



DRTO(2018)1

03/05/18

### *Concept Note*

**5<sup>th</sup> MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE**  
**DIALOGUE WITH ROMA AND TRAVELLER CIVIL SOCIETY**  
*Strasbourg, 20-21 June 2018*

**Topic: ROMA AND TRAVELLER POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

***Presence, Empowerment and Influence in Political and Public Life***

## PREFACE

**Democracy** as a system of government provides equal opportunities for political voice and participation to all its citizens. The quality of democracy is determined by free, open and fair elections, the degree of civil and political freedom, the extent of popular sovereignty-control over policies and those who make them, political equality-rights and powers and standards of good governance such as transparency, legality and rule of law. The commitment to these elements which determine the quality of democracy is expressed through **political participation**.

The term **participation** means to be involved in decision-making and other activities in social life, while **political participation** refers to “those legal activities by private citizens that are directly aimed at influencing the selection of government personnel and/or actions they take”.<sup>1</sup> In both definitions, there are three understandings of participation: **presence, empowerment and influence**. Therefore, empowering political participation strengthens democracy!

**Political participation derives from the freedom of speech; the ability to take part in the conduct of public affairs; and the opportunity to register as a candidate, to campaign, to be elected and to hold office at all levels of government.** Political participation enhances democratic legitimacy also indirectly by contributing to descriptive and substantive representation in policymaking institutions.

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<sup>1</sup> N. H. Nie and S. Verba, ‘Political Participation’, in F. I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby (eds.), *Handbook of Political Science*, vol. 4 (Wesley Publishing Company, 1975) p. 1.

## The right to political participation

The right to political participation is a right equally important as any other right. **All citizens** have the right to elect and be elected and to become involved in the electoral process through independent action particularly at the local level and by joining civil society organisations, to voice their views and be heard. Active political participation by individuals obtains both individual and group benefits. *The European Convention on Human Rights* is an international treaty under which the member States of the Council of Europe secure fundamental civil and political rights to everyone within their jurisdiction irrespective of, for example, sex, race, nationality, or ethnic origin. It expressly prohibits various forms of discrimination and guarantees the right to vote and stand for office, among other basic human freedoms.

## Marginalised Groups and Political Participation

However, some people are more likely to be less politically active. These people often lack access, are **discriminated** against and are not provided with resources to establish informal forms of public participation and hence need more incentive and initiation to be able to exercise their rights, which will enable them to function more effectively in society. Furthermore, regardless of socioeconomic status, **young people** and **women** are less likely to participate in politics.

## BACKGROUND TO THE TOPIC FOR THE 5<sup>th</sup> DIALOGUE MEETING

### Political Participation of Roma and Travellers

Although the engagement of **Roma and Travellers in political and public life** has noticeably increased over the past decade, they still face considerable obstacles in **securing political presence, sustaining representation and exercising influence**.

Repeated evidence has shown that **Roma and Travellers**, and particularly young persons and women, encounter a series of social barriers and prejudices which severely impede their capacity to effectively participate in public life. Hence, **Roma and Travellers are largely absent from local and national political and public participation and decision-making processes**. This invisibility ultimately undermines the potential for Roma and Traveller political participation.

**Political participation demands that participation needs to be effective for Roma and Travellers to reverse embedded marginalisation and discrimination.** The individual right to participation is not enough. Targeted minority participation mechanisms have not yielded adequate results and Roma and Travellers continue to be marginalised.

Taking into consideration

- (i) **Recommendation CM/Rec(2003)3<sup>2</sup> of the Committee of Ministers** on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making;
- (ii) **Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)5 of the Committee of Ministers** on policies for Roma and/or Travellers in Europe<sup>3</sup> regarding equality and integration of Roma and/or Travellers in social, economic and political life, promoting community empowerment and capacity building;
- (iii) **Strasbourg Declaration on Roma CM(2010)133<sup>4</sup>**, where member States have agreed to promote effective participation of Roma in social, political and civic life, including active participation of representatives of Roma in decision-making mechanisms affecting them, and cooperation with independent authorities such as Ombudsmen in the field of human rights protection and ensure close cooperation with Roma communities at all levels, pan-European, national, regional and local, in the implementation of these commitments;
- (iv) the **Thematic Action Plan on the Inclusion of Roma and Travellers (2016-2019)<sup>5</sup>** and its identified priority on supporting the participation of Roma and Travellers in local decision-making;
- (v) **Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023<sup>6</sup>**;
- (vi) Recommendations of the **Sixth International Roma Women Conference “Women and Political Representation: The Case of Roma and Traveller Women”<sup>7</sup>**, organised by the Council of Europe in Strasbourg on 6-7 November 2017;
- (vii) **Organisation for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE)** reports<sup>8 9 10</sup> which emphasise the importance of the role of civil society in both strengthening Roma and, in particular, Roma youth and women inclusion in the policy-making processes but also in the capacity building of Roma leadership and active political and social participation;

the 5<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Council of the Europe Dialogue with Roma and Traveller Civil Society will focus on the topic of **political participation** with the aims of:

- Prioritising and giving visibility to the **rights** of Roma and Travellers to active political and public participation;
- Highlighting the issue of political participation as a key parameter in the effort of tackling Roma and Traveller marginalisation, isolation and discrimination;
- Increasing the capacity of Roma and Traveller NGOs to identify strategies and good practices that strengthen **participation** in the political and public sphere;

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<sup>2</sup> The full text available at: [https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectId=09000016805e0848](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=09000016805e0848)

<sup>3</sup> The full text of Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)5 on policies for Roma and/or Travellers in Europe is available at: <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1253509&Site=CM&BackColorInternet=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=EDB021&BackColorLogged=F5D383>.

<sup>4</sup> The full text available at: [http://unipd-centrodirittiumani.it/public/docs/the\\_strasbourg\\_declaration\\_on\\_roma.pdf](http://unipd-centrodirittiumani.it/public/docs/the_strasbourg_declaration_on_roma.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> The full text available at: <https://rm.coe.int/1680684b5e>

<sup>6</sup> The full text available at: <https://rm.coe.int/strategy-en-2018-2023/16807b58eb>

<sup>7</sup> The full text available at: <http://rm.coe.int/recommendations-from-the-6th-international-roma-women-conference/16807c0e28>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.osce.org/odihr/219511?download=true>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.osce.org/odihr/188166>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.osce.org/odihr/342211?download=true>

- Identifying appropriate long-term efforts and tools of political participation that enable effective Roma and Traveller **representation** in local and national political and decision-making bodies;
- Identifying policies that **empower** Roma and Travellers and build on political participation capacity, particularly for youth and women;
- Identifying institutional mechanisms that address the issue of Roma and Traveller participation in social, economic and political life and stimulate active citizenship.

## EXPECTED DIALOGUE OUTCOMES

**Roma and Traveller integration is a shared responsibility** and all actors (member States, European institutions, international organisations and civil society) have a vital role to play. While recognising the **special responsibility of member States, the Council of Europe** has within its objectives the dialogue and consultation between the Council of Europe and Roma and Traveller civil society, including those working at grassroots level, on policies and practices relevant for the inclusion of Roma and Travellers, as identified in the Council of Europe Thematic Action Plan on the Inclusion of Roma and Travellers (2016-2019).

**Civil society** has the necessary network and knowledge about the situation of Roma and Travellers on the ground and can contribute to assist member States and the Council of Europe in meeting their commitments. The role of Roma and Traveller civil society is to provide support and be the bridge between Roma and Traveller communities and decision and policy making. As complementary actors, they can facilitate the directions of Council of Europe actions through constructive and mutual dialogue.

**The 5<sup>th</sup> Dialogue Meeting will serve as a consultation platform for the mapping of priority areas, key targets and effective strategies in enhancing and sustaining Roma and Traveller political participation which will be incorporated in the Council of Europe post-2019 agenda.**

It will also serve as a policymaking forum for Roma civil society organisations and other stakeholders to improve their knowledge, exchange experiences and share best practices, plan future co-operation activities and identify possibilities for promoting Roma and Traveller political and public participation.

## PARTICIPATION

Taking into account the:

- **Thematic Action Plan on the Inclusion of Roma and Travellers (2016-2019)** which seeks to empower the most vulnerable among Roma and Travellers by strengthening their protection against all forms of discrimination, and the
- **Roma Youth Action Plan** of the Council of Europe which supports the development of leadership and advocacy competencies among Roma Youth leaders;

Roma and Traveller experts from local civil society organisations and representatives of Roma and Traveller and women's organisations with expertise in the area of political participation are encouraged to participate.

## CALL FOR PARTICIPATION

The Call is open for the participation of 20 representatives of Roma and Traveller civil society and other key national and international organisations with expertise in Roma and Traveller political participation.

Interested candidates must complete an online Application Form **by the deadline of 27 May 2018**, at 18:00 Central European Time.

The online application form is available [here](#).

Participants will be selected on the basis of their merits while securing a balance between Roma and Traveller civil society organisations, both national and international, and other key stakeholders with expertise on the topic, gender and age as well as geographical representation.

**Applicants** should clearly state in their motivation letter their area of competence and expertise in the field and indicate in which way their expertise would contribute to reaching pertinent conclusions on the identified topic for the Dialogue meeting.

### **Candidates should be:**

- in a position to use the outcomes of the meeting in their work;
- resident in one of the Council of Europe member States ;
- actively involved in Roma or Traveller political participation issues, particularly in the area of youth and/or women;
- available to attend the meeting for its full duration;
- able to express themselves fluently in at least one of the working languages of the Dialogue meeting (English, French, Romani).

**Selected participants will be informed by 1 June 2018.**

## DATES AND VENUE

**The meeting will take place at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, France, in the Palais de l'Europe, Room 3, on 20 June 2018 from 9.30 a.m. to 6.00 p.m, and 21 June 2018 from 9.30 a.m to 1.30 p.m.**

Travel and subsistence expenses as well as visa fees, if necessary, related to participation in this 5<sup>th</sup> Dialogue meeting will be reimbursed according to the Council of Europe reimbursement rules and regulations.