

Great words and opportunities – practically no action and no awareness about the Action Plan

Position of the Secretary General of European Roma Grass Roots Organisations – 9th of October 2005

During the research on the Action Plan in Romania I listen to the following arguments of main stakeholders when talking about the abysmal failures in the OSCE space regarding the social inclusion of Roma

First argument

The limited participation of Roma in the designing and implementation of national and international strategies focused on Roma which up to this point resulted to an overall failure of those policies and no significant (if any) progress in the Roma communities. The lack of efficiency of European initiatives for instance addressing the social issues affecting the Roma, was made clear in the Phare evaluation of the European Commission, Directorate General (DG) Enlargement (2004). “The existing top-down approach of solving Roma issues in Europe is widely seen by main stakeholders as seriously flawed, due mainly to the lack of participation of Roma in processes targeting or affecting them.”

The OSCE Action Plan for Roma and Sinti issues has been designed, written and debated overwhelmingly by Roma. It has been ratified by the OSCE member states.

Second argument

Lack of coordination between main stakeholders

The OSCE Action Plan for Roma and Sinti has the entire chapter VIII dedicated to “Enhancing co-operation and co-ordination with other international organizations and NGOs.”

Third Argument

Lack of political will and financial resources to address Roma issues.

There are 9 OSCE member countries which signed up to the Decade of Roma Inclusion and which designed national action plans for the inclusion of Roma. All OSCE member states ratified the OSCE Action Plan. There are 8 EU countries (including Romania and Bulgaria) that had separate sections highlighting Roma related issues in the National Action Plan for the EU. The European Commission has named a Commissioner in charge with Roma related issues (Vladimir Spidla) and the UN, European Parliament, the Council of Europe, the EU Council, The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to name just a few had Roma focused resolutions.

The European Union alone would probably spend at very minimum 200 million Euros in the next 6 years for Roma related projects in Romania.

It is my opinion that in fact the problems are in fact others.

Real Problems

1. No mechanism to implement the Action Plan, lack of benchmarks, timeframes, budgets and indicators.

The Action Plan risks remaining nothing but a largely ignored and unknown document which will be brought into attention of diplomacies once or twice a year with very limited or no relevance at the level of communities.

2. The lack of pressure and tools to activate or maximize the action of mechanisms responsible for implementation, evaluation and monitoring of the available strategies, action plans, resolutions, recommendations...
 - a. There is an increasingly visible discrepancy between the rhetoric of the national governments and Intergovernmental Organisations and the implementation within the same bodies of the measures they recommend for the others.
 - b. The events around the OSCE Action Plan have been attended by low key bureaucrats and diplomats. Accordingly there are practically no significant results which can be linked directly to the Action Plan.
 - c. Reduced or no involvement and participation of Roma – no Roma in any of the representative and decision making bodies of the intergovernmental organisations. Worst represented European ethnic group within the bureaucratic mechanisms of national governments and international organisations (in contradiction with the Action Plan)
 - d. Lack of interest in empowering Roma human resources – there was and is no long term policy targeting the building of human resources. There are for instance no national governments with a program targeting the involvement of Roma in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs. UN and OSCE could have played a major role in such initiatives. (in contradiction with the Action Plan)
 - e. Roma political representation is of low quality and unfortunately seems to be encouraged. Roma for Roma idea is doing nothing but following the disastrous experience of nationalistic movements in Europe. European and International Intergovernmental Institutions should encourage national parties and governments to promote Roma representation within and at the European and International Level.
3. Under funding and understaffing of the OSCE /ODHIR

It is true that OSCE is the best example we have when it comes to empowering Roma. The huge amount of work required by the Action Plan for Roma and Sinti by itself makes the activity of the CPRSI a logistical nightmare and leads to what is often seen as erratic and not well enough prepared actions. An estimate for the budget for a Roma Unit for the European Union (compared with the Gender and Disability Units) is at minimum 80 million per year. This is for half of the Roma in the OSCE space. The Action Plan if to be properly applied would require specialists for at least 6 chapters and at minimum 12 people.

4. Lack of specialized structures

To deal with the problems of a population of over 10 million which is historically excluded, under represented and discriminated there is an urgent need of structures capable to do it. Nobody, doesn't matter how optimistic would be would imagine that the Basques problems in Spain could be addressed by an office of the size of CPRSI. OSCE is viewed at the level of the ministry of foreign affairs as a 4 level priority and therefore the attention it gets is minimal.

5. Wrong focus

- a. There has been no significant effort in involving the successful and integrated Roma in the Romani movements all around Europe. The focus on the excluded, uneducated and "Frankenstein" Roma has lead to low quality leadership and representation which further pushed away the Roma intellectual elites. The increase in the number of Roma declaring their ethnic identity is minimal and the number of those who prefer to be identified as part of the majority is still between 3 to 10 times bigger.
- b. Up to this point the focus has been on small scale projects rather than stimulating national and European long term policies. Investment and support for Roma grassroots development was simply not available.