ACHIEVING INTEGRATION OF THE ROMA IN THE EU: DESCRIPTIVE REPRESENTATION AS A POLICY SOLUTION FOR ROMANIA

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Abstract: In the content of this paper the author looks for policy solutions for improving the status of the Roma within the EU and particularly in Romania. The theoretical model is taken from studies on descriptive representation of prominent minorities in the US with the purpose of creating an effective policy model. The first part of the paper contains an introduction to the socio-political situation of the Roma and how is it linked to representation, the second part provides a general theoretical discussion of descriptive representation, while in the third part I analyze the representation of the Roma in Romania, and make theory-grounded proposals for its improvement.

Keywords: Roma, descriptive representation, policy proposals, policy solution, Romania.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most challenging public policy issues of the European Union is the impoverished status of the Roma, a problem largely linked to bad politics and a long history of discrimination. In the aftermath of the General Affairs Council Meeting of the European Commission held on 8 December 2008, high rank officials of the EU body noted in the Council's Conclusions that people of Roma origin within EU, despite having the same level of rights and obligations like the rest of the nationals form a disfavored community, being liable to social exclusion, poverty and discrimination. In a extended report on proper policies for the inclusion of the Roma, EU policy experts consider that the main causes for the present situation are "racism and discrimination against Roma, civil status and access to personal documents, the general economic and political climate, recognition as a national minority, political participation and representation"[1]. The

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[1] European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Unit G4, *Improving the tools for the social inclusion and non-discrimination of Roma in the EU Report,* Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, 2010, p. 8.

last issue, representation (closely linked to political participation) mentioned in the Commission's report, forms the object of the present study. My aim is to provide a framework for a better political representation of the Roma minority in Romania, the largest of this kind in the EU[2], which should help achieve a more profound integration of this impoverished community.

Representation, which in the words of one famous theorist, Hanna Pitkin[3] simply entails the act of making present again is a political concept which offers prospects for improving the status of marginalized minorities by the means of electing descriptive representatives; people who share the same features (gender, sex, ethnicity) or experiences (cf. Young[4]) with the voters.

In the literature, descriptive representation has been linked to positive behaviors which help set up a better functioning and a more inclusive type of democracy, by increasing political participation, knowledge of politics and efficacy[5]. Fowler et al.[6] in their review of the literature, point out that the presence of minority group members in a legislative assembly help prevent the adoption of bills unfavorable towards the marginalized group. Descriptive representation is an effective governmental policy because it has the value of a reparatory measure which encourages people historically apathetic to solve shared problems[7], in our case Romani ethnics who faced discrimination in Romania stemming across centuries.

The background of discrimination for Romani people in Romania has its roots in their condition as slaves during the times of the medieval principalities of Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania; the first documented Gipsy slaves being recorded in 1385[8]. As slaves for the Prince, boyars or monasteries, the Roma endured serious hardships like beating, forced labour, rape[9], while attempts towards

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[2] According to the data provided by the 2011 Romanian census, in Romania there are 621,000 citizens of Roma background, or about 3.3 % of the overall population. However, since Roma ethnics frequently do not declare their real identity (due to the undesired public stigma), the real numbers are debatable; while the Council of Europe records are around 1,850,000 people, other organization like the World Bank or the Romanian agency for the Roma mention that around 1 milion Gypsies live in compact communities, Agenția Națională pentru Romi [ANR], *Report 2014*, p. 6, available at http://www.anr.gov.ro/

[3] *Apud* Suzanne Dovi, *Political Representation*, in Edward N. Zalta (editor), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, available at http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/ political-representation/, accessed at: 29 April 2015.

[4] Iris M. Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 120-153.

[5] See Stacy G. Ulbig, *Political Realities and Political Trust: Descriptive Representation in Municipal Government*, in "Southwestern Political Science Association Meeting", 2005, available at http://www.shsu.edu/~sgu001/npsa2009.pdf, accessed at: April 29, 2015; Fowler Derek J., Jennifer L. Merolla, Abbylin H. Sellers, *The Effects of Descriptive Representation on Political Attitudes and Behaviors*, available at http://wpsa.research.pdx.edu/meet/2012/, accessed at: April 28, 2015.

[6] Fowler Derek J., Jennifer L. Merolla, Abbylin H. Sellers, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

[7] *Ibidem*; see Iris M. Young, *op. cit.*, 120-153.

[8] Mariana Sandu, *Romii din România: repere prin istorie*, Bucharest, Vanemonde Publishing, 2005, p. 5.

[9] Neagu Djuvara, *Între Orient şi Occident. Ţările române la începutul epocii moderne*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing, 1995, *passim*.

their liberation were sometimes made by monarchs who faced the reluctance of slave masters[10]. After 1850 the Roma living in the Romanian territories were politically liberated, but many of them continued to preserve an impoverished economic status. During the communist period the existence of the Romani ethnic identity was no longer acknowledged; however the Romanian state did implement strategies aimed at their (forced) integration. This occurred particularly between 1977-1983, by promoting a set of policies which included the provision of housing, (obligatory) employment status, registration of Roma residents, improving public health and education among the ethnics[11]. However, the measures taken by the Communist parties across Europe (including Romania) for integrating the Roma were not always adequate; e.g. since education in Romani language was not provided by the state, frequently Gipsy pupils were sent to classes for retarded children or to segregated institutions; many of them soon abandoned school. In spite of the harsh regulations imposed for the cultural assimilation of the ethnics, Communist governments in Eastern Europe did succeed in improving the socio-economic status of the Romani people[12]. As soon as Communism fell in Eastern Europe, the Roma achieved political and cultural emancipation as part of the democratization process in their countries, but their living standards decreased[13]. According to a study by the World Bank cited in an EU Commission report[14] most of the poverty specific to the Roma in Central and Eastern Europa is a result of their poor professional qualification and loss of the jobs they held during Communism.

In Romania, the accession to the European Union brought in economic development, legislation and institutions aimed at the protection of the Roma, the latter being part of the acquis communitaire. In 2001, the Romanian government adopted the "Strategy for the improving of the situation of the Roma for the period 2001-2010" and created the National Agency for the Roma. Partly due to lack of institutional effectiveness in applying Romania's legislation[15] and party due to the global financial crisis[16] the results are yet to be seen; recent statistics show a worsening in the situation of the Roma. Data shows that while in 2005 two out of five Romanian citizens of Roma origin were living in relative poverty, in 2011 three out of four Romani citizens were in the same situation according to Annex I

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[10] Mariana Sandu, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

[11] Bleahu Ana, Frunzaru Valeriu, *Participarea politică a romilor din România*, Bucharest, Romani Criss, Centrul Romilor pentru Intervenție Socială şi Studii, 2004; available at http://www.romanicriss. org/PDF/participare%20politica%20romi.pdf, accessed at: 29 April 2015.

[12] Barany Zoltan D., *Living on the Edge: The East European Roma in Postcommunist Politics and Societies*, in "Slavic Review", Vol. 53, No. 2, 1994, p. 327.

[13] *Ibidem*, p. 328.

[14] European Commission, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

[15] *Assessment of barriers to Roma political participation in Romania*, available at http://www.ndi.org/files/Assessment%20Report%20Final%20%28complete%29.pdf, accessed at: 29 April 2015.

[16] *Strategia Guvernului României de incluziune a cetăţenilor români aparţinând minorităţii rome pentru perioada 2014-2020*, available at http://www.anr.gov.ro/docs/Site2014/Strategie/ Strategie_final_18-11-2014.pdf, accessed at: 2 May 2015.

of the Romanian Government Strategy for the inclusion of the Roma in the period 2014-2020. In the same document it is pointed out that only 10-15% of the Roma citizens in Romania are employed, most of them have no qualification or perform activities which do not require a professional qualification, being part of a group extremely liable to impoverishment and social exclusion. This can explain at least partly the wave of migration of Romani people from Romania towards other EU member states. The presence of Romani migrants is frequently presented a matter of public order, with many media outlets launching widespread discrimination against the ethnics; in the opinion of EU bureaucrats this becomes a impediment to the implementation of successful policies for their integration[17].

The status of the Roma in Romania has for a long time been a bone of contention for the country's political elite in the light of the social issues, stigma and negative public image attached to this ethnicity throughout the world. A recent example is the bill enacted by the nationalist deputy Bogdan Diaconu to change the designation of this community in the official documents of the Romanian state, by replacing Roma with "Gipsy", the later term, being deemed as racist by many Roma activists. The initiative was criticized by a segment of civil society for "damaging Romania's reputation abroad, by endorsing the portrayal of a country with racist lawmakers, in which personal dignity and the rights of a national minority are breached with the purpose of creating a false comfortable image for the majority of the country residents"[18].

It is important to point out that the Romanian legal system does not favor discrimination against the Roma, the problem lying rather in the way the law is applied. In 2001 when the National Strategy for the inclusion of Roma was firstly launched, the government constructed the administrative body responsible for implementing it; the National Agency for the Roma (Agenţia Naţională pentru Romi, transcribed as ANR) with its local branches called County Offices for the Roma (Birouri Judeţene pentru Romi – BJR). Employed with the BJRs, the Roma mediators for health and education seem to provide the necessary link between Romani people and the local authorities, although their effectiveness depends on the workload and the support given by the local County Council employees[19]. The Law 14/2003 gives the possibility for minority groups to elect their own representatives in the Parliament, as long as their party passes the 5% threshold. However, since the level of political interest, trust and participation of the Roma is generally low among the ethnics[20], no major Roma party managed to acquire the

[17] European Commission, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

[18] *ActiveWatch solicită respingerea propunerii legislative de revenire la denumirea de "ţigan"*, in newspaper "Adevărul", April 29, 2015; available at http://adevarul.ro/news/societate/ activewatch-solicita-respingerea-propunerii-legislative-revenire-denumirea-tigan-1_55412646cfbe376e35b06 70b/index.html#, accessed at: 2 May 2015.

[19] *Assessment of barriers to Roma political participation in Romania...*, p. IV.

[20] Ana Bleahu, Valeriu Frunzaru, *Participarea politică a romilor din România*, Bucharest, Romani Criss, Centrul Romilor pentru Intervenţie Socială şi Studii, 2004; available at http://www.romanicriss.org/PDF/ participare%20politica%20romi.pdf, accessed at: 29 April 2015.

votes of the citizens with a Romani origin. According to the Law 14/2003, Roma are represented in the Parliament by assigning them the default seat for a member of their main Romani political organization, "Partida Romilor" ["The Roma Party"], which is in fact an NGO. Since the year 2000, the NGO "Partida Romilor" appointed the same person for Parliament, the deputy Nicolae Păun, who failed to provide substantive representation (promote suitable laws) for the interests of the Roma community. According to his personal page on the Chamber of Deputies the only bill favorable to the Roma he managed to get adopted is the Law 204/2007, increasing the compensations for the people who faced discrimination on ethnic grounds between 1940-1945[21]. He is also the main initiator for an extremely controversial bill awarding amnesty to all convicts imprisoned for corruption[22] (Hotnews website November 26, 2014).

Romanian electoral legislation is very restrictive when it comes to the creation of new parties which can compete in elections. For a political party to be registered successfully, a minimum of 15000 adhesions are required from at least 18 counties of the country. Ethnic minority NGOs can also compete in the elections, but to gain the seat assigned by default to the Roma they have to be registered with the National Council for Minorities, where solely "Partida Romilor" has membership[23].

Based on the literature on descriptive representation and recommendations made in Romani policy reports compiled by NGOs, EU and the Romanian government I show how the status of the Roma population can be improved by adapting the administrative system and achieving substantive representation of the Roma people.

2. DESCRIPTIVE REPRESENTATION OF MARGINALIZED MINORITIES. DEBATES IN THE LITERATURE

Political representation, despite its acknowledged contribution to improving the quality of a polity and the policies affecting its citizens[24] is a concept which did not acquire a unitary understanding among academics. In the words of one of the most influential researchers on this matter, Hanna Pitkin, representation means

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[21] Romanian Chamber of Deputies website http://www.cdep.ro/pls/parlam/structura.mp?idm= 261&leg =2004&cam=2, accessed at: 2 May 2015.

[22] *Hotnews.ro*, online news portal, *Deputatul Nicolae Păun vrea să depună în Parlament un nou proiect al legii gratierii*, November 26, 2014, available at http://monitorizari.hotnews.ro/stiri-atacuri_j ustitie_declaratii-18670433-deputatul-nicolae-paun-vrea-depuna-parlament-nou-proiect-legii-gratierii.htm, accessed at: 2 May 2015.

[23] *Assessment of barriers to Roma political participation in Romania...*, *passim*.

[24] For a review of the literature on political representation and the assessment of its efficiency with the use of statistical models, I recommend apart from the studies of Ulbig (2005) and Fowler et al. (2012), already cited in this study, the excellent analysis by Haider-Markel Donald*, Representation and Backlash: The Positive and Negative Influence of Descriptive Representation* in "Legislative Studies Quarterly", Vol. 32, No. 1, 2007, pp. 107-133.

supplying the presence of the electors in public policy matters through representatives who advocate, express opinions and concerns on their behalf; it is a form of "political assistance"[25]. However, this definition does not substantiate enough the reality of the representation concept, since frequently the lives of citizens are not directly affected by those they awarded a popular vote, but by appointed public officials (e.g. clerks, social assistance workers), who are generally not directly responsible to voters. Pitkin does recognize the importance of being responsible for decision making, "accountability" (possibility to sanction the elected for their decisions) along with "authorization" (legitimate accession to the official position) being the cores of the political representation conception in her understanding. But what is missing from her wide definition is the influence of institution functioning. Weissberg[26] corrects this, although his definition of representation refers solely to formal representatives (meaning those who compete in elections), he acknowledges the impact of the administrative system, contending that "the amount of representation is more a matter of institutional arrangements than of electoral control". Other authors, like Andrew Rehfeld, take this concept to a very general level considering as representation the simple act by an audience of accepting somebody as a representative[27].

Descriptive representation was chosen as the suitable framework for this study because it can make marginalized minorities feel "more empowered"[28]. The mechanism functions this way; the descriptive elected represented shows more openness and availability to voice and pursue the interests of the oppressed minority, which in turn leads to higher levels of political information, participation in politics and efficacy among the marginalized group. According to Fowler et al.[29] these effects should be treated as important by anyone who is interested in a democratic polity where the oppressed (in their study black people of the US) feel involved and assess positively the political administration and its actors. Achieving the latter goals is of particular importance to the Roma minority, since studies[30] showed that 75% of the ethnics are not interested in politics and many of them vote for direct economic benefits (alcohol or social wages). Another problem with regard the their political organization cited by the same study is that the informal leaders of traditional communities are not authorized/ legitimated, while party heads are not necessarily accepted by the community.

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[25] Suzanne Dovi, *Political Representation*, in Edward N. Zalta (editor), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, available at http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/political-representation/, accessed at: 29 April 2015.

[26] Robert Weissberg, *Collective vs. Dyadic Representation in Congress*, in "The American Political Science Review", Vol. 72, No. 2, 1978, pp. 535.

[27] Suzanne Dovi, *Political Representation*, in Edward N. Zalta (editor), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, available at http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/political-representation/, accessed at: 29 April 2015.

[28] Stacy G. Ulbig, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

[29] Fowler J. Derek, Jennifer L. Merolla, Abbylin H. Sellers, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

[30] Ana Bleahu, Valeriu Frunzaru, *op. cit.*, p. 32-35.

The main idea behind descriptive representation is that representatives should resemble as much as possible the represented, possess their typical characteristics. Similarities might not refer solely to physical features like gender or skin color, but also to shared life experiences[31]. This implies, for instance, that a person who lived in prison for a considerable amount of time can be seen as a proper representative for all the imprisoned, one gained a social perception that is communal to all detainees, sharing the same interests with them (improve the comfort of the cells, for example).

In general, descriptive representation has been considered a proper means to improve the status of a marginalized group. Since the disadvantaged minority was not given the possibility to participate in the political life of a given polity, their interests might not be properly expressed by decision makers coming from other social backgrounds, because they do not have the perspective about life which disfavored group members share. The communal understanding of life specific to that marginalized minority stems from their "shared experiences and/or social position", resulting in "narratives that members develop collectively"[32].

The common "social perspective" is the main argument set forth by another author, Young[33] for applying descriptive political representation for the case of marginalized groups. She contends that people who spent their time in similar life conditions will have resembling perceptions of the social field. However, one should not understand the social perspective specific to a disadvantaged minority as completely unitary, competing views might emerge among group members. In the author's account a communal perspective does not result in well-established generalizations about the life specific to a social stratum, it is only a starting point for a debate about the group's status: "Social perspective consists in a set of questions, kinds of experience, and assumptions with which reasoning begins, rather than the conclusions drawn"[34]. Therefore, competing views on the social life that that arise among group members should not be seen as mutually exclusive, they simply add to the larger picture.

Weldon[35] agrees with the point that a group perspective should not be seen as a monolith, but as a "collective product" that results from deliberative disputes among factions of the minority. To establish the boundaries of a social perspective, intra-group interaction is absolutely necessary; members debate issues affecting them in newspapers, public meetings, TV shows etc. and come up with a list of common focal areas, problems that affect the community in its entirety (while

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[31] Jane Mansbridge, *Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent 'Yes',* in "Journal of Politics", no. 61(3), 1999, pp. 628-657.

[32] Laurel Weldon, *Beyond Bodies: Institutional Sources of Representation for Women in Democratic Policy-Making*, in "The Journal of Politics", no. 64(4), 2002, pp. 1153-1174.

[33] Iris M. Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, *passim.*

[34] *Ibidem*, p. 137.

[35] Laurel Weldon, *op. cit.*, p. 1153.

proposed solutions may vary). For a policy maker to behave as a good representative it is absolutely necessary to participate in deliberations with other group members and get acquainted to the difficulties that these people face as disadvantaged citizens. More than that, mechanisms of accountability and authorization are also required to assure the substantive representation of the group members[36], otherwise those occupying the seats in the legislative assembly might feel little motivation to properly defend the interest of the oppressed minority.

For certain authors, the common social perspective specific to a marginalized group is an illusion, there are too many differences in perceptions between community members, therefore it is not a strong argument in favor of reparatory measures of descriptive representation. This argument does not stand; as I showed earlier in the paper, descriptive representation of disfavored minority does not entail that a social perspective is characterized by a predefined content; it just shows there is a stronger "affinity" between group members to understand the problems specific to their class, while non-members will have to pay a greater effort to comprehend what difficulties are faced by the oppressed minority[37].

Another criticism brought against this form of representation is that descriptive representatives are less skilled to act as professionals in a decision making position; in other words "no one would argue that morons should be represented by morons"[38]. The counterargument that can be brought against this assumption is that assigning a representative position to an individual from a group is usually a selective process (authorization through voting or other procedures), it gives higher chances to well prepared individuals to get elected rather than to "morons".

Descriptive types of representation were also criticized because they contain no clear guidelines about which specific group categorization are relevant in this political process: should we allot a fixed number of seats to left-handers, blondes or the blue-eyed? Depending on the type of polity we are dealing with, the answer to this kind of criticism follows different arguments. In a deliberative democracy it would seem reasonable to give voice to left-handers if their opinion is relevant with regard to the outcome of a specific decision, for example how to design the handle of a new repairing tool. In an aggregative model of democracy, the decision is dependent upon the will of the dominant group(s); if they suffer a lot by not accepting left-handers as representatives of their constituency, they will most likely change their decision in the next elections and vote for them[39]. For the case of Romania the cost of not assuring proper political representation to the Roma is translated in social tensions generated by poverty in those communities, tensions that also impact citizens of non-Roma origins through crime and bad reputation in the Western media.

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[36] *Ibidem*, p. 1155.
[37] Iris M. Young, *op. cit.*, p. 137.
[38] Jane Mansbridge, *op. cit.*, p. 631.
[39] *Ibidem*, p. 634-635.

Other theorists value descriptive political representation of marginalized groups because it is a reparatory measure (considering their history of oppression by the majority) and because it favors social inclusion and political participation. The past exclusion from political affairs of a disadvantaged minority can contribute to a feeling of apathy among such people, while assigning leadership positions that descriptively represent those community members might encourage them to become engaged in politics, to help solve "shared problems"[40].

Mansbridge also appreciates the benefits of descriptive representation, holding that it can help diminish the feeling of distrust by improving communication between the dominant and the subordinate group. This is not the only the advantage, according to the author, in the case of a community with uncrystallized interests, the presence of a descriptive representative can help improve substantive representation because she is given the possibility to draw attention on the problems affecting the group in policy debates with other legislators. In her theoretical model, Mansbridge[41] endorses representation by descriptive decision makers for two other additional reasons: it creates "a social meaning of 'ability to rule' for members of a group in historical contexts where the ability has been seriously questioned" and increases "the polity's de facto legitimacy in contexts of past discrimination". She does not view descriptive representation as a panacea to solve problems of inequality between different social strata, being rather a context based strategy which should be put into practice only if after serious deliberation it is proven that benefits outweigh the costs.

3. ANALYSIS AND PROPOSALS FOR IMPROVING THE STATUS OF THE ROMA MINORITY

In the case of the Roma from Romania the descriptive representation of their minority in government bodies can be an appropriate reparatory measure, but its application has to be further refined. Although they are the second largest minority in Romania according to the latest census (621,000 or 3.3% of the population) no major political party managed to capture their group interests and gain significant representation in the Parliament. The Romanian Constitution guarantees one seat in the Parliament for every ethnic group but the presence of one elected Roma politician in the legislative assembly did not contribute to the substantive representation of their interests; inequalities between them and the majority population being still high[42].

The absence of Roma political leaders in mainstream politics is a phenomenon pertaining not only to Romania, but a general situation across Europe.

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[40] Iris M. Young, *op. cit.*, p. 144.
[41] Jane Mansbridge, *op. cit.*, p. 628.
[42] Agenția Națională pentru Romi [ANR], *Report 2014*, available at http://www.anr.gov.ro/

As explained in the Report of the European Commission on good policies for the inclusion of the Roma[43], Romani representatives activating in the political establishment are rather rare, being mostly active at local and municipal level. According to the document, if Romani ethnics seek a political position, they should attempt it via mainstream parties, not with the help of ethnocentric parties. For this reason, the Commission sees NGOs as the agents for boosting the political participation of the Roma. For assuring a proper representation of the Romani citizens, the EU executive officials consider supporting civic organizations, assigning seats and ensuring the presence of the ethnics in Consultative bodies as the proper means to achieve this goal. The authors of the report take their strategy even further, directly accounting for substantive representation: the expertise of Roma Consultative body members has to provide an input into policy making. The bureaucrats who drafted the report shared Iris Young's opinion on descriptive representation; it is not something monolithical, but rather accumulating perspectives of the marginalized group members. For this reason they required assuring that all segments of the Romani society are represented within the supported NGOs, including the preservation of gender balance[44].

The Commission's skepticism towards providing support to Romani ethnocentric political parties is extremely relevant for the case of Romania; according to research reports by civic organizations[45], Roma people see little legitimacy in elected officials because they all appear corrupt. On the other hand, the rulers who come across as proper representatives are administrative workers from whom they can seek help (County Council Roma officers, health mediators). This establishes a loophole in Laurel Weldon's conception of descriptive representation; the above mentioned officials do share the descriptive features of the marginalized group (have Romani identity), but are not bound to any mechanisms of authorization and accountability; in most of the cases they are appointed to office. My opinion is that representatives who share descriptive features and achieve substantive representation (by pursuing favorable policies) are still legitimate representatives, despite the lack of mechanism for authorization and control.

The important aspect which stems from most research reports (by the European Commission Report, NDI and ANR reports) is that proper institutional organization and competent bureaucrats are the keys to obtain the substantive representation of the Roma. For these goals to be achieved the following measures have to be implemented:

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[43] European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Unit G4, *Improving the tools for the social inclusion and non-discrimination of Roma in the EU Report,* Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, 2010, *passim.*

[44] *Ibidem*, p. 22.

[45] See the studies by Romani Criss (2004) and by the National Democratic institute for international Affairs (2009).

- Adopt the proper policies to ensure the socio-economic status of the Roma is improved. This should be done by promoting after-school programs for poor children, supporting employers who hire Roma people, counseling and incentivizing the ethnics to achieve professional qualification. The underlying idea is that good communication between representatives (officials) and the represented (Romani citizens) can only be achieved if the latter reach a certain level of development.
- Better coordinate government institutions and professionalize public officials.

The last point requires a more detailed explanation given its complexity. The NDI report recommends synchronization between the Parliament and the Government when policies on the situation of the Roma are adopted. The good news is that Romanian government officials already seek this objective. To achieve this goal the Romanian Government Strategy for Roma integration between 2014-2020 provisions the creation of Ministerial Commissions headed by state secretaries in charge of Roma policy making. The NDI report requires that all such commissions to fall under the authority of the ANR which should be given the resources for supervising these governmental branches.

The policy reports and the research on improving the condition of marginalized minorities cited in this study follow a descending mechanism; while perfecting the functioning of the government and the parliament contributes to better representation, the main focus rather falls on representatives at local and regional level who are the main actors for obtaining substantive representation.

There are three main strategies required to be followed in order to achieve the goal of improving Roma representation: professionalize public officials, enforce proper policies and monitor the results. With regard to the first strategy, the NDI report recommends enhancing the training and development programs for Roma mediators, while in the Strategy set forth by the Romanian government (2014-2020) learning modules about Romani history and culture are advised for local administrators with no Romani origins.

I contend that both measures bring a positive contribution towards substantive representation because they create bridges for communication between the minority group members and the majority. As a matter of fact, in most Roma research reports, proper policies are considered those which foster communication between Roma community leaders and public officials. Romanian government officials proposed the creation of Local Initiatives Groups (Grupuri de Inițiativă Locală – GIL), formed of the Roma leaders belonging to the municipality and aware of the community needs. GIL members should take part in period meetings with the city hall to be informed about public decisions taken and to express the opinion of the represented. This initiative is well adapted to the cultural characteristics of Romani community members, which according to the Report by Romani Criss[46] generally do not vote on individual level but consult with their local leaders. For this policy to fit perfectly the pre-requisites of descriptive

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[46] Romani Criss, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

representation, mechanisms for authorization and accountability have to be established together with the Roma inhabitants. To enable a good environment for communication, both the NDI and the European Commission report recommend partnerships between public institutions and civic organizations of the Roma. Other main strategies for obtaining a proper representation and political participation of the Roma are issuing ID cards to citizens who do not hold them, advocacy by Romani NGOs and voluntary data collection about Romani ethnics. The latter one was successfully implemented in 2004 in Slovakia[47] where the government collected personal data about Gipsy communities that were used afterwards to shape better policies aimed at this ethnic group.

Monitoring is a key factor for benefiting from effective descriptive representation, entailing the idea of representatives' accountability (as shown by Weldon). Romanian Government officials recommend for instance that works of Ministerial Commissions to be monitored by at least 3 experts who should issue a report. The NDI report[48] is very critical of the work done so far by government officials in charge of Roma policies requiring that the activity of County Offices (BJRs) to be coordinated by the Minister of Internal Affairs and examined by external auditors.

A strategic policy proposed by the NDI which helps achieve a better democracy conveys the idea that parties, including Romanian mainstream ones, should establish stronger connections with the Roma electorate to get more involved in the life of the community. They suggest ruling parties to support Roma candidates for seats in the Parliament, to create coalitions between Romanian parties and Romani NGOs so that the marginalized minority becomes more eager to participate in politics. The idea underlying the findings in the report is that policy makers should improve deliberation with the Roma minority on issues relating to their status, they should get acquainted to their social perspective (which is not unitary). Getting informed continuously on the focal areas which are of interest for the marginalized group will give future Romani decision makers credibility, but also authorization from the marginalized community.

In this set of policy proposals the role of the EU is crucial; to continuously monitor progresses and sanction the government for massive failures, such as the low absorption of EU funds aimed at the integration of the Roma.

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[47] European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Unit G4, *Improving the tools for the social inclusion and non-discrimination of Roma in the EU Report*, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, 2010, *passim*.
[48] *Assessment of barriers to Roma political participation in Romania...*, pp. 30-36.