

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

Warsaw, 24 September – 5 October 2007

Working Sessions 6 and 7: 'OSCE Action Plan on Roma and Sinti: participation in political life, overcoming discrimination'

Contribution of the Council of Europe

In 1995, the Committee of Ministers set up a committee, the Specialist Group on Roma, Gypsies and Travellers (MG-S-ROM). **In July 2006, the MG-S-ROM was renamed "Committee of Experts on Roma and Travellers".**

The Committee of Experts is today composed of representatives of about 27 member states¹. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, the Office of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), as well as international organisations/institutions such as the European Commission, the FRA, the OSCE-ODIHR/Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues, IOM, UNDP, UNHCR and the World Bank regularly take part in the meetings of the Committee. A minimum of five Roma and Travellers NGOs and independent experts are invited to participate in the work of the Committee pending the items on the agenda. This includes a reserved seat for a representative of the European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF). Other international NGOs, such as the European Roma Information Office (ERIO), the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), the Open Society Institute (OSI) or the Project on Ethnic Relations (PER) contribute to the work of the Committee.

The Committee has a mandate to study, analyse and evaluate the implementation of governmental policies and practices on Roma and Travellers and to keep under review the situation of Roma and Travellers in member states. It draws up guidelines for the improvement of the interests of these populations in matters relating to human rights, employment, health, housing, culture and education, the situation of women and children and other issues of daily life. These guidelines become recommendations that are later adopted by the Committee of Ministers.

In this context the Council of Europe has adopted **specific recommendations** on education [Rec. (2000)4], on employment [Rec. (2001)17], on the movement and encampment of Travellers [Rec. (2004)14], on housing [Rec. (2005)4] and on access to

¹ Permanent members are : Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Finland, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain and Ukraine. The following member states send experts on a regular basis: France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Norway, Sweden and United Kingdom. As from 2007 Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" and Turkey are represented at MG-S-ROM meetings. Moldova's participation is under consideration.

health care [Rec. (2006)10]. In 2007 the MG-S-ROM has undertaken an update of recommendations (2000)4 and (2001)17 in co-operation with other relevant committees of the Council of Europe. All these recommendations will be appended to a recommendation on policies for Roma and/or Travellers which was finalised by the MG-S-ROM in May 2007 and which should be adopted by the Committee of Ministers by the end of the year. The recommendation will serve as a model strategy for member states to follow in policy-making on Roma and/or Travellers and monitoring implementation, as well as a reference document for other international organisations working in this area.

One of the main priorities of the Committee is the **monitoring and evaluation of national strategies** which have now been adopted in about 22 European countries. Many of these strategies were adopted at the instigation and with the assistance of the Council of Europe. Their implementation is now a major concern for the Organisation.

The Secretariat of the Roma and Travellers Division of the Council of Europe maintains a **documentation centre** and regularly updates its **website** with thematic reports and other documents concerning Roma and Travellers activities (<http://www.coe.int/romatravellers>).

Since 1996, regular financial contributions by member states have made it possible to develop a comprehensive programme of activities to assist governments seeking to develop policies towards Roma and Travellers, as well as to ensure the participation of Roma in various activities at national and international levels. Recent contributions have come from Norway for activities related to youth, women and anti-trafficking, as well as from Finland which makes a generous annual contribution towards the **Special Account on Roma**.

The programme of activities of the Council of Europe Roma and Travellers Division includes in 2007:

- Series of training sessions of members of interministerial commissions in charge of the implementation of national programmes for Roma in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” as part of the joint EC/CoE programme on Roma in South East Europe;
- Promotion of the Dosta! awareness-raising campaign against prejudices towards Roma in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, as well as in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” as part of the joint EC/CoE programme on Roma in South East Europe;
- Study Session “Campaigning for Roma Rights and Equality of Opportunities” organised by the Forum of European Roma Young People (FERYP) (Strasbourg, January 2007);
- Recruitment and institutionalisation of Roma socio-sanitary mediators in Moldova (throughout 2006-2007);
- Training of Roma women from Albania, Moldova and Slovakia as mediators to combat trafficking (Strasbourg, October 2006; Helsinki, April 2007; Chisinau, July 2007);

- Round table on the implementation of the recently adopted Plan of Measures for Roma in the Republic of Moldova 2007-2010 (Chisinau, April 2007);
- Regional Seminar on Roma culture and traditions for journalists as part of the joint EC/CoE programme on Roma in South East Europe (Belgrade, May 2007);
- The 11th Training Session on the European Convention on Human Rights for lawyers involved in legal assistance to Roma organised with ERRC (Strasbourg, 21-22 September 2007) and a first joint training on the Collective Complaints Mechanism of the Revised European Social Charter organised with DG Human Rights and Legal Affairs (Strasbourg, October or December 2007);
- A Conference on the Identity and Situation of Roma, Sinti and Camminanti in Italy to be organised with the Ministry of Interior of Italy (Rome, October or November 2007);
- A conference on the Situation of Roma refugees, IDPs and Returnees in the Balkans, organised together with the Serbian authorities (Parliament and Government) under the Serbian presidency of the Council of Europe (Belgrade, 29-30 October 2007);
- Symposium on Discrimination and Access to Labour Market for Roma and Travellers, organised with the French association FNASAT (Strasbourg, 6 November 2007);
- A Conference on Romani Women's Rights, organised together with the Swedish Government and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), Stockholm, 3-4 December 2007.

Bilateral co-operation with member states

Within the framework of the Council of Europe programme of assistance and cooperation with member States, activities have been undertaken (or planned) in 2007 to assess the present situation of the Roma population in Moldova (April 2007), Norway (June 2007), Italy (October or November 2007), France (November 2007) and the Russian Federation (postponed to Spring 2008). The Roma and Travellers Division is also invited to participate in the annual monitoring of the implementation of the National Programme for Roma in Croatia.

Co-operation with international partners

European Commission

Joint Council of Europe/European Commission Project "Equal Rights and Treatment for Roma in South East Europe"

The project aims at assisting the development of participative monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, as well as at combating prejudices and stereotypes for improving the

social image of Roma in South East Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, and « the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia ») via an awareness-raising campaign for combating prejudices towards Roma called Dosta! (www.dosta.org). The ultimate beneficiaries of this project are the Roma communities of these countries. The project is divided into three components:

Component 1: *Aim:* Improvement of participative monitoring and evaluation methodology; *Target groups:* the members of the Inter-ministerial commissions responsible for the implementation of national programmes/action plans for Roma, and members of commissions in charge of the implementation of Roma Decade Action Plans, Roma project managers; *Main activities:* presentation of the whole project in each participating country and needs assessment seminars on monitoring and evaluation ; training and mentoring, trainers' training, publication and translation of guidelines.

Component 2: *Aim:* Ensuring transparency and visibility of national programmes/action plans for Roma through improved communication channels and awareness-raising campaigns; *Target groups:* State and local authorities, members of national parliaments, state institutions such as local employment offices, schools, police academies, social welfare offices etc, national and local media, the society at large; *Main activities:* setting-up of an awareness-raising campaign internet site, video competition, promotion of school and other civil society projects combating prejudices and negative stereotypes against Roma, VIP testimonials, campaign posters and videos against discrimination, festivals (film, music, youth) ; regional seminar on Roma culture and media awareness raising, focussing on how to avoid stereotyping reporting.

Component 3: *Aim:* Evaluation of the two previous joint programmes for Roma; *Target groups:* Council of Europe/European Commission/OSCE-ODIHR (partner institutions in developing these programmes on Roma in South East Europe); *Main activities:* external evaluation through consultation of the main actors (partners and beneficiaries of the two previous joint programmes).

The project ensures sustainability of the two previous joint projects (2000-2002 and 2003-2005) and contributes to a regional exchange of experiences. The project is implemented in close cooperation with other international actors, involving *inter alia* EC delegations, OSCE field missions and Council of Europe field offices, and taking into account existing initiatives (e.g. the Decade for Roma Inclusion 2005-2015).

A continuation of Council of Europe action in the field of Roma in South East Europe is envisaged in 2008 through the reinforcement of the Dosta! campaign, especially in schools and media, as well as through joint cooperation with the European Commission as concerns countries of Western Balkans.

A joint programme with the European Commission on Roma issues in Moldova and Ukraine has been submitted for approval by Brussels for the period 2008-2009.

Informal Contact Group between International Organisations/Institutions on Roma, Sinti and Travellers

An informal mechanism of consultation and cooperation among international organisations involved in Roma issues was put in place in 2000 and named Informal Contact Group between International Organisations on Roma, Sinti and Travellers. It was originally

intended to hold meetings between the Council of Europe, the OSCE/ODIHR, the European Commission and the Presidency of the European Union on the occasion of each presidency. Unfortunately no meetings were held under the Greek, Italian and Irish presidency. The Netherlands presidency reintroduced the practice, followed by Luxembourg, the UK, Austria, Finland and Germany. A new meeting is expected under Portuguese presidency in the autumn 2007. The objectives of these meetings are to maximise the use of existing resources, to avoid duplication, to benefit from each other's experience and to launch a process of common reflection on current problems facing Roma, Sinti and Traveller communities in Europe. Participants include also representatives of the World Bank, UN agencies and the European Parliament, as well as from two NGOs: the European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF), the European Roma Information Office (ERIO) and Open Society Institute (OSI). At the last meeting under German Presidency (11 June 2007), participants agreed on the need of multilateral cooperation but wondered whether intergovernmental organisations and institutions should consider holding a conference on a possible division of work, followed by a conference of the main actors with representatives of countries concerned. The next meeting of the Group under Portuguese presidency (autumn 2007) could examine this possibility.

Participants held a discussion with representatives of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) about their opinion on how to maximise the impact and effectiveness of all relevant instruments in order to fight discrimination and promote the integration of minorities, notably Roma.

Due to an increase in requests from governmental and non governmental organisations to participate in meetings of the Informal Contact Group, it was proposed that future meetings should be divided into two parts: a first open to all those NGOs dealing with Roma issues, and a second part limited to the intergovernmental organisations and institutions.

The Group continued tackling the issues of education (school segregation), housing (forced evictions) and the situation in Kosovo (participation in negotiation talks, returnees, integration strategy) which had previously been defined as priority themes for 2006-2007. The group also discussed the setting up a task force to deal with crises and to analyse more deeply the role of anti-Gypsyism in order to propose measures to combat it.

UNHCR

The Council of Europe and the UNHCR organise every year joint activities related to Roma refugees. The last activity was on Access to Civil Rights for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians internally displaced persons in Montenegro (Budva, April 2007).

World Bank and OSI

The Council of Europe participates and contributes to discussion at the level of international steering committees of the **Decade for Roma Inclusion (2005-2015)**.

The Council of Europe attended the Conference of the **Roma Education Fund (REF)** on the Education Reform to Support Roma Inclusion (April 2007).

The Project "Education of Roma children in Europe"

As regards the education of Roma there are different activities developed in the framework of the project "Education of Roma children in Europe" – Directorate of Education - Division for the European Dimension of Education.

Due to the specific situation of Roma, who face educational, social, cultural and economic problems all at the same time, the education is not considered in isolation, but in relation to cultural identity and heritage, integration into society, preparation for employment and involvement in the community.

As part of the Project, the Council of Europe has designed an **education pack for Roma pre-school children**. This pack prepares Roma and Traveller children who have not attended nursery school and are neither ready nor sufficiently mature for the first primary school class to start school so that they do not fall too far behind.

Through the Council of Europe's **in-service training programme** *Pestalozzi* about 40 training seminars are held each year, some of them on Roma issues (use of teaching material, Roma culture and history in schools, Roma school mediators, etc.).

Planned activities of DG4 Directorate of Education/Division for the European Dimension of Education in 2007 include:

- Participation at the 22nd Session of the Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education (Istanbul, May 2007);
- a meeting on the education of Roma in Norway (Oslo, June 2007);
- a meeting of an expert groups on Roma Holocaust (Paris, June 2007);
- an International Conference on Access of Roma Children to Preschool Education, organised with UNESCO (Paris, 10-11 September 2007);
- the 2nd Edition of the Week of Roma movies in Strasbourg, November 2007;
- Pestalozzi European Roma Workshop on Roma school mediators, December 2007.

The Council of Europe is producing a **Guide for Roma school mediators**. Positions such as that of Roma mediator or school assistant can be made more effective by promoting high-quality initial training geared to the needs on the ground. This Guide will contain an occupational profile, training modules for mediators and other essential practical information.

The Council of Europe is producing **teaching material** suitable for use by Roma and non-Roma teachers working with classes made up of both Roma and other children. This material, in the form of publications or sets of educational fact sheets covering a number of topics, such as history, culture, cinema, literature and theatre, will foster mutual understanding of differences, which is the basic principle underlying the intercultural approach. It will be used in both formal education and non-formal

educational settings such as cultural centres or museums of Roma culture and history. Some of this material can be used in the community by children and their parents.

As part of the Council of Europe's project on the education of Roma children, representatives of the Roma community are involved at each stage, and play an active role in the implementation of policies concerning them. The idea of involving community representatives in developing the project is in keeping with the more general principle of encouraging **direct participation** by, and **empowerment** of, members of these communities.

The Project "A European Curriculum Framework for Romani Language"

The Language Policy Division has started a medium term project that aims to elaborate a common framework of reference for the development of Romani language curricula, drawing as far as possible on those used in member states and adapting to this effect the structure of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) to the specific situation of Romani language use in society and its place in education systems. Among the expected results there is also a proposal for a European Language Portfolio model as well as a Guide for teachers. The work has benefited from a voluntary contribution from Finland. The European Roma and Travellers Forum has followed the work with interest and is kept informed of developments. The project, along with other policy actions on minority education, was also presented at a Hearing of the Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages with the Language Policy Division. The curriculum framework for Romani was finalised at a meeting at the end of May 2007 and is now available in Romani, English and French. It should be tested (and adapted) in about ten European countries in 2008.

A Coordinator of Activities concerning Roma and Travellers is responsible at the level of the Council of Europe for:

- co-ordinating activities on Roma and Travellers within the Council of Europe;
- co-operating with other international organisations involved with Roma issues, and in particular with the OSCE/ODIHR/Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues and with the European Commission;
- establishing working relations with Roma and Traveller associations; and
- advising on policies and problems regarding Roma and Travellers.

A Special Adviser on Roma related issues seconded by Finnish Government has worked in the Council of Europe Roma and Travellers Division since autumn 2002 for:

- maintaining and developing relations with Roma organisations and communities in national member States regarding Council of Europe activities and democratic participation of Roma in Europe;
- assisting the Coordinator and the Council of Europe at large in their relationship with Roma organisations and communities, in particular the European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF);
- contributing to the preparation of a European Conference on Roma women's Rights, as well as managing a programme of training sessions for Roma anti-trafficking mediators;

- maintaining and developing relations between CoE and Roma communities from Scandinavian, Baltic and CIS countries, as well as with organisations like NDI (National Democratic Institute) for training of Roma on political participation.

The European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF)

The Council of Europe signed a partnership agreement with the European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF) on 15 December 2004. The Forum is an independent international association set up thanks to the initiative of Finnish President, Mrs. Tarja Halonen, and developed according to a French-Finnish proposal. It represents Roma, Sinti, Kale, Travellers and other related groups in Europe, helping them to voice their concerns and provide channels of communication with the relevant organs of the Council of Europe, as well as of other international organisations and institutions. The ERTF will organise its third Plenary Assembly in Strasbourg on 26-29 November 2007. About 80 delegates (both from national level and from the level of seven international Roma associations) are invited. This will be an opportunity for both the Council of Europe on the one hand and the ERTF president (Mr. Rudko Kawczynski) and the Executive Board of the Forum on the other hand, to present the results of the first three years of co-operation. In 2006 the ERTF adopted a policy paper on the Romani language, as well as a position paper on ensuring the Romani interests in the status negotiation talks in Kosovo (available on ERTF website: www.ertf.org). In 2007 the ERTF started publishing regular Updates about positive developments and major incidents in Europe related to Roma and Travellers. A number of press releases have been also issued related *inter alia* to the situation in Kosovo, forced returnees, evictions, concerns concerning exhibitions and Roma and health related conferences, etc.