

Check against delivery



REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

**Statement by
Mr Branko Sočanac, M.A.
Head of the Office for National Minorities
Government of the Republic of Croatia**

OSCE Review Conference on Human Dimension

**Session 15: Enhancing the implementation of OSCE commitments regarding Roma and Sinti – Partnership between States and representatives of Roma and Sinti in the design and implementation of integration policies for Roma and Sinti
Warsaw, 5 October 2011**

Thank you Mr. Chairman,

At the outset I would like to thank for the opportunity to address this human dimension session and to exchange information on the question of partnership between States and Roma representatives in the designing and implementation of integration policies for Roma. In this respect allow me to acquaint you with some of these issues in the Republic of Croatia.

Like other national minorities in Croatia, members of Roma community enjoy a high level of protection, especially under the Constitution and the Constitutional Law on the rights of National Minorities, in accordance with the highest international standards. In order to further improve living conditions of this vulnerable minority and continue fighting against all forms of discrimination, the Government has adopted a National Programme for Roma in October 2003. In 2005, Croatia has joined several other European countries and has been participating in the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015 with a view to co-ordinating its efforts for Europe's biggest minority, by focusing mainly on education, health care, employment and housing, and improvement of its living conditions.

The Government of the Republic of Croatia pays particular attention to the rights of the Roma national minority, and continuously undertakes measures in order to enable them to enjoy the same rights as other citizens of Croatia. Support for this policy comes from the highest levels of government, since the Prime Minister is also the president of the Commission for the Implementation of the National Roma Program, and the National Coordinator of the Roma Inclusion Decade.

These two strategic documents are also the basis for most interventions favouring Roma national minority in the Republic of Croatia. All these policies and measures are conducted with the participation of the Roma community, in accordance with the principles enshrined in

numerous documents, such as: the OSCE Action Plan, and 10 Common Principles on Roma Inclusion, adopted in Croatia in 2009. The idea of maximizing Roma ownership was underlying principle from the very beginning: representatives of the Roma national minority in Croatia were involved in designing of these documents, they play a key role in its implementation, and Roma representatives are members of the Commission for the Implementation of the National Roma Program as well the Working Group for the monitoring of the implementation of the Roma Decade Action Plan.

In general, Members of the Roma national minority participate in the **decision making process** from the level of the Croatian Parliament to the level of local communities. Apart from the fact that a member of the Roma national minority has been elected to the Croatian Parliament, the Roma have also their representatives on the local level. Four Roma members have been elected to representative bodies at the municipal level, and the July 2011 elections for councils of national minorities, key bodies for participation in the decision-making process in local and regional self-government units, brought further increase to their number, allowing the Roma national minority to participate in the decision-making process in local and regional self-government units. However, it has been recognized that the implementation of above-mentioned policies on the local level should be further strengthened particularly through capacity building of both local authorities and Roma institutions and organisations. In this respect, lessons learned which we could share with you today is importance of cooperation between Roma NGOs and non-Roma NGOs in overcoming capacity problems, and models of cross-border cooperation on local level, as we have with Hungary and Slovenia on projects targeting Roma national minority.

Activities have been intensified aimed at training young Roma, especially women, in order to facilitate their involvement in public and social life. But still, in the decision-making process, and in the implementation of the National Programme for the Roma, proportional involvement of Romani women and youth still remains a challenge.

All these factors and many more are taken into account as we are revising the National Roma Program, with full participation of Roma community throughout the process. They are members of all working groups drafting the program, regional and local level Roma councils and NGOs will be included in public discussions and the mechanisms for monitoring and implementation will continue to include a substantial number of Roma representatives.

In conclusion, we also recognize and welcome important role that OSCE plays in promotion of all principles mentioned above, such as through recent resolutions of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly: Resolution on National Minorities, Resolution on Strengthening Efforts to Combat Racism and Xenophobia and Foster Inclusion, and particularly Resolution on Promoting Policies in Favour of the Roma Population, and Resolution on Promoting Policies on Equality between Women and Men of the Roma Population.

Thank you.