

## **Women and Political representation: The Case of Roma Women**

### **Mara Calista: Romanian MP**

My experience as a young MP was quite a unique one, although it was not for the first time as I was interacting with political related branches.

As a young politician, my career started almost 10 years ago, when I was 18. By that time, I thought that politics, at least in Romania, is just as I've read in my books at Political Science University. Actually, it took me some time and experience to realize that if you want to succeed in this domain, being a political woman in a traditional-conservative country, it would take a long time alongside effort and determination.

While it seemed hard, with some effort and back from the party where I'm being an active member - the National Liberal Party in Romania (NLP is a right party in Romania, promoting the free will of the individuals, but also promoting the minorities rights and, women's rights among other principles) we made it and I am proud of saying that, for me as a woman, it was the right and righteous choice in the sense of political representation.

As you well know, women got their right to vote in Romania 1938, when the Constitution was written. In fact, their current right regarding free vote, and also possibility to join the political field took place in 1946 with the communist regime. By 1948, in Romania, any gender based discrimination was forbidden.

Nowadays, Romanian women are free to vote everywhere, are free to run for any type of election if they respect the written in the Constitution aging criteria.

Even though Romania is a democratic state, it still has areas where women are encouraged to stay home, just/only take care of the children and take care of all the housing responsibilities. Moreover, because of these mentalities, women are scared, less encouraged and not as involved as they should be in this political field.

At a certain/specific point, NLP started to talk about introducing a gender quota: 30% women candidates list of this party, at least. Even so, there were not so many women to take them into consideration, because a great majority still consider that this is a 'male specific field'. However, The National Liberal Party is fighting with this kind of mentalities and, for

example between 2014 and 2016 it was the first political party in Romania to be ruled by a woman.

Although Romania has made huge steps regarding women's representation in the Parliament (right now there are 19% women in this institution), there's still much more to do in order to raise this percentage; also to take into consideration the representation of women from minority groups. By this, I mean we should treat more seriously Roma Women's rights.

Taking into consideration the census made in Romania in 2011, there were 621.573 Roma people in Romania. 305.518 are women. Although these numbers are not recognised by the Roma Associations, because it seems that the number of Roma community is much larger: almost 2 mil citizens, these are the official numbers just because the Roma majority don't declare themselves as such. A large majority lives in poverty, they don't have access to education, they don't have a proper professional training and they are currently jobless, living due to social aid.

It's our duty, as a democratic country which sustains minorities' rights (and we've proven it countless times) to take measures to help Roma minority, especially women to be properly integrated in the society and within decision forums.

Therefore, taking into consideration my personal belief that women have proven and will show that they know how to be political influencers, it's my recommendation that in 2020, on every political level there should be at least a Roma woman running for Local Council, County Council, City Hall and for Parliament elections.

In conclusion, in Romania, there are over 10 mil women, representing 51,2% of the population. It's high time for to be represented in the major political institutions and to be part of the process regarding public policies that are designed to help, promote and sustain women in Romania.