

**OSCE-ODIHR  
Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2015**

**Side Event:**

**“Combatting Hate Speech, Racism and Incitement against Roma and Sinti in Election Campaigns”**

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I have decided to bring a specific Hungarian case-study, the “Miskolc-case”, to contribute to this debate about political commitments and the existing available tools in order to address racism, hate speech and incitement.

The reason for choosing the case-study is that Miskolc has become a kind of “basket case”, which demonstrates all the possible negative conditions that may occur in this field. This North-Eastern Hungarian city is attracting more and more attention due to the illegal practices of Miskolc Real Estate Management related to the ongoing eviction of one of the slums called “Numbered Streets”. As you will see, the current situation is partly attributable to the electoral campaign.

Miskolc is situated in North-Eastern Hungary, which is one of the most disadvantaged regions in the country. Because of the unfavorable economic and social situation, ethnic conflicts and racism or using the so-called Roma issue as a part of political agenda is not new. The last time it has occurred was during the elections in 2014.

First, it is quite revealing that Jobbik took the national campaign launch event to Miskolc in 2014. The Hungarian right-wing party chose – not by accident – this city for the launch event; because they knew that they would find their like-minded audience. However, the current unconstitutional and illegal situation mainly began after the national election, during the preparation of the local election. It is not surprising that Jobbik used the anti-Roma rhetoric during the national election, but the other parties – even the left-wing – embarked on this path during local electoral campaign.

Going down this path, not only Jobbik and Fidesz supported an openly racist candidate, but so did MSZP and DK, the left-wing political parties. Their candidate mayor was the former police chief, who became famous for his anti-Roma statements. The main political parties in Miskolc have acted in a profoundly opportunistic way, when they used the anti-Roma prejudices for vote-winning. The major problem is that this kind of political behavior is not exceptional; it has become standard practice of Hungarian politics to use the “Roma issue” as a vote-winning strategy in elections. Finally, this cynical electoral strategy opened the door for the current illegal actions and human rights violations that are going on in Miskolc.

As I have mentioned, the “Roma issue” appeared as a part of public security policy in the parties’ agendas. After the national election, in May 2014, the local government amended the municipal decree about the rental of local government-owned housing. As the report of the municipal meeting attests, the amendment was accepted in the frame of the “Proposal regarding the public coexistence, the public order and enhancement of public order”. Basically, the idea of evictions started as a public security question.

This amendment sets out that when rental agreements are terminated, tenants renting low comfort social housing can receive compensation for vacating accommodation. However, a condition has been added; they must agree to use the compensation to purchase property outside the municipality and not return to Miskolc for five years. Because of this amendment and further ongoing events related to the eviction, the case appeared in the practice of the Supreme Court, the Commissioner

for Fundamental Rights and the Equal Treatment Authority. The Supreme Court declared the unconstitutionality of the provision (that they are not allowed to return for 5 years), however it could not stop the municipality from continuing with the eviction based on a different “legal” basis. The Ombudsman’s report also stated that the evictions mainly affect the Roma population and the municipality failed to comply with its obligations in connection with social security and promoting housing, which omission led to an emergency situation related to mass homelessness. Finally, the Equal Treatment Authority stated that the municipality, with its eviction practice, expose and is continuously exposing the inhabitants of the numbered streets to the risk of becoming homeless, based on their social origin, unfavorable financial situation and Roma origin. This practice of the Miskolc municipality violated the principle of non-discrimination, or in other words, indirect discrimination occurred.

Additionally to the “public security” argument of the slum elimination, another argument also appeared: the stadium construction, which only affects a part of the Numbered Streets. Without going into the details of the housing regulation or the regulation about the stadium decree, it’s plainly visible that the housing question served political goals from the beginning. The municipality laid down the basis for the national election campaigns’ key issue: the elimination of the slums. It laid down the basis for a campaign which was built on anti-Roma sentiments, and the anti-Roma campaign in which every mainstream political party became privy of each other. The social security became the key issue of the Jobbik and Fidesz agendas, as reflected by the campaign posters. There are two posters, one from Fidesz and one from Jobbik.

FIDESZ-KDNP followed their housing, public safety policy:

*“Do you support the elimination of the slums in Miskolc? Miskolc and the people of Miskolc deserve a quiet and peaceful life. There must not be slums in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in a European city. The slums must be eliminated once and for all!”*

Jobbik poster: *“UNBELIEVABLE: FIDESZ VOTED FOR CREATING GHETTOS IN MISKOLC*

*The FIDESZ slum project would give two million Forints to those who ruined the municipal properties, who did not pay their bills, who are unable to follow the basic principles of coexistence, who are ready to leave their shabby houses and let us demolish those houses with all your money.*

*What will be the consequences? They are not obliged to leave the city and they can buy cheap apartments in for instance the Avas quarter (another slum), they will keep preying upon the social welfare system of Miskolc, keep going with their anti-community lifestyle and they will vote for FIDESZ and MSZP.*

*We’ve had enough! We do not negotiate with trouble-makers. We demand that the municipality must immediately terminate their contract without paying anything, must invalidate their certificate of domicile, must make them pay for the damage caused, and those people who destroyed the buildings should demolish those houses.*

*Jobbik! The choice of the law-abiding majority!”*

As you see, they do not specifically mention Roma, but you do not need to make too much effort to figure out that they actually imply the Roma.

Due to the time constraints, I cannot go further into the details, but let me share my conclusions:

- First, the political parties have grabbed the opportunity and build up an entire campaign on anti-Roma sentiments. Not only right-wing but the mainstream parties have also acted in a profoundly opportunistic way.
- And they do implement what they promised during the elections. They are implementing it despite the decision of the Supreme Court, the Equal Treatment Authority and the report of the Commissioner. Basically, the most important legal institutions declared that this practice is illegal and unconstitutional, but the evictions are still in process.

- So what happens next? By March, hundreds of people will probably become homeless. And it seems that the Hungarian government has not shown any strong commitment to the Roma people in Miskolc, not even after the visit of the Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), or after the concerns of ECRI.
- This case plainly represents how prejudices and racism can be a strong tool in an election campaign. But what is more important in the recent case at this moment is that Roma in Miskolc need immediate help, and this is a matter of extreme urgency, immediate intervention in order to avoid mass homelessness and the further violations of human rights.