

Roma At Risk

Policy Brief for

The All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Prevention of Genocide and Other Crimes Against Humanity

Executive Summary

With the Hungarian Parliamentary Elections slated for the Spring of 2014, it is likely that Hungary's Roma community will become increasingly at risk of racially-based ethnic violence. This policy brief recommends that the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Prevention of Genocide and Other Crimes Against Humanity approach the Government of Canada with recommendations that respond to these worrisome trends. A number of short-term policy options are provided, in addition to a number of long-term policy recommendations that would help further address the structural issues of the Roma at risk in Hungary.

Roma in Europe have historically been marginalized from mainstream society, and frequently been the victims of hate crimes and violent repression. The recent economic recession in Europe has exacerbated these racial prejudices and hatreds, with Roma communities in Hungary proving to be particularly susceptible to racially-motivated violence. The rapid growth of Hungarian nationalist extremist groups that openly incite racial hatred against Roma is particularly worrisome, as these groups have gained a foothold in mainstream Hungarian politics.

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Objective:

- Raise the issue of increasing violence towards Roma fostered by Hungarian elites.
- Recommend policy options for the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Prevention of Genocide and Other Crimes Against Humanity (hereafter the “All-Party Parliamentary Group”) in the lead up to 2014 Hungarian Parliamentary elections

Background:

The Roma constitute Europe’s largest ethnic minority, with an estimated current total population of between 10 and 12 million.¹ Genetic and linguistic evidence traces Roma origins to Northern India.² The Roma arrived in Europe in successive waves of migration beginning in the ninth century, and have had a well-established presence in European society by the 1400s. Despite characterizations as nomads, the majority of Roma in Europe have long settled in their host states, giving rise to distinct sub-groups.

Exclusion, discrimination, and persecution have characterized the Roma experience in Europe. The genocide of hundreds of thousands of Roma by the Nazi regime during the Second World War, referred to as the *parrajmos* (literally, “the devouring”) by Roma, constituted the worst episode in modern history.

Within Hungary, the Roma constitute approximately 10 percent of the population.³ As with Europe as a whole, the Roma in Hungary do not comprise a single community given the various waves of immigration from other European states. Language constitutes the most apparent division among the various Roma groups within Hungary. Three-quarters of the Roma are Hungarian speaking and self-identify as *Romungro*, literally “Hungarian man.” Economic and political restructuring after the communist era have helped to further the severe socio-economic issues faced by the Roma today. While the Roma are not represented by any mainstream political party, many civil organizations exist and limited autonomy is granted via the National Gypsy Minority Self-Government.⁴

Roma At Risk:

According to the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), 61 attacks were reported against Hungarian Roma and their property between January 2008 and September 2012, resulting in nine deaths and dozens of injuries. In many of these cases, the state was indifferent — in some — it was accused of being complicit⁵. Generally, however, there is ample evidence that anti-Roma behavior is being condoned — if not encouraged — by the country’s political elite.

¹ “Stats,” *Council of Europe Roma and Travellers Division*, <http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/romatravellers/Source/documents/stats.xls> (last accessed May 21, 2013); “Fact Sheets on Hungary,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Budapest*, http://www.mfa.gov.hu/NR/rdonlyres/05DF7A51-99A5-4BFE-B8A5-210344C02B1A/0/Roma_en.pdf (last accessed May 22, 2013).

² As self-identification among the various Roma groups and communities and names attached to them from outsiders vary widely, it should be noted that the term “Roma” will be used throughout to collectively refer to the European ethnic group that share common origin from Northern India.

³ “Stats,” *Council of Europe Roma and Travellers Division*, <http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/romatravellers/Source/documents/stats.xls> (last accessed May 21, 2013).

⁴ Megan V. Unangst, “The Hungarian Minority Self-Government System as a Means of Increasing Romani Political Participation,” in *Assessment Report* (National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, 2006).

⁵ “Attacks Against Roma in Hungary: January 2008 – September 2012,” *European Roma Rights Centre*. <http://www.errc.org/cms/upload/file/attacks-list-in-hungary.pdf> (last accessed June 9, 2013).

One of the more egregious examples was an editorial published in Magyar Hírlap — a national daily newspaper — in January 2013. It was written by one of the founding members of the ruling Fidesz Party, Zsolt Bayer. Bayer, a close friend of current Prime Minister Viktor Orbán⁶, wrote that a significant number of Hungary's gypsies are “unfit to live among people” and “must be dealt with — immediately — by any means necessary”.⁷ Prime Minister Orbán, who said nothing following the publication, was pictured as recently as March 31, 2013 with Bayer, celebrating the Fidesz party's 25th anniversary.⁸

This type of incitement has more commonly been manifest in what are euphemistically described as “peace marches”. One widely-reported march, in the village of Devecser in August 2012, involved more than 1,000 black-clad protesters threatening people they suspected were Roma by shouting, “You will die here” and vandalizing their property. Of significant concern at that march — and others similar to it — was the presence of members of the Jobbik party, which won 16% of the seats in the Hungarian National Assembly in the 2010 election.⁹ As the country moves towards another election in early 2014, it has been noted that “Fidesz, which has lost voters to Jobbik, knows that there are hardly any votes in standing up for the Roma.”¹⁰ Consequently, there is a palpable fear Fidesz will engage in what is referred to as “elite-led ethnic outbidding”¹¹ in an attempt to appease the more extreme elements in its party, while winning back voters from Jobbik.

In the Canadian context, Roma organizations have suggested the Canadian government is insensitive to the discrimination faced by Hungary's Roma. In particular, the focus has been on a billboard, bus shelter, and radio campaign launched in Hungary's fourth largest city (Miskolc) last January¹², which discouraged Roma refugees from seeking asylum in Canada.¹³ In October, Miskolc was the site of one Jobbik's marches, and the billboard campaign — the organizations argue — has reinforced the negative stereotypes of Roma that Jobbik expresses.¹⁴ A section of Jobbik's English-language website supports that interpretation, as it links to a Vancouver Sun article on the billboard campaign as proof that Canada shares their views.¹⁵

Policy Options:

1. Do Nothing: This option requires the All-Party Parliamentary Group to take no action. It requires no expenditure of financial or political resources. Potential risks include accusations of Canadian inaction from human rights groups and International Non-Governmental Organizations. Trends of racially motivated violence and discrimination are

⁶ Keno Verseck, “Hungary's Racism Problem: Orbán Friend Says Roma ‘Shouldn't Be Allowed To Exist,’” *Der Spiegel* (January 11, 2013).

⁷ Zsolt. Bayer, “Ki ne legyen?” *Magyar Hírlap* (January 5, 2013).

⁸ “Viktor Orbán facebook page shows PM with Fidesz figure scorned by party for anti-Roma diatribe,” *All Hungary News* (March 31, 2013).

⁹ “Hungarian anti-Roma marches: You are going to die here.” *The Economist* (August 23, 2012).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Stuart J. Kaufman, “Spiraling to Ethnic War—Elites, Masses, and Moscow in Moldova's Civil War.” *International Security* Vol. 21:2 (1996).

¹² Andy Levy-Ajzenkopf, “Canada Warns Hungarian Roma not to seek asylum,” *The Canadian Jewish News* (January 20, 2013)

¹³ Nicholas Keung, “Roma refugees: Canadian billboards warn of deportation,” *Toronto Star* (January 25, 2013)

¹⁴ Nick Thorpe, “March by far right raises concern for Hungary's Roma,” *BBC News* (October 18, 2012).

¹⁵ “Frequently Refuted Lies,” *Official Jobbik Website*, http://www.jobbik.com/frequently_refuted_lies (last accessed June 9, 2013).

likely to escalate as racially-based rhetoric from extreme Hungarian nationalist groups continues to grow.¹⁶

2. Public statement from the All-Party Parliamentary Group: This option would consist of the All-Party Parliamentary Group publishing a statement condemning in the strongest terms possible the proliferation of articles inciting racial hatred against Roma within Hungary, as well as expressing concern over the continued discrimination and increasing rates of ethnic violence against Hungarian Roma. This would be coupled with a strongly worded letter (drafted by the All-Party Parliamentary Group and endorsed by the Prime Minister's Office) for the Canadian Ambassador in Hungary to deliver to the Hungarian Government. The financial costs for this option would be minimal (ie- costs of one press conference). This option would officially and publically raise Canada's concern over the increasingly extreme racial rhetoric espoused by Hungarian nationalist groups with the Hungarian Government. Potential risks include negative reaction or indifference from the Hungarian Government.

3. Campaign Monitoring: This option would see All-Party Parliamentary Group send a media monitoring delegation to Hungary for the scheduled Spring 2014 Parliamentary elections. The delegation would monitor Hungarian media, as well as electoral debates and all campaigning material, for any evidence of racial incitement or promotion of racial hatred. The mission would also monitor all incidents of racially motivated violence and discrimination before, during and immediately after the election. The maximum estimated costs for this option would be \$8.9 million.¹⁷ Potential risks include the Hungarian government responding negatively to the media monitoring mission, possibly taking scaled punitive actions.

4. Recall Canadian Ambassador: This option would see the All Party Parliamentary Group encourage the Government of Canada to recall its Ambassador to Hungary. This option would send a strong political message to the Hungarian Government, publicly expressing official displeasure of the Hungarian Government's response to the unchecked growth of anti-Roma racial rhetoric by extreme Hungarian nationalist groups. Financial

¹⁶ As stated by authorities within the US State Department, and documented by numerous independent NGOs, there have been upward trends of racially motivated attacks targeting Roma within Hungary, particularly after the most recent economic recession, starting in 2007-08. These reports all espouse fears that this violence is likely to increase should no further action be taken. (Speech by Thomas O. Melia, "Remarks at the International Roma Day Event," *US Department of State*, (April 30, 2012) <http://www.humanrights.gov/2012/05/03/remarks-at-the-international-roma-day-event/> (last accessed June 9, 2013); Sinan Gokçen "Roma Under Attack: Violence Against Roma Surges in Central and Eastern Europe," *European Roma Rights Center* (September 12, 2012), <http://www.errc.org/article/roma-under-attack-violence-against-roma-surges-in-central-and-eastern-europe/4059> (last accessed June 9, 2013); "Violent Attacks Against Roma in Hungary: Time to Investigate Racial Motivation," Amnesty International (2010), http://www.amnesty.at/uploads/tx_amnesty/Violent_attacks_against_Roma_in_Hungary_report_web_02.pdf (last accessed June 9, 2013))

¹⁷ Based on a recent Elections Monitoring Mission to Ukraine; Stephen Harper, "Canada's support to the electoral process in Ukraine," *Prime Minister of Canada* (October 19, 2012) <http://www.pm.gc.ca/eng/media.asp?id=5113> (last accessed June 9, 2013).

costs would be minimal. Potential risks include the Hungarian government responding negatively, possibly taking scaled punitive actions (recalling the Hungarian Ambassador to Canada, limiting Canadian business interests in Hungary, etc)

Policy Recommendations:

The recommended course of action is a combination of policy options 2 (Public Statement) and 3 (Campaign Monitoring). These two options provide measured and reasonable responses for the All Party Parliamentary Group to pursue, while proactively taking measures to adequately respond to the increased risk of anti-Roma rhetoric and violence by extreme Hungarian nationalists in the upcoming 2014 Parliamentary elections.

Since these policy prescriptions are framed around the Spring 2014 Parliamentary elections, we urge the All Party Parliamentary Group to encourage the Government of Canada to consider pursuing additional follow-up engagements beyond the scheduled elections, to ensure this at risk group is adequately protected. Specific recommendations for the All Party Parliamentary Group to present to the Government of Canada for further consideration would include¹⁸:

- Revisit Citizenship and Immigration Canada's decision to designate Hungary as a safe 'designated country of origin.'¹⁹
- Work with the Hungarian government and European Union to ensure Roma have equal access to the same quality social services (health, education, water and sanitation, adequate social housing, etc) as entitled to all Hungarian and European Union citizens.
- Work with the Hungarian government to ensure that all racially motivated attacks against Roma are investigated and the perpetrators brought to justice;
- Continue to monitor and track Hungarian media and political groups for incidents of racial incitement and the promotion of racial hatred;
- Work with civil society groups (Canadian, Hungarian and International) to develop strategic, outcome-based proposals geared towards key decision-makers in the Hungarian government;
- Encourage Canadian civil society groups to leverage new information and communications technologies to educate the Canadian public and government on Roma issues;
- Encourage Individual journalists, media owners, and managers in Canada to commit themselves to "the responsibility to report" human rights abuses against Roma in Hungary and Europe.

¹⁸A number of these recommendations are drawn from previous policy recommendations offered in a report commissioned by the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Prevention of Genocide and Other Crimes Against Humanity: "Mobilizing the Will to Intervene," *The Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies* (2009) http://migs.concordia.ca/W2I/documents/ENG_MIGS_finalW2IAugust09.pdf (last accessed June 9, 2013): p.xi

¹⁹ "Designated Countries of Origin," *Citizenship and Immigration Canada* (May 30, 2013) <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/reform-safe.asp> (last accessed June 9, 2013).

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Annex A – Policy Options Matrix

Options	Impact	Costs	Potential Risks
1. Do Nothing	None	No Cost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accusations of inaction • Roma continue to be marginalized • Increasingly violent discrimination from extremist groups
2. Public statement	Publicises the issue	Minimal costs (press conference)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indifference • Negative Response
3. Campaign Monitoring	Publicises the issue; Increases pressure on Hungarian Government	CAD\$8.9 million (estimated maximum)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative response • Punitive actions taken
4. Recall Canadian Ambassador	Strong political message	Minimal costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative response • Punitive actions taken