PARTICIPATION OF ROMA IN SOCIO-POLITICAL LIFE OF UKRAINE: ACCORDING TO THE RESULTS OF THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

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Summary: The article presents the main results of the empirical study which identify the level of access, interest, awareness of Roma in socio-political life in Ukraine. Based on the sociological survey, the barriers to Roma participation in socio-political life and prospects for improving access have been described. During the analysis of the Roma’ attitude to the political life of Ukrainian society and the Roma community on the basis of gender, age and educational distribution have been identified a number of factors that determine the guidelines of Roma on participation in political life.

Keywords: Roma, Roma community, national minorities, socio-political life in Ukraine, sociological survey.

The participation of Roma in different aspects of the functioning of Ukrainian society is an important factor in the processes of their social integration, as well as a guarantee in the prevention of conflicts.

It is obvious that a modern democratic society can be consolidated only if all its members are guaranteed basic human and civil rights. Therefore, the full inclusion of Roma in Ukrainian public life should be the goal of the Ukrainian government and the task for the Ukrainian society that has chosen the European future.

In Ukraine, according to various estimates there may be between 150 and 400 thousand Roma. The protection of the Roma national minority, the promotion of their rights on an equal footing with other citizens of Ukraine, their social, economic and cultural integration is one of the important area of public policy.

It should be noted that in accordance with the Constitution of Ukraine
(Article 11), the state is obliged to promote the development of ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of all indigenous peoples and national minorities of Ukraine [1]. Subsequently, the Parliament of Ukraine adopted the Law ‘On National Minorities in Ukraine’ setting the framework for the protection of minorities [2].

Also the guarantees of Roma participation in socio-political life have been confirmed by the state and at the international level, in particular, in accordance with the provisions of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of 1 February 1995, Article 15 establishes the need to create conditions for the effective participation of national minorities in cultural, social and economic life, as well as in public affairs concerning them [3].

A positive development was the adoption of the Strategy to promote realization of the rights and opportunities of persons belonging to the Roma national minority in Ukrainian society until 2030, which was signed by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on 28 July 2021 [4]. The aim of the Strategy is to provide Roma with documents, provide them with legal protection, education, medical services, employment and improve social protection.

However, the fact of adopting any documents at the state or institutional levels in order to improve the level of Roma involvement in the socio-political life, cannot replace specific actions for their implementation. Discrimination against Roma is explained by their limited representation in the social (especially political) life of the state.

At present, the inability of the authorities to address the persistent discrimination against the Roma remains a major stumbling block for the development of a strong, cohesive civilized society based on justice, equality and human rights for all.

Therefore, it is extremely important to form a group of people among the Roma community who will be able to participate in the political life of society, defending the rights of Roma and ensuring effective communication of this national minority with the authorities on a regular basis.

In view of the above, let’s consider the main results of our empirical study which determines the level of Roma access to political life in Ukraine. The study was conducted by Research Institute of Social Policy of the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine and the National Academy of Science of Ukraine with the support of the International Charitable Organization Roma Women’s Fund "Chiricli", which has wide experience in implementing projects related to the protection of Roma rights. Particularly helpful in this regard was the recent study undertaken by Chiricli ‘Roma in Ukraine – A Time for Action: Priorities and Pathways for an Effective Integration Policy’ [5]. The report draws the most acute problems facing Roma in various communities, outlined their views on the root causes of these issues and also described their own experiences of attempting to remedy various human rights violations.

The study is based on the sociological survey (September 2021) covering the following characteristics: the sample size is 402 respondents; the sample represents the adult Roma population of Ukraine aged 18 and older; the type of sample – a multi-stage stratified territorial, random sample of respondents with an element of targeted selection (coverage of the survey by basic socio-demographic...
characteristics (gender, age, education)). The survey covered 13 regions of Ukraine and the city of Kyiv (in accordance with large Roma residence).

According to the survey, it was found that among the interviewed Roma 15.5% were constantly interested in political life, 40.5% were not interested, 41.2% were sometimes interested (that left the respondent a plenty of room for maneuver, including the opportunity to avoid a clear answer about disinterest, as well as to show oneself in a more favorable perspective, however, in fact, that option fixed a low level of interest). Therefore, it can be concluded that in general, among the interviewed Roma there is a low level of interest in current political processes.

In general, 26.3% of surveyed Roma didn’t have access to information about political life in Ukraine. For those who had access to information, the main sources were television (56.2%) and the Internet (51.3%).

According to the survey, 32.4% of Roma respondents never participated in the election. For those who participated in the elections, most often it was the election of the President of Ukraine (48.6%) and elections to the local council (41.8%), the least respondents participated in the elections to the Parliament (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine) (18.9%).

The majority of Roma respondents (66.2%) believe in negative attitudes (discrimination) in Ukrainian society, which limits Roma access to political life. Only 16.2% of respondents denied this thesis. In addition, respondents noted that the main barriers to Roma access in political life were the internal characteristics of Roma - lack of education and skills, experience and vocational training (42.6%) and Roma indifference to politics (42.5%).

Therefore, on the one hand, there is an unfavorable macro-society environment for the political activity of the Roma, and on the other, it is a complex of internal problems of this ethnic group, the overcoming of which is a prerequisite for increasing the access of Roma to political life.

At the same time, the majority of respondents (72.3%) consider it necessary to strengthen the Roma’s own efforts to increase their participation in political life, and 16.2% are categorically against it. However, the main interest of respondents regarding participation in political life is mainly focused on the political life of the Roma community - 34.4%, in the political life of Ukrainian society - 26.3% and 31.1% don’t want to participate in the political life of either the community or society.

Integral components of democratic political processes, which include the involvement of national minorities, are: participation in elections (the right to vote and the right to be elected); freedom of association, which guarantees the right to form political parties and civil society groups - non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and associations based on local communities; freedom of expression, which is fundamental to ensuring the effective participation of national minorities in public life, the right to freedom of expression is closely linked to the right to free dissemination of information, which is important for national minorities as a way of preserving their cultural identity; freedom of peaceful assembly - the right to hold political meetings is a fundamental component of democracy and extends to peaceful demonstrations and protests. The Table 1 presents a rating of political activity forms that are more or less acceptable for the interviewed Roma. In particular, the majority - 52.7% - consider the participation in elections as the most
acceptable form of political activity. Significant percentage gained the following answers "participation in the activities of the Roma community" (33.7%), "participation in the activities of public organizations (including youth)" (29.1%), "participation in the activities of political parties" (28.3%). 20.2% of respondents were undecided on the choice of political activity form. In fact, Roma do not consider the following radical measures important for the protection of their interests, such as participation in civil disobedience actions (4.1%), strikes, hunger strikes (2.7%), in meetings, pickets (2.1%).

Elections are an equally priority form of political activity for both men and women, but women have chosen the second position - participation in the activities of political parties, and men - participation in the activities of the Roma community (Table 1).

Table 1

Distribution of respondents' answers regarding the forms of political activity in which they could participate in order to protect their interests and political beliefs, (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank in general</th>
<th>Forms of political activity</th>
<th>% Total</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Elections</td>
<td>52,7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>57,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Participation in the activities of the Roma community</td>
<td>33,7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>28,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Participation in the activities of public organizations (including youth)</td>
<td>29,1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Participation in the activities of political parties</td>
<td>28,3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>20,2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Participation in civil disobedience actions</td>
<td>4,1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Participation in strikes, hunger strikes</td>
<td>2,7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Participation in meetings, pickets</td>
<td>2,1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Your option</td>
<td>1,3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1,3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Namely the work within the Roma community was identified by the respondents as a prerequisite for improving the access of Roma to political life in Ukraine: 41.3% noted the need for assistance in political education and 41.2% - the instilling in young generation of Roma the desire and skills for political activity. The external changes are also discussed - respondents consider it necessary to provide quotas for Roma in government (39.1%) and adoption of laws needed to improve Roma access to political life (35.1%). However, there is a tendency - noting certain negative attitudes in the macro-society towards members of their ethnic group, Roma are clearly aware of internal problems, they don't position themselves only as a victim of external circumstances, but consciously point to their own characteristics that require change and improvement.

An analysis of the results of the survey by gender showed that men in general...
are more active than women regarding the interest in political life, awareness, participation in elections, and the desire to participate in the political life of society and community. Men showed a higher level of interest in the political life of the macro-society, women were more focused on the Roma community life. Also, women more often point to external factors that limit the access of Roma to political life, and men to internal factors.

Age was a specific feature - it did not directly affect the interest in political life, in each age group there were those who were not interested in political life, and those who were interested, and so on every issue. It should be noted that "not interested" were the same, and the differences were among those who were interested - what sources of information were used, in what forms of political activity were ready to participate, etc. The analysis focused on the youngest age group (18-27), as the most promising for the involvement of Roma in political life, but among them there were quite high rates of 'disinterest in political life' (25.5%), as well as 'unwillingness to participate in political life' (27.9%). Probably due to the young age, respondents from this group have not yet developed an interest in political life, lack awareness, readiness, however, the survey data may be a signal to intensify work with this group by representatives of the Roma community, who are interested in instilling in young generation of Roma the knowledge and skills for political activity. The most progressive age group regarding the political literacy and activity has been the age group from 28 to 35 years old.

The most significant feature that influences interest and activity in political life has been the education of respondents. The lack or low of education level in the most respondents from these educational groups clearly correlates not only with disinterest, lack of knowledge about the course of political life, extremely negative attitude to women's political activities, but also with reluctance to reject possible prospects for involvement in political life. Respondents from these educational groups often found it difficult to answer the questions. However, this cannot be explained only by indifference, such a position can also be associated with awareness of insolvency, insecurity, negative life experiences.

We believe the way for Roma to participate in the country's political life lies through education and professional achievements. Lack of general secondary education, isolation in the family circle and lack of legal permanent work don't allow members of the Roma community to understand the difficult political and socio-economic processes not only in the country, but also in the region (locality). The educational and professional "vacuum" cannot predict the desire of Roma for self-realization, and it is one of the main reasons for their lack of sustained interest in any political processes. The Roma themselves admit this, the majority of the respondents agreed with the statement that 'Roma lack of education and skills, experience and vocational training'. Even more respondents noted that 'Roma need to strengthen their efforts to increase participation in the political life of Ukraine'. Therefore, educational and vocational training are necessary conditions for the formation of active participants in political processes among the Roma, both at the local and national levels.

It is indicative that the Roma youth (18-27 years old), like the elderly Roma, have little interest in political life. It should be noted that Roma public activists conduct
political and educational activities among young people; this study is a good example. However, everything depends exclusively on the Roma community. Because the domestic media don’t give sufficient attention to vocational guidance of citizens, it would be appropriate for leaders and activists of the Roma community to organize (with the involvement of specialists) local projects to disseminate information blocks that would help Roma to obtain professions relevant to the Ukrainian labor market, their content and accompanying formal data.

Because any political activity is based on a profession, which, accordingly, begins with education, it seems logical to conduct separate studies in the near future on the problems of general secondary education and the professional preferences of Roma. It would be useful for all parties to the social dialogue to learn, among other things, about the attitude of Roma to the education of their children in boarding schools (general secondary education), for which the state should allocate funds. In other words, the authorities need to improve the educational outcomes among schoolchildren from Roma communities by removing complex financial, social and geographic barriers that prevent many children, especially girls, from exercising their right to education. Moreover, the women who took part in the survey showed a high level of interest in increasing the participation of Roma in political life. Therefore, in the future it is necessary to conduct gender studies among members of Roma communities on ways to provide educational and professional opportunities for Roma women on their way to self-realization in the economic and political spheres. We believe that future directions for interaction between government and Roma representatives (community mediators, mediators and others) are the following:

– raising awareness of the Roma national minority about the functioning of public institutions, legally guaranteed rights and statutory responsibilities;

– improving the interaction between public authorities, local self-government bodies and persons belonging to the Roma national minority, in particular in their places of compact residence.

In conclusion, a democratic civilized society needs constant analytical studies that will provide relevant information on various aspects of Roma life on a scientific basis. Such studies should cover vital areas of the Roma community, namely social security, education, health care, political consciousness, realization of legal rights and opportunities, etc.

Because Ukraine seeks to join the EU, the authorities can use the experience of Eastern European EU member states in this area. The authorities at the national and local levels should encourage and support research on the situation of national minorities in Ukraine and the Roma, in particular by social policy scholars. Sociologists and economists could collect information on the socio-economic situation of the Roma through periodic surveys carried out by private research agencies on the basis of contracts. Most importantly, the authorities must ensure that policymaking which addresses the Roma minority and communities where Roma live does not rely solely on official population data because they do not accurately reflect the actual number of Roma population. At the same time, decision-making should be based on a comprehensive evidence base, where official data are confirmed and supplemented by the results of analytical studies of international organizations and private agencies, a comprehensive survey of public opinion with
the help of sociological tools.

References: