

EUROPEAN ROMA GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATION NETWORK
statement OSCE HDIM 5th October 2011

“Dangerous Failures”

Dear chairperson,
honorable country representatives,
dear colleagues and friends,

It is my pleasure to address you with a statement of ERGO\ the European Roma Grassroots Organization Network

Last week, the largest deployment of Bulgarian security forces in many years was needed to prevent lynching of Roma by angry Bulgarians. Marches and chants calling for death of Roma took place in many cities all around Bulgaria involving thousands. Similar marches and chants took place a number of times in the Czech Republic in the last month.

Posts on the Internet calling for Roma extermination exploded – there are thousands to be found every day. Football hooligans around Europe displayed banners in support of the Bulgarians football fans that called for the annihilation of Roma.

In the last years young children were killed, seriously injured or burned just because they were Roma. Roma adults were hunted down and killed by extremists in Hungary less than 2 years ago. High level politicians including presidents, prime ministers or ministers of foreign affairs in Italy, France, Finland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Czech Republic deployed hate speech targeting Roma in order to gain popularity or escape damaging corruption scandals.

The physical and verbal attacks against Roma are far from unexpected – they are a logical result of catastrophic failure at the EU and national level. One of the worst of the many failures relates to the inability/unwillingness to put in place appropriate mechanisms and action plans to prevent such incidents.

The European Commission (EC) and Member States (MS) positions about the Roma situation are almost identical at least in official papers and speeches. The answers are convoluted and filled with bureaucratic (often meaningless) jargon. Efforts are taken, structural funds, social inclusion, mainstreaming, EU Roma Framework of National Strategies, Member States responsibility, jurisdiction, directives are some examples of the wording one could read or hear over and over again for the last years.

On practical terms the only significant efforts remain focused on the passing and ducking responsibilities for the social inclusion of Roma between the European Union and Governments. Governments do not want to allocate budgets for Roma

and the EC doesn't want to get too involved in an issue that is hugely unpopular at the political level.

This did not prevent the escalation of self-congratulatory rhetoric at the EU level about EU future actions meant to achieve Roma social inclusion. The irony due to the stark contrast between rhetoric and the abrupt escalation of social exclusion policies and racism targeting Roma all around the continent seem to escape Commissioners and bureaucrats in Brussels.

Overall the European Commission continues to be stridently unprepared to deal with the issues and so are the Member States. Window-dressing informal mechanisms, as are all the EC mechanisms focused on Roma at this moment, do not help. They send a very clear message to the Member States that tackling anti-Gypsyism and exclusion of Roma is not at all a priority for anybody in Brussels and lead to (at best) similar empty rhetoric at the national levels.

In our experience it is exceptional that bureaucrats in charge of social inclusion in Brussels or in ministries at the national level have any idea about the issues at stake in the Roma communities or have any hands-on experience working with Roma.

Badly thought EU and national strategies resulted in financial resources being mainly allocated to redundant trainings and hugely expensive meetings with very limited impact.

Despite acknowledgement from the ex-Commissioner *informally* in charge of Roma issues (Vladimir Spidla) of the need for a EU task-force against anti-Gypsyism no measures were taken for the last 3 years to put his words in practice.

The EU is ill-equipped and unprepared to deal with Roma crisis that are unavoidable. So are member states. Focus needs to switch to an urgent curbing of hate against Roma and rapid improvement regarding active responsibilities towards citizenship within the Roma communities at high risks.

A Crystal Nacht targeting Roma is not just possible – it becomes unavoidable if the European political and bureaucratic elites do not accept and remedy urgently their failures.

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