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EU POLICY ON ROMA

In the Presidency Conclusions of the European Council adopted on 14 December 2007, the European Council included its analysis of the results of the 2007 European Year of Equal Opportunities for All. In its para 50, “it invited Member States to strengthen efforts to prevent and combat discrimination inside and outside the labour market. In this connection, the European Council, conscious of the very specific situation faced by the Roma across the Union, invited Member States and the Union to use all means to improve their inclusion. To this end, it invited the Commission to examine existing policies and instruments and to report to the European Council on progress achieved”.

Under the auspices of the Network of European Foundations (NEF)¹, and in cooperation with the Freudenberg Foundation and the PAKIV European Roma Fund, a review was conducted with the aim of contributing proposals into this process. These are set out below in the form of a Weinheim Declaration. This Declaration is based on the results of a meeting held in Weinheim in May 2008 organised by the Freudenberg Foundation. It is addressed to the special meeting organized by the European Commission on 16 September 2008, with a view to its incorporation in a text to be submitted to the European Council in December 2008.

¹ The Network of European foundations is a platform to promote operational cooperation between foundations in the form of joint ventures, which also provide a European perspective to the work of foundations in the different countries.

WEINHEIM DECLARATION

Introduction

The Roma continue to be one of the most disadvantaged minorities in Europe, subject to widespread discrimination in all spheres of life. In the last decade, the European Union and its Member States have devoted attention and resources to improving the situation of the Roma. Working in cooperation with the Roma rights movement, some Member States have begun to implement policies aimed at ensuring equal access to quality education for Roma children. Continuing efforts in this area should remain the highest priority in the coming years. But it is time to review progress and reorient educational policies, with a view to increasing their efficiency, and identifying possibilities for achieving greater leverage. Policies need to be comprehensive in order to achieve a maximum systemic impact in closing the gap between Roma and non-Roma in all key areas, including education, employment, housing and health. Comprehensiveness and leverage effect in our view will be best pursued through refocusing policies in a way to address the sets of interrelated needs during those life stages most crucial to Roma inclusion and participation – early childhood and the period of transition of young people from education to work and adult life.

Recommendations

1./ The purpose of the EU policies should be to achieve full and effective equality between Roma and non-Roma.

The best strategy to fulfil this purpose is for the European Council and Member States to reaffirm their commitment to strengthen and implement vigorously the EU equality legislation and policies. Roma are among the most disadvantaged groups in European societies, as well as a target of intense racially motivated hate, harassment and destructive violence, all too frequently involving law enforcement officers. They will therefore be among the primary beneficiaries of Europe-wide progress in achieving equal rights and opportunities, and of the effective implementation of non-discrimination legislation at European and Member State level.

2./ The general purpose stated above - eradication of discrimination, full and effective equality, confidence building among Roma groupings and the wider community – can be further defined to include:

- Effective protection of the fundamental civil rights of the Roma, including the right to non –discrimination;
- Equal access to quality education; employment and self-employment; facilities, goods and services, particularly healthcare and housing, whereby
- Participation, on an equal basis with others, in economic, social, political and cultural life.

Equal treatment, as an aspect of equality, is not equivalent to identical treatment. To realise full and effective equality it is necessary to treat people differently according to their different circumstances, to assert their equal worth and to enhance their capabilities to participate in society as equals.

3./ Roma disadvantage in Europe has both social and identity aspects. It is entrenched in the daily fabric of the communities in which they live as well as in the institutional arrangements of the majority societies with which they interact. Policies should therefore avoid reducing the Roma issue, or its root causes, to either a purely socio-economic issue, or a purely ethno-cultural one. Policies should be underpin the inter-related goals of socio-economic inclusion, respect for the Roma identity and dismantling of the institutions which reproduce and amplify the racial divide in European societies. The fulfilment of Roma rights is only possible by understanding and developing policies which deal with these inter-related aspects, and also take into account the vast geographical and cultural diversity of the Roma populations.

4./ The EU and Member States should continue to evaluate their Roma-related policies to-date and seek ways to eliminate any paternalistic approaches the Roma issue, implying the Roma as dependent, passive recipients of policy benefits. Rather, Roma should be actively encouraged to take responsibility as citizens for their part in perpetuating their own marginalization. They should also share responsibility for the definition and

development of policy, and play a leading role in promoting the broader European equality and non-discrimination agenda that would benefit not only Roma but everyone.

5./ We welcome this first official recognition by the European Council of its concern and willingness to strengthen its policies and provisions in respect of Roma. We further consider that since the Roma issue has reached a stage of sufficient articulation in a number of European countries, and since further singling out of the Roma issue may backfire and work against social cohesion, EU and Member States policies should generally avoid separating the Roma issue within isolated Roma-related institutions, programmes, policies and funding schemes. Instead, a Roma-specific aspect should be ensured within each relevant EU and Member State structure, programme, policy or funding scheme. However, positive action, implying a targeting approach so as to accelerate progress towards equality of the Roma, is necessary as a counter-balance to mainstreaming.

6./ The EU and Member States should be requested to give priority to certain key issues over the next 5-year period (2009-2013), so as to make it possible to assess and evaluate the practical and visible effects of the measures pursued. Special attention should be given in this context to those measures which are also supported by the EU Structural Policies and Funds, which in any event require the full cooperation of and reporting obligations on Member States and the European Commission. Since many policies are conceived and implemented at local levels, it is essential to promote coherence between local, national and European policies. Furthermore, partnership with civil society, including Roma, should be reinforced to ensure the active participation of citizens in the design, implementation and evaluation of the different measures.

7./ We regard the following three policy themes to be of central importance in the overall strategy to be pursued by the EU and Member States:

- Early childhood;
- Transition of Roma young people from education to adult and working life; and

- Specific measures to counteract/fight the negative perceptions and blanket racist stereotyping of Roma.

8./ In addressing these three priority areas, it is essential that they be approached on the basis of an inter-sectoral, comprehensive approach. In accordance with the principle set out earlier, namely not to allow the present tendency to ghettoise and marginalise the Roma issue and alienate non-Roma, policies and programmes related to these priority themes should be framed in non-ethnic terms, and designed to extend the opportunities for life-long learning as a key factor in promoting equality.

a) Early Childhood.

Policies related to early childhood should be designed with a view to achieving a systemic change, affecting a number of interrelated areas, including family support, health, housing, pre-school education and education of the parents, to ensure the effective equality of the Roma child by the age of entry to primary education. Early childhood policies should be framed in terms of creating equal opportunity for a quality life for all children, rather than in terms of early childhood of Roma children alone. The acute problem of non-enrolment of Romani children in pre-school establishments- due to poverty, but often related to conflictual local relations and pervasive societal racism- should be seen as an especially urgent issue demanding intervention. Pooling of experience should be encouraged to promote good practices, for example on the importance of language skills and critical thinking. The involvement of a wide range of actors from the local community is crucial, ensuring that all those persons and institutions who affect socialization during the period of early childhood are engaged in developing a comprehensive policy reform.

b) Transition of young people from education to adult and working life.

This period of transition is critically important to all young people, especially those who are disadvantaged and most at risk to reproduce a life-long welfare dependency as adults. Cooperation schemes between schools and their local community, including the public and private sectors, need to involve Roma young people and special efforts made to provide effective guidance and counselling arrangements to develop the

potential of all young people. Imaginative measures to promote entrepreneurship education and local community initiatives designed to empower young people to take responsibility and initiative should deliberately include Roma. These measures should be linked with wider public policies to promote income-generating activities in all fields.

c) Programmes related to fighting anti-Romani stereotypes.

These should focus on treating Roma as equals in terms of their dignity and rights- including rights to political participation, and co-ownership of decision making processes in the wider communities in which they live, rather than on counteracting the negative perceptions with folkloric approaches, urging the public to value Romani cultures. In this context, we consider that the Roma rights movement can be mobilised to serve as a driving force to support promotion of the EU equality agenda as a whole. To this end, the wider moves in European societies to define both the rights and responsibilities of all citizens, whatever their origin, need to include Roma. Commitment to such a two way process is an essential precondition to successful policies.

9./ We believe that the 2008 European Year of Intercultural Dialogue offers an important opportunity for the European Union and Member States to make a breakthrough with regard to Roma issues, stressing the benefits that can flow from a combined, coherent approach to their effective integration and active participation in a pluralistic Europe. To this end, we also call on the EU to reinforce cooperation with the Council of Europe and the OSCE in this field, and to take the necessary steps to ensure that the EU's Structural Policies and Funds are used as a visible and well-coordinated effort to complement the valuable contribution of the Roma Education Fund set up and supported by the World Bank, the Open Society Institute, a number of States, and European foundations via the Network of European Foundations (NEF).

10./ The Commission and Council should be invited to take the necessary steps both at EU level and within Member States to establish a pool of experts, including Roma, to act as advisers on problems of multiple deprivation and disadvantage including those

affecting the Roma. This pool of expertise should then be drawn upon as appropriate to participate in providing advice as advisers and/or observers to the various bodies and committees dealing with policies and programmes in this field. A traineeship scheme should also be set up for young Roma to build up their professional expertise through attachments to Commission departments and to appropriate governmental machinery.

11./ In December 2008, the European Council should be invited to revisit the commitments it makes every 2 years with a view to monitoring progress and to identifying further steps required to achieve the objectives set out above, which should be the essential basis of the policies of the EU and Member States in this field. For its part, the European Parliament should use its authority and powers to review progress jointly with the European Council and identify further policies needed to address the situation of Roma in Europe.

10 September 2008

Participants in the meeting of the Freudenberg Foundation and Pakiv Reflexion Group and the NEF Secretariat in Weinheim in May 2008:

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