-making is one of the priorities identified by the OSCE Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti Within the OSCE Area (OSCE Action Plan)<sup>1</sup>, subsequently enhanced by the Ministerial Council decisions 6/08<sup>2</sup> and 4/13<sup>3</sup>. The representation of Roma and Sinti men and women in elected and appointed office at all levels of government and active involvement in electoral processes represents the core of participation. To address such principles, the adequate representation of Roma and Sinti in political parties' membership is both a pre-requisite and an opportunity. The ODIHR 2013 Status Report stressed that mainstream political parties are still reluctant to put forward Roma and Sinti candidates.<sup>4</sup> Further, mainstream political parties across the OSCE region as well as within the entire political spectrum shy away from prioritizing Roma and Sinti issues within an inclusive policy agenda, or, when such inclusion is provided, they are often not translated into concrete policies. On the contrary, anti-Roma rhetoric and exploitation

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<sup>1</sup> OSCE Ministerial Council, Decision No. 3/03, "Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti Within the OSCE Area", Maastricht, 1 and 2 December 2003, <<http://www.osce.org/odihr/17554>>.

<sup>2</sup> OSCE Ministerial Council, Decision No. 6/08, "Enhancing OSCE Efforts to Implement the Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti Within the OSCE Area", Helsinki, 5 December 2008, <<http://www.osce.org/mc/35488?download=true>>.

<sup>3</sup> OSCE Ministerial Council, Decision No. 4/13, "Enhancing OSCE Efforts to Implement the Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti Within the OSCE Area, With a Particular Focus on Roma and Sinti Women, Youth and Children", Kyiv, 6 December 2013, <<http://www.osce.org/mc/109340?download=true>>.

<sup>4</sup> Implementation of the Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area - Renewed Commitments, Continued Challenges, Status Report 2013, OSCE/ODIHR, Warsaw, 2013, <<http://www.osce.org/odihr/107406?download=true>>.

of anti-Roma sentiment are reportedly used by political candidates in election campaigns to increase their popularity.

The ODIHR Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues (CPRSI) has consistently addressed these issues, by engaging stakeholders, such as politicians, Roma and Sinti civil society activists, experts, women and youth in various activities.<sup>5</sup> These events have shown that further engagement is needed from mainstream political parties and European political leaders to counter anti-Gypsyism and support Roma and Sinti inclusion and promote inclusive political platforms for Roma and Sinti women and men as well as youth representatives to stimulate change.

## **1.2. Objective**

The workshop aimed at strengthening dialogue between Roma and Sinti, policy makers and politicians and at exploring strategies to enhance public and political participation of Roma and Sinti, including women and youth, as means to advocate for the integration of community interests into the political and policy agenda at national and European level. In addition, the event sought to discuss the potential of effective participation in public and political life for changing bias narratives and to combat racism and discrimination against Roma and Sinti.

With discursive and interactive exchange participants shared experiences of successful community participation in public and political spheres, of community representation to change the narrative and anti-Roma public discourse, and of models of successfully influencing and changing policies.

Based on examples from the United States of America (US) and Europe, the discussion reflected on intersecting social and ethnic identities with a particular focus on gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, and religion.

## **1.3. Participants**

The workshop brought together 41 participants (23 women and 18 men), including high-level speakers, panelists, introducers, moderators, and experts, including youth representing authorities from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (fYROM), Slovakia, Serbia and the US and Roma and Sinti and other civil society representatives from Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Slovenia, and Spain.

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<sup>5</sup> Further information about related work of the ODIHR CPRSI is available at: <<http://www.osce.org/office-for-democratic-institutions-and-human-rights/223691>>.

Representatives of the OSCE/ODIHR, European Parliament (EP), the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (U.S. Helsinki Commission), ENAR (European Network Against Racism), ERGO European Roma Grassroots Organizations Network (ERGO Network) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) took part in the workshop.

The diverse participation set the stage for a fruitful multi-stakeholder discussion and dialogue.

## II. SUMMARY OF THE SESSIONS

### 2.1. Opening remarks

**Mirjam Karoly**, Senior Adviser on Roma and Sinti Issues/Chief of the ODIHR CPRSI, welcomed participants and shortly introduced the mandate of the OSCE on Roma and Sinti and particularly the commitments of the OSCE on enhancing participation of Roma and Sinti, including women and youth in public and political life. She outlined the specific



*Photo information: Mirjam Karoly, OSCE/ODIHR Senior Adviser on Roma and Sinti Issues welcomes participants to the workshop. 27 March 2017, Brussels. (Michael Chia).*

recommendations of the 2003 OSCE Action Plan and introduced into the CPRSI related work in this area. The Senior Adviser discussed obstacles that Roma and Sinti face with regard to their electoral rights or in running for political office. At the same time she stressed that Roma and Sinti political participation can be a powerful tool for countering racism and discrimination and putting the interests of the community on the political

agenda at local, national and European level. In this regard she referred to the conclusions of last years OSCE/ODIHR high-level conference in Berlin, Germany on “Confronting Anti-Gypsyism – The Role of Political Leaders in Countering Discrimination, Racism, Hate Crimes and Violence Against Roma and Sinti Communities”<sup>6</sup>, stressing that the current workshop follows-up on a number of conclusions and recommendations of the Berlin Conference. Through this activity, CPRSI aims at looking at examples from the US and wider Europe and sharing experiences on managing and representing diversity in the public and political sphere, on how to build political alliances as well as how this work can be utilized within local contexts throughout Europe to increase Roma and Sinti participation and

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<sup>6</sup> For further information about the conference is available at: <<http://www.osce.org/cio/262606>>.

representation in politics. In this regard she welcomed the fruitful cooperation and support from the U.S. Helsinki Commission and the participants from the US. Finally, the Senior Adviser invited participants to actively engage in debating various models of participation and representation of Roma, including women and youth, in public and political life.

## **2.2. Panel: European and US Perspectives on Diversity in the Public and Political Spheres**

The moderator **Iulius Rostas**, Chair of Romani Studies Programme, Central European University and moderator of the session, introduced the panelists, **Mee Moua**, Former State Senator of Minnesota and former President of Asian Americans Advancing Justice, **Ciprian Necula**, Former State Secretary, Romania, **Livia Járóka**, Hungarian politician and Former Member of the European Parliament (MEP), **Assita Kanko**, Author, Columnist and Politician, and **Alfiaz Vaiya**, Coordinator of the European Parliament Anti-Racism and Diversity Intergroup (ARDI).

The moderator posed the following questions to the speakers: How do state institutions address issues of Roma political participation in our society and is Roma political participation relevant in the context of growing political populism and increases in migrants and refugees in Europe, as well as how to address this challenge? How can Roma and their situation be relevant in a larger context on a public agenda, taking into account the democratic competitive process? And finally, how do policies influence xenophobic discourse and Anti-Gypsyism?

**Mee Moua** welcomed participants and expressed her gratitude to have a discussion with such a diverse group. Moua shared her personal story as an Asian American. She was born in Laos and later on immigrated with the family, as refugees, to the US. Currently, Moua still has relatives in Laos and Thailand and relatives in Australia, Canada, France and other countries. In the village where she was born, there was no access to water and electricity. Her parents had no access to education. She highlighted that she felt a connection with the Roma in Europe, as in America she is also part of a minority.

Many men and women of her generation experienced cultural, social and economic difficulties in trying to integrate into American society. In the US the lack of education and challenges to integrate was especially difficult for the young people. The situation of her community



*Photo information: Mee Moua, Former State Senator of Minnesota and former President of Asian Americans Advancing Justice shares her personal experience. 27 March 2017, Brussels (Michael Chia).*

influenced Moua to decide to run for political office in Minnesota in 2011. She was driven by the desire to change perceptions in the society about her community. Her political agenda aimed at tackling negative headlines in the media about the Asian minority, to stimulate debates on public housing, and to collect statistics to address school drop-out and employment. In her campaign, Moua pointed out that the Asian minority had great potential, are smart and can contribute to the development of the society.

She further elaborated that inclusion is a goal that each person has to achieve through public policy. The public policy is a starting point for minorities who want to change cultural perceptions. Moua stressed that people change when the system changes and the system changes when people change. In conclusion, she mentioned that young people around the world should run for politics and they should think about how their decisions will affect the next generation.

**Ciprian Necula** provided an account of his professional development and engagement within the Roma movement. He decided to engage in the civil rights movement in order to address stereotypes and to fight racism.

Together with his father, a traditional Roma blacksmith, Necula started to promote occupational traditions of the Roma community. He founded Romano Butiq, an organization promoting – among other things, Roma crafts. Additionally, they succeeded to open a museum located in a Roma settlement in Bucharest on a territory of 2400 square meters to promote non-discrimination through cultural and educational activities and to collect and exhibits Roma art and craft.

Necula also shared his experience as a public speaker and journalist. As a journalist he has written about poverty and how the state could address the issue. Through his work he gained popularity and in 2015 he was nominated for the position of State Secretary in the Ministry of European Union Funds in Romania by the Prime Minister (PM). At first, he was responsible for administering funds allocated for Roma and other vulnerable populations. This grew into increasing responsibility for the overall human resources funding programme within EU funding programmes in Romania.

Following this experience, he decided to enter politics as he considered that problems Roma are facing are interrelated and could be solved by advocacy and lobbying. He therefore joined the Social Democratic Party in Romania. He was included in the list of deputies on the thirteenth position but following the outcomes of the elections only twelve representatives from the list were elected. Necula underlined that his Roma colleague, Petre Florin Manole had managed to get elected as a Member of the Parliament (MP) in the same party in the 2016 elections. Finally he stressed that this particular experience, even if he was not a successful candidate, has been extremely useful and that he has invested a lot in garnering support from different groups in society, including by standing up for women's rights, inclusion and non-discrimination.



**Livia Járóka** underlined the importance of having Roma politicians in different countries. She was a MEP, elected as part of the Hungarian Fidesz list in 2004. She welcomed this meeting and noted that in the field of Roma political participation there has been limited progress, noting the situation is similar to what it was twenty years ago when she started advocating for Roma rights. She stressed that Roma have never been considered serious political actors or on the top of political party lists. Also, in her view Roma who are MEPs or MPs do not necessarily connect their activity with issues of their communities. In order to be a good politician it is not enough to have good communication skills, but to know how to consistently advocate for a cause. Járóka also expressed her concerns with regard to discrimination and exclusion that Roma politicians are subjected to.

Further, Járóka shared her experience in advocating for the European NRIS under the Hungarian EU chairmanship in 2011. She mentioned that it was a long way to get the NRIS adopted and needed a lot of continuous investment in lobbying and advocacy. Further, she underlined that its adoption has been a milestone in the European Union's history and a huge opportunity for Roma in Europe. She pointed out that the representatives of the European Commission (EC) involved in implementation of the European Framework for NRIS must be better informed about the issues and real situation of Roma communities. She further underlined that young Roma activists and politicians should also be aware of the risks of being involved in politics. Járóka further referred to the high level EU conference "Empowerment of Roma Youth as a Driving Force behind Change" which took place in Bratislava, Slovakia in 2016. She critically noted that the issues raised during the event did not reflect the real situation of Roma at the local level and encouraged young Roma to connect at the local level with their communities and advocate for their needs.

Describing how the NRIS are implemented by the EU Member States she brought attention to four main weaknesses she observes: First, lack of comprehensive monitoring of the EU NRIS; second, funds are spent superficially without addressing the real difficulties of Roma people, third, the issues of employment, health and gender disparities still remain unaddressed. Roma in the villages lost their jobs and Roma are ten times more likely to die because of cardio-vascular diseases and five times more from cancer; also Roma women suffer from gender discrimination within and outside the community; and fourth, Roma activists are not informed about the European Framework for NRIS and do not follow up on the implementation of the NRIS in their countries.

At the same time she expressed her concerns regarding the lack of funds for a post 2020 EU Roma policy and highlighted the need for conducting strong monitoring of the European Framework for the NRIS and raising the issue of Roma representation. She stressed the need to focus and follow up on activities and funds dedicated for Roma inclusion.

To illustrate difficulties in getting support for a Roma agenda at the European level, Járóka briefly referred to the process of establishing at the European level a Roma Holocaust Memorial

Day on 2 August, and underlined the low level of support of MEPs for this resolution. Only 150 out of 750 MEPs, even colleagues representing other persecuted communities, supported the resolution. On the other hand she underlined the need for unity and alliances of different vulnerable groups which can lead to big changes and positive results. Concluding her intervention, she encouraged young Roma to choose those leaders that will represent the interests of the community and who are transparent and not corrupt.

**Assita Kanko** focused on the complexities women face on a daily basis in all areas of life, with one of the issues being the underrepresentation of women in political and public life. She stressed that women have to run in elections, and also to participate in the voting process. She discussed a positive example from Belgium, where citizens are obliged by law to vote otherwise they are fined. She pointed out that political efforts should include and respond to the diversity of people with different backgrounds. The politicians should include everyone by speaking with people instead of speaking about them. Further, she shared her personal experiences of political activity in Belgium.

Kanko joined the Reformist Movement party and was elected town councilor in the Brussels commune of Ixelles in the year 2012. In 2016 her party mainly focused on education. In this respect, they also reached out to the local Roma community and held meetings with Roma. She expressed her dissatisfaction that at one meeting only men and no Roma women were present. When she asked about women's participation the men informed her that they are absent because they have to take care of the children, a reason she finds unacceptable. She stressed the importance of both men and women participating in policy processes. Further, she expressed her concern about the causes of low rates of women's participation in politics, especially women from African communities and other underrepresented groups. Kanko reflected on how the society could use the potential of women in general and women from minority groups in particular. She highlighted the example of African Americans during the Civil Rights Movement in the US and stressed that the solidarity and unity between minority groups led to prosperity and success. Women from Roma and Sinti, Asian, and African communities should build bridges and learn from each other. Kanko shared her experience of participation in an event in France where she spoke about sexism in politics. She met locally elected women and she was impressed by their ambitions and their fearless approach to the topic of sexism in politics. She concluded her statement by stressing once more the importance of focusing on the needs of the community and in particular the needs of the women while engaging in public policy.

**Alfiaz Vaiya** introduced his experience of working in the EP and representing 18 MEPs within the Anti-Racism and Diversity Intergroup (ARDI). Vaiya noted that at the European level there are many issues of different vulnerable groups including LGBTQI, migrants, Muslims, Roma, Jewish, Afro-descent, etc. Representatives of some groups are more active and others are less involved in political and public life. His work is related to different groups including Roma. He stated that in terms of policies at the European as well as the national level, Roma are privileged

compared with other groups as they successfully managed to get recognition from policy makers and the EC. Today, there are many organizations that focus their activities on Roma issues.

Referring to the underrepresentation of Roma in politics he formulated four recommendations for consideration: First, to increase representation at the local and European level. In the EP there are only two Roma politicians. Lack of Roma representation prevents the voices of the community from being heard. Additionally, people should know about the power of their vote; Second, focus on children's education. Educated people have more chances to get involved in politics; Third, invest in sustainable businesses. Activists should make an economic argument for integration, noting that discrimination costs more than empowering and integrating people; Fourth, be strategic. In order to bring sustainable change in communities, activists should think and act strategically.

Vaiya made reference to the organization Operation Black Vote from the United Kingdom (UK) which strives to ensure greater racial justice and equality throughout the UK. He also raised that important decisions are made at various levels in every day's life situations, thus broad participation to local decision-making processes are crucial for empowerment. For example, parents' participation in school boards can be instrumental for stimulating longer term changes. Concluding his intervention, Vaiya mentioned that Europe is very diverse and the issue of one minority community should be the issue of all other minorities.

In the discussion following the presentations, participants noted that in order to influence politics Roma have to be members of political parties and shared successful examples from the Western Balkans region. A young Roma activist recommended that Roma MPs and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) strengthen cooperation to capitalize on common efforts relating to Roma communities. In addition participants mentioned the need to create networking platforms between Roma, MPs and NGOs from different regions for sharing experiences and good practices. One participant proposed to bring all interested actors under an umbrella platform and to define joint objectives, one objective for example could be that the NRIS should reflect the reality and needs of Roma communities.

Further, several participants challenged the argument that influencing depends on being a member of a political party, stressing that even from outside or by running as an independent candidate pressure might be exerted; additionally, several participants raised examples where minority votes in the US and Europe had been manipulated, and the need to overcome this, including by engaging in political approaches aiming at the reduction of poverty of Roma and other communities.

Responding to the issues raised, a Roma activist and politician stated that he had decided to leave the party when it promoted legislation downplaying anti-corruption principles which triggered massive public protests. The same participant underlined that in Romania the common stereotype about politicians is that they are corrupt and that by leaving the party he aimed to challenge the

stereotype, however despite this he thinks of and running again as a candidate in the next European elections.

Another participant, politician from Belgium, underlined that in Belgium party lists are very diverse but not gender balanced. In order to address this and increase women's involvement in politics a quota system will be introduced in Belgium in 2018. Further, the importance of creating diversity both in politics and in the media was underlined with the example given that only 10 per cent of women lead the world as a result of sexism in the parliament and other institutions.

The intersectionality of gender and ethnicity was also supported by the representative of the Asian American community in the US who shared that in her community it is hard to be young and to be a woman, saying a young woman faces double discrimination. When she started to engage politically, she on one hand encountered resistance from her community but on the other hand she had the support of her mother and aunt. They were calling other women from the community asking to support and vote for her. She further stressed that the women did not ask for permission from their men but made use of their votes. She also shared that her district has a very diverse population, including Latino, Chinese, Asians, Irish, Catholics and Indian communities. None of these communities were in positions of power. She was the first representative of a minority group to run in politics from this district and when she started to politically engage she did not expect to win. She however had reached out to the community on a regular basis and discussed with them issues they were facing in their everyday life. Concluding, she underlined the importance of involving civil society in politics as it plays a crucial role in mobilizing and organizing people.

The point on the role to connect with civil society was also supported by another participant, who shared that ARDI for example maintains a very strong relationship with civil society. Further, reflections highlighted the lack of ethnic diversity in the European feminist movement. Finally, a Roma women politician expressed concerns about continuous Anti-Gypsyism in society instigated by different actors, including some politicians. In this regard the work of MEP Soraya Post and the importance of her initiative to prepare a comprehensive report about Anti-Gypsyism in Europe this year in the EP was brought to the attention of participants.

### **2.3. *Workshop: Changing the narrative about Roma and other diverse communities***

The workshop was moderated by **Julie Pascoët**, Senior Advocacy Officer, European Network Against Racism (ENAR). Pascoët welcomed participants and introduced the topic of the workshop by raising the racist discourse about Roma and Sinti underlining that the de-humanization of the Roma community is leading to a denial of Roma rights. She stimulated the debate by asking introducers and participants to actively contribute to the session by exploring different models of diverse community participation and its potential and impact to counter bias

and hostility against communities; by exploring the current state of public discourse about Roma and Sinti and how anti-Roma rhetoric used in electoral campaigning can be reversed; further, by exploring what we can learn from different communities in Europe and the US with regard to fostering community representation and participation in politics to overcome negative and biased political discourse; and by sharing successful strategies of participation and representation to influence politics and policies.



*Photo information: Roland Ferkovics, Roma activist from Hungary and Grantee of the German Marshall Fund Alumni Action Project talks about the impact of political narrative on Roma communities. 27 March 2017, Brussels (Michael Chia).*

Opening the debate, she gave the floor to **Roland Ferkovics**, Roma activist from Hungary and Grantee of the German Marshall Fund Alumni Action Project.

**Roland Ferkovics** called for raising attention towards political parties' rhetoric against Roma and the impact on the community. Generally speaking he said the political narrative has the potential to positively or negatively impact Roma communities. A positive political narrative provides direction or motivation for people and creates environments conducive for Roma integration. Elaborating on the example

of negative political narratives about Roma in Hungary he raised concerns about their impact on the mainstream population. In the last decade Roma were blamed for all problems of the society and further the political narrative was radicalized by the creation of new labels relating to Roma in public and political discourse, such as the use of the term "gypsy crimes". In this context he also referred to the danger and threats to the Roma community by extremists and the murder of six Roma in Hungary in 2008 and how the public responded to the racist violence and killings.

Further, Ferkovics hinted at the negative trend of the political narrative during times of economic crises and its influence on the discourse about Roma in mainstream society. He said that Viktor Orbán, the current Prime Minister (PM) of Hungary, had made a huge investment in election campaigns that targeted Roma as scapegoats and propagated anti-Roma sentiment. In addition, Roma voters were put under pressure by local politicians who argued that Roma would otherwise lose their social benefits if the current leadership would not be reelected. In this context Ferkovics also mentioned the common stereotype that Roma only vote to secure social benefits and that their vote does not reflect their political preferences. With regard to ethnic Roma parties he underlined that being ethnic Roma does not necessarily lead to voting for a Roma politician. Moreover, the political affiliation of Roma politicians is not always shared by members of the community. Ferkovics mentioned with regard to Hungary he observes lack of strategy and sustainability of Roma politicians. He added that during the last elections in Hungary a radical anti-Roma political party had distributed election campaign videos in which Roma were portrayed as mosquitos and in the end of the video the mosquitos were killed. In this regard he

recalled the experience during the Second World War when half a million Roma were killed by dehumanizing them and often portraying them as animals. Ferkovics concluded his statement by calling on Roma to unite, to be more strategic, and to counter the current negative narrative.

Starting the discussion the moderator added that many politicians in Europe are using strong anti-Roma rhetoric. She underlined the need to speak out against the crimes against Roma in Hungary and other countries. In addition, she pointed out that in the case of Hungary, the far right marches started when a democratic government was in place. Pascoët also discussed the danger of manipulation, e.g. by having Roma representatives joining extremist parties or movements, for example the Jobbik party, in order to influence the vote at the local level and work against an inclusive policy agenda. She asked participants to share their thoughts and experiences of how politicians can use positive narratives to unite different underrepresented groups.

In the following discussion, participants reflected on how to engage other groups in the struggle for Roma integration and the reasons why Roma might join extremist parties. One participant underlined that in the example of Hungary Roma reportedly join extremist parties because they are disappointed with the status quo of the political environment in general. Another young activist stated that civil society needs to be more strategic to achieve positive sustainable results. Further, a representative from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia underlined that Roma need support from to succeed in politics. In addition, participants mentioned the need to stop the victimisation of Roma and others perceiving them as a vulnerable group. Further they raised that Roma youth have to be empowered to take a proactive role in politics. Reflecting on the strategies that should be applied to improve Roma political participation and promote a positive narrative, it was proposed to train Roma youth in digital skills, to afford them digital devices and to increase their capacity to access different sources of information, as well as to enhance civic education for Roma children, and to foster cooperation between NGOs and media.

Some participants also underlined the need to consider two additional approaches for changing the narrative. First, to focus on a positive narrative on culture to imply change and second, to address hate crimes against Roma. In this regard, the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture was suggested as a platform for producing a different narrative by building on the potential of Roma culture and on combating Anti-Gypsyism and mainstreaming Roma culture at the European level with through an established structure and a developed strategy.

Further, participants expressed concerns about the lack of cooperation between the older and newer generation of activists and representatives striving to achieve non-discrimination and equality for Roma and Sinti. It was stressed that different actors fight for the same purpose but their experiences are lost and not handed over to the newer generation. They also shared concerns about the lack of dialogue between governments and Roma NGOs. A Roma activist from France raised that many Roma are fighting to survive and face hardship in housing and food in France. In their fight for survival they are not interested in politics, therefore Roma

activists have to make politicians aware about the situation of their community and to ensure that Roma have access to education and are on the political and public agenda. In addition, the participant pointed that the Roma community has to stop self-victimization and reverse the narrative by building resistance. In this regard the narrative of the resistance of the Roma group on 16 May 1944, in the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, could serve as an example for activists.

A participant from Hungary supported the argument that the self-victimization of the Roma community would not change the situation and argued for an all-inclusive approach without designing divisions in society. It was therefore proposed to reach out to media to promote positive narratives about Roma.

Drawing from the experience of marginalized groups in the US, a participant underlined that the topics discussed with regard to Roma during the workshop are similar to her experiences in the US. She pointed at the danger of self-victimization of minority communities instead of building coalitions of solidarity across different communities. Further, she highlighted the potential of minority communities. They can identify a common interest/agenda that will unite. In conclusion, she added her support for creative ideas and diversity.

Another participant stressed the importance of focusing on Roma language and identity while building Roma leadership. In the participants opinion many educated Roma think they can articulate the experiences about Roma, but are often unable to accurately reflect the complexity of issues that Roma face on a daily basis. Therefore it was proposed to explain to larger society the irrationality of segregation and racism, to follow and to inform the public about events happening at the national and European levels, to build coalitions with interested actors in order to stand up against populist politicians and to apply the rule of law to counter racism as it is key for democratic societies.

#### **2.4. *Workshop: Engaging in dialogue and changing policy***

The workshop was facilitated by **Mischa Thompson**, a Policy advisor at the U.S. Helsinki Commission, who began the workshop by sharing her experiences working with Jewish and other diverse groups in the United States and across Europe. Further, she shared her personal story growing up in the diverse city of Detroit, with Greek Polish, African-American, Middle Eastern, Chaldean, Jewish and other communities, and overcoming negative stereotypes to advance positive changes. She then spoke about deeply rooted stereotypes and prejudices about people of African descent and mentioned that she learned more about the stereotypes in order to tackle them, noting that it is important to know about societies' labels to be able to break stereotypes. She then used this example to speak about the need to understand Roma stereotypes, how they impact policy and daily life, and the need to change the conversation on

Roma to one that accentuates historical and present day contributions to society as a means to increase political will and support for initiatives to improve the situation of Roma.

She then detailed three of several ways to influence decision-making: serving as an elected official; working in government, including parliaments; and through civil society efforts. Following a discussion on the importance of each of the roles and related career and leadership opportunities, participants broke into groups for a team exercise on advocating for issues addressing Roma and Sinti. As part of the exercise they also developed a presentation for MEPs during the Roma week advocacy day in light of the mid-term review of the NRIS. Participants joined five working groups and as a result presented the following list of issues of concerns and recommendations:



*Photo information: Participants discussing strategies to influence policies. 28 March 2017, Brussels. (Michael Chia).*

#### Issues of concern:

- A lack of data, monitoring and evaluation of the European Framework for NRIS;
- A lack of a transparent dialogue between the Roma and Sinti community and the authorities or think-tank organizations, who are designing targeted strategies or projects;
- A lack of transparency in the distribution of EU funds dedicated for Roma and Sinti inclusion that do not reach the intended Roma beneficiaries;
- A lack of Roma and Sinti directly receiving EU funds to implement projects in their communities;
- A large number of Roma and Sinti in Europe face deep poverty and poor living conditions, and are under threat of eviction.

#### Recommendations:

- To conduct a proper monitoring of the policy by engaging Roma and Sinti organizations, in particular Roma and Sinti youth and women;
- To establish an institution at the European level responsible for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the European Framework for NRIS;
- To build strong partnerships with national governments, grassroots Roma and Sinti organizations, think-tank agencies and Roma and Sinti, as well as to consider the communities as partners not as the problem;



- The European institutions to enforce the law and monitor human rights abuses against Roma and Sinti;
- Ensure Roma funds remain available following 2021, given the situation of Roma has not improved in many EU Members States.

## 2.5. *More inclusive memberships and political platforms of mainstream political parties for Roma and Sinti*

**Jamen Gabriela Hrabanova**, Deputy Director, ERGO Network and moderator of the session presented the two panellists **Terry Reintke**, MEP, Group of Greens, and **Killion Munyama**, Member of PACE and member of the Polish Parliament.

The moderator invited the introducers to give feedback to the working groups and at the same time to critically reflect on how to create more inclusive political platforms for Roma and Sinti. Additionally, the moderator encouraged participants to reflect on strategies to address the rise in xenophobic and biased discourse in Europe and the US, impacting Roma and Sinti and other diverse communities.



*Photo information: The introducers of the panel give feed-back to the participants. From left: Livia Járóka, Hungarian politician and Former MEP; Terry Reintke, MEP; Jamen Gabriela Hrabanova, Deputy Director, ERGO Network; Killion Munyama, Member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the CoE and Mischa Thompson, U.S. Helsinki Commission. 28 March 2017, Brussels. (Michael Chia).*

**Terry Reintke** provided an account of her work experience on addressing Anti-Gypsyism and more generally youth issues. She underlined the importance of her experience starting as a young leader. She pointed out that Anti-Gypsyism is a problem of the whole society. She said that in her work she applies many of the issues discussed during the workshop. With regard to advocacy and addressing

politicians, Reintke stressed the important role of civil society for highlighting problems and also proposing solutions. She underlined

that solutions should be as concrete as possible. It is crucial that Roma activists advocate for their causes and approach the MEPs in order to include the topics on their political agenda.

**Jamen Gabriela Hrabanova** underlined the need to monitor and evaluate Roma policies, as well as to collect relevant data. In addition, Hrabanova pointed out the role of the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency in collecting data on the implementation of the European Framework for NRIS and engaging member states for regular reporting. She added that the EC is designing a program which will measure the progress of member states on Roma integration.

**Killion Munyama** made reference to the political context in Poland where he had entered politics and became MEP. He pointed out that around 80.000 Roma and around 5.000 to 6.000 people of African descent live in Poland. He underlined the importance to integrate everyone without making differences of skin color or ethnic appearance. Munyama mentioned the difficulties relating to Roma inclusion. Further, he underlined the need to include women, minorities, LGBTQI or elder people in politics and to promote their representation in political life. From his experience as a member of PACE and of the Polish Civic Platform Party, he concluded that none of 47 CoE member countries has a perfect policy for representation of minorities in politics. He agreed that issues discussed during the workshop are very important and should be effectively addressed. Munyama also highlighted the need to approach issues in a balanced way without going to extremes.

**Terry Reintke** gave further feedback to the participants who presented their working group outcomes and recommended they link their presentations with the principles of fundamental rights and to be very concrete when talking about any issue. She welcomed the idea of sharing personal stories. Reintke said participants should highlight positive developments in Roma communities and plans for the future. She underlined the importance to have good cooperation between Roma NGOs and governments. Concluding her intervention, she encouraged young activists not to tolerate injustice and to speak out about their problems by proposing concrete solutions.



*Photo information: Participants discussing strategies to influence policies. Brussels, 28 March 2017. (Michael Chia)*

**Jamen Gabriela Hrabanova** stressed the relevance of having a linkage between issues at local and European levels. She underlined the importance of monitoring and evaluating Roma policies as well as proposing solutions for the upcoming period. Hrabanova stated that the European Commission's online platform will create the opportunity for Roma civil society to have direct contact with the institution and to report injustices at the local.

**Killion Munyama** highlighted the importance of approaching two sides of inclusion, minorities should integrate and the mainstream society should support them. In order to run for politics he had to learn how to integrate into the mainstream Polish society. Munyama was surprised to have the support of his town even though he was the only person of African descent in the region. In conclusion, he left the floor open for further reflections on how to integrate minorities in society, in particular youth.

## ANNEXES

### *ANNEX 1: Agenda*

#### **Monday, 27 March**

14:00 – 14:30

#### ***Opening and introduction of participants***

**Mirjam Karoly**, Senior Adviser on Roma and Sinti Issues/ Chief of Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues, OSCE/ODIHR

**Mischa Thompson**, PhD, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe – U.S. Helsinki Commission

14:30 – 16:00

#### ***Panel: European and U. Perspectives on Diversity in the Public and Political Spheres***

**Moderator: Iulius Rostas**, Chair in Romani Studies, Central European University

**Soraya Post**, Member of the European Parliament, Co-Chair of the Anti-Racism and Diversity Intergroup

**Mee Moua**, Former State Senator Minnesota/President of Asian Americans Advancing Justice

**Ciprian Necula**, Former State Secretary, Romania

**Livia Járóka**, Hungarian politician and Former Member of the European Parliament

**Assita Kanko**, Author, Columnist and Politician

16:00 – 16:15

#### ***Coffee break***

16:15 – 17:45

#### ***Workshop: Changing the narrative about Roma and other diverse communities***

**Facilitator: Mee Moua**, Former State Senator Minnesota/President of Asian Americans Advancing Justice, United States

**Facilitator: Julie Pascoët**, Senior Advocacy Officer, European Network Against Racism

**Introducer: Roland Ferkovics**, German Marshall Fund Alumni Leadership Action Project Grantee

**Tuesday, 28 March**

9:00 – 10:15

***Workshop: Engaging in dialogue and changing policy***

**Facilitator: Mischa Thompson**, PhD, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe-U.S. Helsinki Commission

**Facilitator: Livia Járóka**, Hungarian politician and Former Member of the European Parliament, Hungary

10:15 – 11:15

***More inclusive memberships and political platforms of mainstream political parties for Roma and Sinti***

**Moderator: Jamen Gabriela Hrabanova**, Deputy Director, European Roma Grassroots Organizations Network

**Introducer: Terry Reintke**, Member of the European Parliament

**Introducer: Killion Munyama**, Member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

**Introducer: Petre Florin Manole**, Member of the Chamber of Deputies, Parliament of Romania

11:15 – 11:30

***Closing***

**Mirjam Karoly**, Senior Adviser on Roma and Sinti Issues/ Chief of Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues, OSCE/ODIHR

## ***ANNEX 2: List of participants***

Sead Kazanxhiu, Albania  
Brisilda Taco, Roma activist, Albania  
Maaïke Buyst, City Council, Ghent, Belgium  
Bianca Faragau, Policy advisor on social affairs, Eurocities, Belgium  
Jamen Gabriela Hrabanova, Deputy Director, ERGO Network, Belgium  
Assita Kanko, Author, columnist and politician, Belgium  
Julie Pascoët, Senior Advocacy Officer, European Network Against Racism, Belgium  
Christine Sudbrock, ERGO Network, Belgium  
Atanas Stoyanov, Roma activist, Bulgaria  
Michal Miko, Project co-ordinator, Slovo 21, Czech Republic  
Marta Garcia Fidalgo, Coordinator Roma policy, European Commission  
Terry Reintke, European Parliament, Germany  
Alfiaz Vaiya, Coordinator, European Parliament Anti-Racism and Diversity Intergroup (ARDI)  
Anina Ciuciu, Roma activist and lawyer, France  
Lora Berg, Senior Fellow, German Marshall Fund of the United States  
Emran Elmazi, Germany  
Henriette Dinók, Roma activist and researcher, Hungary  
Roland Ferkovics, Fellow, German Marshall Fund, Hungary  
Sándor Gáspár, Hungary  
Livia Járóka, Politician, Former member of the European Parliament, Hungary  
Iulius Rostaş, Chair in Romani Studies, Central European University, Hungary  
Dijana Pavlović, Vice President, Upre Roma, Italy  
Timotej Mileveski, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia  
Selvije Mustafi, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia  
Chupi Redjepali, Expert, Ministry of Education and Science, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia  
Deniz Selmani, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia  
Natalia Duminica, Junior Expert, Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues, OSCE/ODIHR  
Mirjam Karoly, Senior Adviser on Roma and Sinti Issues / Chief of CPRSI, OSCE/ODIHR  
Cristi Mihalache, Associate Programme Officer, Roma and Sinti Issues, OSCE/ODIHR  
Killion Munyama, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe  
Ana Maria Băcan, Romania  
Gladiola Lăcătuş, Romania  
Georgiana Lincan, Romania  
Ciprian Necula, Roma politician, Romania  
Igor Kostić, Expert, Office for Human and Minority Rights, Serbia  
Ján Balazs, Representative, Plenipotentiary Office of Slovak Government for Roma Communities, Slovakia  
Nikola Pompova, Slovakia  
Tomaž Deželan, Vice-dean, Associate professor, Ljubljana University, Slovenia  
Ramon Moreno, Spain  
Mee Moua, President and Executive Director, Asian Americans Advancing Justice, United States  
Mischa Thompson, Policy advisor on social affairs, Helsinki Commission, United States