

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
“GOOD PRACTICES IN PROMOTING ROMANI AND MINORITY WOMEN IN THE POLITICAL AND DEMOCRATIC
PROCESSES: FOCUS ON EXPERIENCE IN ROMANIA”

BUCHAREST, 15-18 APRIL 2004
ROMANIAN PARLIAMENT - THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES

ANNOTATED AGENDA
AS OF 14 APRIL 2004

Note: the draft of the annotated agenda was circulated to all co-organizers and participants for comments and we received comments only from three participants

ORGANISERS

The organisers of the meeting are the **Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues** (CPRSI) of Office for Democratic Institutions (ODIHR) of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Chamber of Deputies of the Romanian Parliament (see Overview ODIHR CPRSI).

The ODIHR has more units related to the issue of the agenda:

- Elections Unit
- Gender Unit –Democratization
- Kosovo and South Eastern Europe – Democratisation

ODIHR/CPRSI is the unit organising the meeting in the context of the joint program with the Council of Europe funded by the European Commission, Roma and Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe (RSPSEE), 2001-2003 (see report) and , ODIHR project "*Roma, use your ballot wisely!* : Promoting increased participation of the Roma in electoral system as means for effective implementation of Roma-related policies and for mainstreaming Roma affairs in the stabilisation & democratisation processes in the countries of south-eastern Europe and the region” 2003-2005; and the Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area (see texts of the Action Plan) .

The CPRSI started to pay attention to women’s issues in 2001, when the project Roma and Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe (2001 – 2003) included a special chapter on empowering Romani women NGOs.

The Chamber of Deputies of the Romanian Parliament is organising the meeting in the context of its policy of promoting national minorities including Roma in the political life. The partner in organising the conference is the Commission for Human Rights, Cults and National Minorities Issues. The Head of the Human Rights Commission is Mr. Nicolae Paun, member of the Parliament and president of the Roma Party, the Roma association represented in the Parliament.

CO-ORGANIZERS

Council of Europe (Strasbourg) has its own project under the program Roma and Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, funded by the European Commission. Council of Europe is concentrating on assistance to States on their national Roma policy strategy development and establishment of co-operation structures between governments and Roma population. Gender Equality issues are part of the permanent priorities of the European Council. The Steering Committee of Equality between Women and Men organised the first Roma women hearing as early as 1995 in Strasbourg and since then the secretariat for Roma/Gypsy has had an increasing interest in addressing Romani women issues. Most recently it has produced the publication "*Breaking the Barriers- Romani Women and Access to Public Health Care (project 2002-2003)*, and the gender quotas on the constituency of the European Roma and Travellers Forum.

Gender Task Force of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe's latest initiative was the one-year project (2003) *Roma Women Can Do it (see Report)*. The project addressed the political participation of Romani women and it was implemented based on the previous experience of the Gender Task Force in promoting minority women in the politics.

Project on Ethnic Relations (based in Princeton, USA)

The Project on Ethnic Relations (PER) is dedicated to preventing ethnic conflict in Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans and the former Soviet Union. PER conducts programs of high-level intervention and dialogue and serves as a neutral mediator in several major disputes in the region. PER is co organizing the meeting in light of 10 years of continuous work on promoting participation of Roma, including electoral participation.

European Roma Information Center

The European Roma Information Office (ERIO), with headquarters in Brussels, aims to intensify the political and public discussion on Roma by providing factual and in-depth information, and to promote Romani affairs across European society. ERIO made an intervention in front of the European Commission Committee on Women's rights and Equal Opportunities meeting on 26 November 2003 about the "Double Discrimination Faced by Romani Women in Europe". The ERIO played an important role in bringing some of the participants to the meeting.

Romani CRISS - Roma Center for Social Intervention and Studies combines civic activism with the designing and the implementation of public policy programs for the benefit of local Roma communities in order to respect human rights. Romani CRISS was the implementing partner of the OSCE/ODIHR in the 2001-2003 project "Roma and Stability Pact in south-eastern Europe".

Since 1997, Romani CRISS initiated a training program for health mediators. The project aims to involve Romani women in solving Roma communities' problems of accessing public health services. Romani CRISS developed the institutionalizing process for the health mediator profession.

Romani CRISS is the co-organizer with a role on the concept and content of the meeting, is organizing the logistics and assures the financial services for the meeting.

BACKGROUND OF THE MEETING

PROJECT: "ROMA, USE YOUR BALLOT WISELY: *Promoting increased participation of the Roma in the electoral systems means for effective implementation of Roma related policies and for mainstreaming Roma affairs in the stabilisation & democratisation process in the countries of South Eastern Europe*".

This project aims to make use of the electoral mechanisms in the countries of South Eastern Europe to contribute to combating intolerance and discrimination based on ethnicity, culture, gender, lifestyle or religion, as well as social exclusion and marginalisation of Romani people and communities, including within and between the communities.

The project targets communities, non governmental organizations and political parties of Roma, Sinti, Egyptians, Ashkalie, Rudari and other groups commonly referred to as "Gypsies", as part of electoral constituencies. It works with a network of Romani local contact points and task forces at national and regional (SEE) level, including the committees of IDPs and refugees established during the previous EC-ODIHR- CoE project; selected mainstream political parties: leaders, MPs and staff in charge of electoral platforms/campaigning. The project works elected authorities (local, national) in selected countries/provinces/municipalities, and with the bodies in charge of the administration and monitoring of elections. It has a special focus on women and young people, both as voters and candidates.

ACTION PLAN ON IMPROVING THE SITUATION OF ROMA AND SINTI WITHIN THE OSCE AREA (Action Plan) is a decision (Decision No.556) of the OSCE Permanent Council and was taken during the Plenary Meeting of Maastricht in December 2003. The Action Plan contains recommendations for the participating States on different areas such as: participation, racism and discrimination, social and economic issues. Issues concerning Romani and Sinti women are addressed in a cross-sectorial manner throughout the recommendations of the Action Plan. A special chapter addresses the participation in public and political life (see chapter VI of the Action Plan) and another one makes recommendations for crisis and post-crisis situations.

The conference will pay special attention to ways of implementing the recommendations under chapter VI and VII, following the gender equality perspective.

AIMS OF THE CONFERENCE

- Raise awareness about the importance of the political participation of Romani women among women and Roma politicians;
- To signal solidarity of women belonging to the same political minority while belonging to different groups and minorities; the civic solidarity between Roma as national minority and non-Roma (as majority and other minorities) in case of political participation of women.; forthcoming elections in the region
- To make an inventory of the positive experiences of the political participation of women;
- To make policy recommendations for the countries of the South Eastern European region, in view of better political participation of Romani women under the framework of both gender policies and minority policies;
- To link the conference results with relevant OSCE and other institution actions for 2004 (see the list of activities)

LIST OF PRODUCTS OF THE MEETING

- List of actions for implementing the provisions related to Roma women of the Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area;
- To redraft the implementing plan of the “Roma, use your ballot wisely!”, May 2004 – May 2005 in particular from a gender perspective (an informal group starting to work on this issue on 9th of April and will end on 18th of April with an evaluation meeting of the implemented activities) and start preparation of the forthcoming regional meeting of elected Roma;
- Proposal for concrete mechanisms to be used by political parties and governments for increasing the participations of women in political and democratic processes;
- Concrete proposal of links between Roma women’s network/associations and women politicians

MODALITIES OF THE MEETING

The conference is organised over two days. The first day is organised in plenary sessions and two working groups. The second day is organised in four plenary sessions. In the end of the first day, the rapporteurs and the note takers will have a meeting for drafting the conclusion of the day.

During the conference, there will be organised side events and informal working groups on different topics. These will take place during the lunch breaks and during the dinners.

DAY 1, FRIDAY 16 APRIL 2004

Official opening (with media participation) and Opening Remarks

The organizers of the meeting will officially open the conference and will give the background and the context in which the meeting was organized.

Presentation of the background paper of the conference

The background paper will contain a review of the international instruments on minorities and Roma and national policies on Roma from the gender perspective under the provision on political participation. Also the background paper will draft a set of recommendations for the states and civil sector in view of improved, qualitative political participation of Roma women.

Press Conference

The press conference will be organized by the Romanian Parliament, Chamber of Deputies - Commission for Human Rights, Cults and National Minorities Issues in the Parliament premises. Press statements will be presented by Ambassador Strohal Christian, Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and other speakers (to be confirmed)

Working group I: Participation of Romani and minority women in politics and elected democratic institutions in OSCE space

This working group aims to make use of the personal stories of successful women experiencing different minority roles and minority women including Roma women politicians as a tool to empower other women belonging to similar constituencies. The discussions are going gradually from women as political minorities in the region toward minority women and ending with personal experiences of Romani women with a public role. During this working group, special attention and time will be given to the expression of Romani women's points of view. The discussions are organized in three topics:

- Topic 1: Women as political minority: focus on the situation in South Eastern Europe
- Topic 2: Minority women: minorities representatives inside their communities and among women in politics at large
- Topic 3: Voices of Romani Women: How to challenge existing patterns of disadvantage and make a difference? Personal stories. Building cross-gender and cross –ethnic coalitions

The desired outcome of the working group is a set of suggested actions: for OSCE Action Plan and project Roma and Stability Pact in SEE, for international organizations, states and Roma and non –Roma parties in view of a higher political participation of Romani women.

Another desired output of this working group is a set of ideas of how we may generate cross-ethnic solidarity and coalition building among women for achieving enhanced electoral success and higher performance in political participation of women in general.

Working group II: Overview of positive actions for improving the participation of the women in politics: legislative measures, institutional arrangements and monitoring mechanisms

Working Group II is an expert working group in which the participants will review the existing measures: legislative, political arrangements, institutions and monitoring mechanisms on promoting national and ethnic minorities and women. They will analyze which are the most feasible ones and which could be applied in cases of minority women and Roma women. The result of the working group will be a set of recommended measures.

Plenary session: Political participation as a tool to deal with crisis and post-crisis situations, with focus on the impact on Romani women

It has been demonstrated that, in post crises situations, the participation of women in political life is crucial for stability. A new wave of conflicts appeared in Kosovo during recent months. During this session, participants will try to have a sense of the situation of Roma with an accent on women and children. A side event dedicated to the crises situation in Kosovo (Friday 16 April, dinner) and another one on crises situation in different locations and regions within OSCE area (Saturday 17 April, lunch) will complete this session.

Since 1999, the CPRSI ODIHR has been actively looking at the situation of the Roma and Ashkalie community in Kosovo. The first (2001-2003) and the second (2003-2005) joint CoE/ODIHR/EC "Roma and Stability Pact" project has actively worked with the Kosovo Roma and Ashkalie refugees and internally displaced person in the countries of the region. After many discriminatory signals against Roma refugees and lack of understanding about their situation, in May 2003, a group of 700 Roma refugees has continuously protesting for 3 months at Medzitlija (border between Macedonia and Greece).

On 17 of March 2004, a newly developed crisis happened in Kosovo. Almost, no articles, reports, and assessments have been given notice about what happened to the Roma and Ashkalie "citizens" of Kosovo. Recently, the European Roma Rights Center from Budapest published the preliminary findings from its fact finding mission to Kosovo.

Since, the beginning of the "brand new" Kosovo ethnic cleansing, the international Roma community has been actively monitoring and analyzing the sensitivity and weakness of the Roma community in Kosovo. There is a conclusion that international community, such as UNMIK and OSCE in close cooperation with the Roma Crises Group must take an active role in preventing further developments of the crises in Kosovo.

DAY 2, SATURDAY 17 APRIL 2004

Conclusions of the previous day

The results of the two working groups will be presented by the ODIHR.

The perspective of Roma politicians on the participation of Romani women: the case of Romania

This session is aimed to give rise to the leaders of Roma political parties present at the meeting. The presentations will focus on how the Roma parties promoted Romani women within the party structures as well as in the elections.

The session will have a focus on Romania. Among the presentations, there will be a general overview of the political participation of women in Romania. This will show that political participation is low, not only among Roma women, but among women more broadly.

As a base for the discussions of this session, the background paper has two case studies on Romania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, analyzing parties' structure and indicating the number and the roles played by Romani women in the elections and the administration.

Participation of Romani women in the recent Roma related international initiatives

Recently at the European level a number of initiatives related to Roma were launched. The presentations will focus on how these initiatives can promote the participation of Romani women including the criterias based on which their selection will be done. During the session participants will have the opportunity to raise questions and discuss.

The preparation of European Roma and Travelers Forum, Action Plan on Improving the situation of Roma and

Sinti within the OSCE area and the Roma Decade 2005-2015, are the three “big” international initiatives currently on European political context, which question the Roma leadership in general, and more in particular, the equal participation and representation roles of the old community leaders ‘Cero Rom’, NGO leaders, intellectual Roma, Roma women and Roma youth. The understanding of leadership is living through a transition period – all the above mentioned parties have their women and are needed.

The emancipation of the Roma women in the last decade is connected to a general positive climate towards to the women's emancipation. This is maintained by more women on key-positions, legislative changes giving equal rights to women, EU directives for respecting quota in the elections, women gaining estimation in our predominately masculine societies. Roma women followed this movement of progress; they brought changes in their own communities, required recognition not only from their husbands and family and from the society as a whole. They have become involved in the international Roma movement, and they spreading messages of reconciliation and tolerance.

Closing session: Recommendations for a higher political participation of minority women and especially Romani women

Informal working groups

15 April 2004, Working dinner:	<i>ODIHR and main co-organizers</i>
16 April 2004,	An exhibition with photos of Roma will be organized during the conference, at the entrance of the conference room.
16 April 2004, Lunch break:	<i>Working lunch with senior Romanian politicians</i> (Lunch room “Brancovenescu” ,ground floor, moderated by Mrs. Mihaela Miroiu)
16 April 2004, Dinner:	<i>Roma, Ashkalie and Egyptians refugees from Kosovo</i> <i>Debriefing with the note takers and moderators and rapporteurs of the working groups</i>

Informal working groups alongside the conference:

1. Re-working the implementation plan of the OSCE/CoE/EC project “Roma use your ballot wisely!”
 - *Input Mr. Zeljko Jovanovic*
 - *Output Mr. Jud Nirenberg*
2. Roma in crisis and post crisis situation in various locations and regions of OSCE. New analysis in the context of the chapter VII – Roma and Post crises situations of the Action Plan on Roma and Sinti Issues, in particular :
 112. *Pay special attention to the needs of Roma and Sinti women and children in crisis and post-crisis situations, particularly by providing them with access to health care, housing and schooling.*
 - *Input/output: Crises task force of the International Roma Contact Group*
 - *Mrs. Iveta Bozova, Slovakia (to be confirmed)*
3. New project draft proposal “ Roma and elections in Europe 2004-2009”
 - *Input Mr. Ciprian Necula*
 - *Output...*
4. Re-drafting guidelines for observation of the participation of Roma in elections as voters
 - *Input Mr. Konrad Olszewski Output Mr. Ciprian Necula*

The provisions of the “Action Plan on Improving the situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE area” that are going to be discussed during the conference are:

I. Chapter VI “Enhancing participation in public and political life”
Paragraphs 89-98

- 89. *Elected officials should establish close working relations with Roma and Sinti communities.*
- 90. *Establish mechanisms to ensure equal, direct and open communication between Roma and Sinti representatives and government authorities, including advisory and consultative bodies.*
- 91. *Facilitate interaction between political leaders at the local and national levels and diverse Roma groups.*
- 92. *Organize election-awareness campaigns so as to increase participation of the Roma electorate in elections.*
- 93. *Ensure that Roma voters can make free and informed choices in elections.*
- 94. *Take measures to guarantee the equal voting rights of women, including by enforcing prohibitions on so-called “family voting”.*
- 95. *Encourage Roma and Sinti people to engage more actively in public service, including, where necessary, through the introduction of special measures to promote their participation in the civil service.*
- 96. *Encourage the representation of Roma and Sinti people in elected and appointed office at all levels of government.*
- 97. *Empower and integrate Roma and Sinti individuals into decision-making processes of States and localities as elected representatives of their communities and as citizens of their respective countries.*
- 98. *Promote Roma women’s participation in public and political life; Roma women should be able to participate on an equal basis with men in consultative and other mechanisms designed to increase access to all areas of public and political life.”*

II. Chapter VII “Roma and Sinti in crisis and post-crisis situations”
Paragraphs 110 and 112

- 110. *Ensure that Roma and Sinti refugees are treated in accordance with the relevant international norms and standards of protection, and in a non-discriminatory manner.*
- 112. *Pay special attention to the needs of Roma and Sinti women and children in crisis and post-crisis situations, particularly by providing them with access to health care, housing and schooling.*