

ANTIGYPSYISM IN PUBLIC DISCOURSES AND ELECTION CAMPAIGNS

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ROMA AS AN INSTRUMENT OF POLITICS: THE CASE OF MISKOLC (HUNGARY)

INTRODUCTION

Elaborating on a specific Hungarian case-study, the “Miskolc-case” contributes to the debate about racism, hate speech, and incitement against Roma and Sinti in election campaigns in the frame of the OSCE-ODIHR Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) side event.¹ Roma are frequently key targets of racism, hate speech, and incitement, in particular during election campaigns.² Politicians and political parties often draw upon prejudices against Roma in order to win votes through populist strategies and the scapegoating of minorities.³ However this kind of behavior is not unique, it is standard in a frightening manner and damages the social cohesion of our societies.

In the following I would like to illustrate a short analysis of a specific Hungarian case in which the public discourse about Roma was fueled during the Hungarian local governmental elections (in Miskolc). Thereupon, Roma were scapegoats and became second-class citizens whose fundamental rights were ignored and violated.⁴ I will explore the way the antigypsyism appeared in the campaign, disguised as the housing issue of Roma people in Miskolc.⁵

The case of Miskolc is a good example to demonstrate the variety of negative conditions that may occur in this field. Miskolc, which is in the northeastern part of Hungary drew attention owing to the practices by the Miskolc Real Estate Management. By means of unlawful measures the local authorities evicted Roma from one of the slums – the so-called Numbered Streets.⁶ They conducted joint inspections which were

¹ The current paper is based on the author’s speech given in the frame of the OSCE-ODIHR Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2015, “Combating Hate Speech, Racism and Incitement against Roma and Sinti in Election Campaigns” side event, 30 September 2015.

² No Hate Speech Movement: European Parliamentary Election – No Hate Speech. 2014. <http://www.nohatespeechmovement.org/hate-speech-watch/focus/european-parliamentary-elections---no-hate-speech> (September 13, 2015). The manuscript was closed on 9 January 2016.

³ See e.g. Jobbik campaign film 2010. The Hungarian Television and Radio refused to air this film (see decision of the Supreme Court (Decision No. Kvk.III.37.993/2010/4.).

⁴ Following the speech the author conducted a short discourse analysis with her two colleagues (Saulé Agata and Noemi Olah) at the Central European University, Department of Political Science (one-year Political Science Ma), in the frame of Scope and Methods class, about the Miskolc case.

⁵ For antigypsyism see Antigypsyism.eu, <http://antigypsyism.eu>.

⁶ See more about the eviction, and especially about the illegal practice of joint inspections: Hungarian Civil Liberties Union: A Hungarian City Its Openly Against Roma 2015. <http://tasz.hu/en/romaprogram/hungarian-city-openly-against-its-roma> (13 September 2015), OSCE: Authorities need to promote sustainable, non-discriminatory housing solutions for Roma, ODIHR Director Link says during visit to Hungary. 2015. <http://www.osce.org/odihr/167966> (13 September 2015) and OSCE: The

accompanied and coordinated by the Miskolc Municipality Police.⁷ The current situation of Roma in this region to some extent is related to the racist election campaign in 2014.⁸

BACKGROUND OF THE CASE, NATIONAL ELECTION IN 2014

Miskolc is located in one of the most disadvantaged regions in the country.⁹ Miskolc has approximately 170,000 inhabitants. Based on the census data of 2011 and further estimations, around 13,500 people live in one of the 13 segregated slums within the municipality of Miskolc. 80 to 90 per cent of them are Roma. The long-term unemployment rate among the slums' inhabitants is extremely high.¹⁰ The abbreviated explanation by politicians to the poor economic and social situation is often racist and leads to ethnic conflicts. But blaming Roma for the disadvantageous situation is nothing new. Referring to a so-called "Roma issue" is ever since part of the political agenda.¹¹ With the collapse of the Eastern bloc in the late 1980s the local authorities decided to renew the historic center of the town – which was by then the home of many Roma families. Following their restructuring plans the local council was eager to "relocate" the Roma population to the outskirts and force them into a newly edified and isolated slum. But the plan failed due to the joint protest and resistance of activists, local residents, sociologists, and civilians.¹² Once again the Roma people of Miskolc became unintentionally part of the political 'game' during the elections in 2014.

First of all, it is quite revealing that the right-wing camp of Jobbik took their national campaign launch event to Miskolc in 2014. The Hungarian right-wing party chose – not by chance – this municipality for their launch event. They knew there they would find a like-minded audience for their political agenda on – among others – security and 'gypsy criminality'.¹³ However, the illegal evictions and the harassment of the 'Numbered Streets' inhabitants were mainly grounded after the national elections, during the preparation for local elections. It is not surprising that Jobbik used the anti-Roma rhetoric during the national election, but also other parties – even left-wing – embarked on this path during their local election campaigns.

Housing Rights of Roma in Miskolc, Hungary. Report on the ODIHR Field Assessment Visit to Hungary, 29 June – 1 July 2015, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/262026> (1 September 2016).

⁷ Because of the practice of inspections the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union and the Legal Defense Bureau for National and Ethnic Minorities filed a joint complaint to the Ombudsman for Fundamental Rights in March 2014. The inspections which focus on the segregated neighborhoods, involved checking compliance with the obligation of registering a home address; with animal-keeping regulations; existence of waste disposal agreements, renting agreements, and documents proving ownership. The periodical and continuous inspections were conducted by large teams sometimes. Based on the reports, residents of the effected neighborhoods feel threatened and harassed by the repeated, coordinated, raid-like joint inspections by official personnel. See more about the inspection: Joint Report of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights and Deputy-Commissioner Responsible for the Rights of National Minorities: *Comprehensive investigation: the practice of joint inspections coordinated by Miskolc Municipality Police, the local housing decree, other Miskolc Municipality measures affecting housing, and decree amendments by other municipalities in the Miskolc metropolitan area* (Hungarian), No. AJB-1474/2014, 2015.

⁸ "Ombudsman's report on housing discrimination in Miskolc and neighboring towns", European Network of Legal Experts in Gender Equality and Non-discrimination, 5 June 2015, http://www.equalitylaw.eu/index.php?option=com_edocman&task=document.viewdoc&cid=2893&Itemid=295

⁹ Statement by the Delegation of Hungary at the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting Warsaw, 30 September 2014. 2. <http://www.osce.org/odihr/124599?download=true> (September 13, 2015)

¹⁰ Hungarian Civil Liberties Union 2015.

¹¹ "Presumably, people have prejudice because it serves a certain purpose. Most theorists who have considered this issue have concluded that prejudice essentially serves to justify economic and social privileges. [...] If prejudice serves to justify economic inequality, then placing individuals in a relatively privileged or gratified position ought to increase their level of prejudice (in order to justify such privileged position relative to others)." Dan Landis-Rosita D. Albert (ed.): *Handbook of Ethnic Conflicts*. International Perspectives. An International Academy for Intercultural Research Book. New York – Dordrecht – Heidelberg – London: Springer, 2012. p. 492–493.

¹² Janos Ladanyi: *A miskolci gettóügy* (Hungarian) (*The Miskolc ghetto case*), 1991. http://www.tankonyvtar.hu/hu/tartalom/tamop425/0010_2A_05_Ladanyi_Sandor_Tarsadalom_es_terszerkezeti_atalakulasok/ar26.html (15 September 2015).

¹³ Origo: Kasztrálást és csendrőseget ígért a Jobbik (Jobbik promised castration and gendarmerie), <http://www.origo.hu/itthon/20140215-kasztralast-es-csendorseget-igert-a-jobbik.html>.

During the local elections not only Jobbik and Fidesz supported an openly racist candidate, but so did MSZP and DK, two left-wing political parties.¹⁴ None of them seemed to be hesitant to use anti-Roma (antigypsyist) prejudices for vote winning. Their joint mayoral candidate in Miskolc was a former police chief, who is well-known for his anti-Roma statements.¹⁵ It is disturbing and a severe problem that antigypsyist and racist statements have become a standardized practice in Hungary. Even the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) pointed out that the right-wing extremist party Jobbik openly engages in anti-Roma hate speech. However, antigypsyism and hate speech is not limited to right-wing extremist parties and groups but emerges across the political spectrum.¹⁶ The public and political discourse has been radicalized and the number of far right supporters has rapidly increased from the mid-2000s.¹⁷ This phenomenon is also to be seen in Miskolc, in particular within the local election campaign. It paved the way for ongoing human rights violations as well as racist and unlawful actions against Roma in Miskolc.

AMENDMENT OF THE HOUSING REGULATION FROM THE HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVES

The “Roma issue” as a part of the public security policy appeared on the right-wing parties’ agendas. After the national elections in May 2014 the local government amended the municipal decree on the rental of local public housing. As the report of the municipal meeting report outlines, the amendment was accepted within the framework of the “Proposal regarding the public coexistence, the public order and enhancement of public order”.¹⁸ Basically, the idea of evictions started as a public security issue.

The amendment sets out that when rental agreements are terminated, tenants of low comfort social housing can be granted a compensation for vacating accommodation. However, a condition has been added; the tenants must agree to use the compensation to purchase property outside the municipality and to not return to Miskolc within five years. Based on this amendment and further ongoing evictions, the Miskolc case appeared in front of the Supreme Court, the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights, and the Equal Treatment Authority.

The Supreme Court has nullified the provision of the municipal decree on the grounds of infringing the prohibition of discrimination in access to housing. But the verdict addressed only one aspect of the eviction, the provision that persons concerned are banned from the city for five years. It did not challenge the legality and constitutionality of the municipality’s decision in general, and the local authorities continued with evictions based on a different “legal” ground.¹⁹

After the Supreme Court’s decision the Ombudsman’s report stated that the evictions mainly affected the Roma population. Furthermore, it criticized the municipality’s failure to comply with its obligations for social security and housing, which led to massive homelessness.²⁰ Based on the report, the local authorities collected 35,000 signatures in support of the amendment, and sold it to the public as the will of the citizens

¹⁴ Searching for the list of candidates: http://valasztas.hu/hu/onkval2014/883/883_0_index.html

¹⁵ Boon.hu: *Miskolci rendőrkapitány: "Az utcai támadásokat általában cigányok követik el"* (Hungarian) (Miskolc Police Chief: “Street offences are usually committed by Roma”), January 31, 2009, <http://www.boon.hu/miskolci-rendorkapitany-az-utcai-tamadasokat-altalaban-ciganyok-k246vetik-el/news-20090130-01204365> (15 September 2015).

¹⁶ ECRI: Report on Hungary (fifth monitoring cycle), CRI(2015)19. p. 9. <https://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Country-by-country/Hungary/HUN-CbC-V-2015-19-ENG.pdf> (September 13, 2015)9. <https://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Country-by-country/Hungary/HUN-CbC-V-2015-19-ENG.pdf>.

¹⁷ TARKI Social Research Institute: *The Roots of Radicalism and Anti-Roma Attitudes on the Far Right*. 2012. http://www.tarki.hu/hu/news/2012/kitekint/20121122_bernart_kreko_prezentacio.pdf

¹⁸ Report of the municipal meeting, Miskolc Megyei Jogú Város Közgyűlése, Jegyzőkönyv, IV-80.254-7/2014. p. 9. (Hungarian)

¹⁹ Decision of the Supreme Court, No. Köf/5.003./2015.4. (Hungarian).

²⁰ Joint Report of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights and Deputy-Commissioner Responsible for the Rights of National Minorities. 2015.

to get rid of the city's slums.²¹ The Roma affected by the provision were left out of the discourse and were only informed about the outcome. It shows how Roma are discriminated and treated as second-class citizens. At no stage of the discussion about housing regulation and urban development planning Roma representatives have been involved.

Eventually, the Equal Treatment Authority expressed its deep concerns that through the eviction practice the municipality exposes the inhabitants of the 'Numbered Streets' continuously - due to their social situation and ethnic affiliation - to the risk of homelessness.²² The evictions of Miskolc violated the principles of non-discrimination.²³ The Equal Treatment Authority imposed a fine to the municipality and obliged the municipality to terminate the infringement and to set out specific measures. But the municipality failed to comply with the order. The Másság Foundation/Legal Defense Bureau for National and Ethnic Minorities – which submitted the complaint to the Equal Treatment Authority – noted that the municipality further decreased the population of the 'Numbered Streets'. Many residents left on their own initiative and moved to another even bigger and poorer segregated area, others went abroad or moved to other parts of Hungary, as they could not bear the uncertainty about their future.²⁴

Besides the Hungarian institutions²⁵, also ECRI²⁶ and the OSCE-ODIHR²⁷ deem the provisions to be indirect and concealed discrimination against Roma as the vast majority of low comfort housing is rented by Roma.

Besides the racist argument of “public security” the municipality also uses the construction of a stadium as a reasoning for the destruction of the 'Numbered Streets' district. According to Miskolc's mayor, Akos Kriza, this project is of high importance for the city's urban development. The mayor explained in an interview that “[b]oth for reasons of public safety and health the existence of slums cannot be tolerated any more”.²⁸

DISCOURSE ON ROMA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE LOCAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN – INCITEMENT TO HOSTILITY AND HATRED

Without going into the details of the housing regulation or the provisions for the stadium's construction, it is obvious that the housing question served political objectives. The municipality's policy laid the foundation for the key issue of the national election campaigns: the elimination of the run-down and neglected neighborhoods. The campaigns were built on anti-Roma sentiments, in which even the mainstream political parties engaged. Notably the social security and housing policy haven been linked to Roma and became quickly the core topics of Jobbik's and Fidesz' agendas. Roma people were pictured in the election campaign posters of both parties as enemies and outsiders. There are two posters, one from Fidesz and one from Jobbik that illustrate this quite good:

²¹ In connection to the inspections of local authorities the report stated that the Roma residents' right to privacy, right to equal treatment and right to a fair proceeding were also infringed.

²² For the Equal Treatment Authority see <http://www.egyenlobanasmod.hu/eng>.

²³ Equal Treatment Authority, No. EBH/67/22/2015. (Hungarian)

²⁴ ERGO Network: Hearing on Fighting Racial Discrimination in Housing: Forced Evictions against Roma. Factsheets. 14 October 2015. 6-7. http://www.ergonet.org/media/userfiles/media/Factsheet_combined.pdf (10 November 2015).

²⁵ The Supreme Court, the Equal Treatment Authority and the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights and Deputy-Commissioner Responsible for the Rights of National Minorities.

²⁶ ECRI Fifth Report p. 27. para. 91.

²⁷ <http://www.osce.org/odihr/167966>.

²⁸ The Budapest Times: Your number is up, unless you're a football fan. 2014. <http://budapesttimes.hu/2014/10/19/your-number-is-up-unless-youre-a-football-fan/>

FIDESZ-KDNP followed their housing, public safety policy:

“Do you support the elimination of the slums in Miskolc? Miskolc and the people of Miskolc deserve a quiet and peaceful life. There must not be slums in the 21st century in a European city. The slums must be eliminated once and for all!”

Jobbik poster:

*“UNBELIEVABLE: FIDESZ VOTED FOR CREATING GHETTOS IN MISKOLC
FIDESZ’s slum project would give two million Forints to those who ruined the municipal properties, who did not pay their bills, which are unable to follow the basic principles of coexistence, which are ready to leave their shabby houses and let us demolish those houses with all your money.
What will be the consequences? They are not obliged to leave the city and they can buy cheap apartments in, for instance, the Avas quarter (another slum), they will keep preying upon the social welfare system of Miskolc, keep their anti-community lifestyle and they will vote for FIDESZ and MSZP.
We have had enough! We do not negotiate with trouble-makers. We demand that the municipality must immediately terminate their contract without paying anything, must invalidate their certificate of domicile, must make them pay for the damage caused, and those people who destroyed the buildings should demolish those houses.
Jobbik! The choice of the law-abiding majority!”*

None of the posters mentions Roma but reading between the lines it is clear that it refers to Roma. The antigypsyist expressions used e.g. ‘shabby houses’, ‘preying upon the social welfare system’ etc. implicitly indicate that Roma are meant by this. Given the historical background, it is evident that the slum/housing question covers the Roma population.

The Fidesz’ poster also refers to Roma indirectly – without further racist statements – in the context of the slum elimination project. Fidesz accepted the housing amendment and kicked off the discourse on the slum elimination project. On their posters they use the word “slums”, which is in the public discourse often used in relation to Roma. Furthermore, it refers to the ‘Numbered Streets’ district and ‘Avas’, known as Roma neighborhoods. Their campaign for “a quiet and peaceful life” for the citizens of Miskolc, begs the question: Do Roma people prevent non-Roma people from enjoying a quiet and peaceful life? It implies that the inhabitants of these districts are “trouble-makers” and cause problems. Moreover, it excludes Roma from the Miskolc community and treats them as second-class citizens.

The Jobbik poster goes much further down this path. Initially it talks about the Fidesz’ slum elimination project and the two million forints planned as offer for those who were willing to leave their houses. On its posters, Jobbik used typical antigypsyist stereotypes such as the remark that the dwellers “ruined the municipal properties”. It indicates the common right-wing rhetoric that Roma tend to ruin the apartments given within the scope of social housing.²⁹ Another typical antigypsyist stereotype used by Jobbik is that Roma would “not pay their bills”, which conceals the overall poor economic and social situation and a lack of job opportunities of which Roma and non-Roma suffer in the region. The racist statements go on with the allegation that Roma would be “unable to follow the basic principles of coexistence”, which was even said by the mayor of Miskolc.³⁰ In particular in a social deprived region as Miskolc allegations such as Roma would “keep preying upon the social welfare system” and would prefer an “anti-community lifestyle”, fuel the social cohesion and feed public anger.

²⁹ This myth is refuted in the following (Hungarian) article: <http://www.urbanlegends.hu/2006/10/felszedik-es-elegetik-a-par-kettakat/> (November 11 2015).

³⁰ Cecilia Kovai: *The “Gypsy issue” and the Coexistence in Northern Hungary*. 2014. <http://muftah.org/gypsy-issue-coexistence-northern-hungary/#.VkUJHL9-agZ> (November 11 2015).

CONCLUSIONS

The messages of both posters are clear: Roma are not welcome in Miskolc. Roma became the scapegoat for the social and economic misery of Miskolc and its non-Roma population. Therefore both poster campaigns used antigypsyism in order to win votes. Roma did not have a voice in this at all; they only served as a projection screen for everything bad in the municipality. This is only one case but it represents the situation of Roma all over Hungary how they are made second-class citizens. Roma are ‘political pawns’, without a voice, decisions are made about them in order to marginalize and to oppress them.

In the light of what has been said it appears clearly that the political stakeholders grabbed the opportunity and built up their entire campaign on anti-Roma sentiments. Not only right-wing but also the mainstream parties have acted in a profoundly opportunistic way, which led to the current situation of the Roma population; although the most important legal institutions – the Supreme Court, the Equal Treatment Authority and the Ombudsman – declared the municipality’s policies illegal and unconstitutional. Nevertheless, the municipality is implementing its plans and evictions are in process.

This case plainly shows how prejudices and racism can be a strong tool in election campaigns and further fuel the public opinion on Roma people. We should be aware that this is not only a “case study” but the everyday reality of Roma people in Hungary. This is a matter of extreme urgency that requires intervention in order to avoid massive homelessness and to end further violations of human rights. The Hungarian government should recognize and acknowledge that the situation in Miskolc constitutes a structural problem and, therefore, should be treated as such. The case of Miskolc shows the deep-rooted antigypsyism in Hungary, which takes place in all institutions of society and demonstrates how political forces take advantage of antigypsyism.

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