



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
High Commissioner on National Minorities
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STATEMENT

by
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to the
**Joint Conference on
Roma Migration and Freedom of Movement**
convened by
the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA),
the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights (CommHR),
the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and
the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM)

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Madam Chairperson, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start by sharing with you an observation by Louise Doughty, a British novelist with Romany ancestry and a passionate advocate for the Roma: “The [non-Roma] world seems to have less of a problem with Romany people as long as they stay in a folkloric pigeonhole and don’t grow too numerous – i.e., do not appear to be real people with real housing needs, hunger and educational ambition for their children.”

The Roma people have recently grown numerous in many OSCE participating States. The numbers on the move in Europe today are also considerable. Faced with persistent discrimination and poverty at home, the Roma are looking elsewhere in search of a better life and migrate to Western Europe. For many years, the Roma from outside the European Union arrived in the EU as asylum seekers or economic migrants. The EU enlargement and the expansion of the Schengen area make their migration even easier.

Today’s joint OSCE, Council of Europe and FRA Conference is a golden opportunity to zoom in on the phenomenon of Roma migration; to try to formulate strategies on how to welcome and integrate Roma in our societies while respecting their culture and traditions.

The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities – or the HCNM in OSCE jargon – has focused on Roma issues since its establishment in 1993. The HCNM’s reports and recommendations on Roma of 1993 and 2000 laid the foundation for the 2003 “OSCE Action Plan on improving the situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area”. In addition, the HCNM has repeatedly raised the situation of Roma during visits to the OSCE participating States and I continue to apply this policy whenever necessary, with due respect to the confidentiality clause of my mandate.

The phenomenon of recent Roma migration is a complex one. Many of the challenges it generates fall outside the HCNM remit. They fit to a large extent within the OSCE’s human dimension, whereas my mandate relates to early warning and conflict prevention.

Having said this, I mean that many of the problems faced today by Roma and Sinti – in one way or another – have security implications. These implications not only concern the security of Roma and Sinti communities themselves, when they have to relocate within their home

countries or migrate from one country to another in order to improve their lives, but also the interethnic tensions that arise between the Roma and the majority population, as was the case in Italy in 2008. Therefore, while the main responsibility for Roma and Sinti issues within the OSCE area lies with the ODIHR, I have been keeping a close watch on those situations that meet the criteria of my mandate and will continue to do so.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Recent events have demonstrated that the situation of the Roma continues to be of considerable concern. The EU expansion has been plagued by a considerable increase in outbreaks of anti-Roma hostility, violence and discrimination, particularly in Central and South Eastern Europe. As a result, Roma migration is on the rise within the enlarged EU as well as within the wider OSCE area.

In response to this climate of growing antagonism, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Hammarberg, and I decided a year ago to commission a joint study in order to cast more light on this trend and to examine its security implications.

Recent Roma migration has heightened the need for the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the FRA to give the social inclusion of the Roma a far more prominent position on their agendas. This year it has become the main theme of a joint rolling programme, with a Joint Statement issued on Roma Day and a preparatory seminar for this Conference in July.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the last twenty years we have seen a proliferation of reports and innumerable seminars and conferences organized on the subject of Roma and Sinti. In addition, considerable sums of money have been spent both by governments and by international actors in an effort to improve the situation of Roma. Yet, in spite of this, the reality is that the situation of Roma seems to be worsening rather than improving. There is a whole new generation of Roma, in particular in Central and Eastern Europe, that is less educated, more discriminated against and living in worse conditions than their parents.

We live in some of the most developed countries of the world and still there are people among us who continue to face social exclusion and discrimination; people who do not have access to key services such as education, healthcare and housing; people who, in many cases, are not even registered in the communities where they reside. Their children go to special schools just because they are Roma. They are subjected to violent attacks, have to seek asylum in other parts of the world and, in some cases, are even murdered.

What can we do to break out of this endless cycle of conferences and high-level discussions and put a stop to money being wasted because it does not reach the people we aim to help.

We know what the problems are. We have been discussing them for years. We have a considerable body of international law standards and commitments on our side. In most cases, we even have legislation at national level and earmarked resources – both human and financial – to face up to the challenge. And still the situation is worsening.

We are at a dead end and this can only be rectified with positive leadership, sincerity and courage. We should not be afraid to call the problems by their real names and face them head on.

I would like to identify three areas that need our attention:

- first, the proper implementation of existing commitments on the part of the participating States,
- second, grass-root initiatives and properly monitored projects that meet the real needs of the end beneficiaries and help them extricate themselves from the lamentable situations in which they might find themselves, and
- third, while combating stereotyping by the majority, also developing a sense of responsibility and ownership on the Roma side.

Integration is a two-way process. Neither the majority community nor the Roma themselves should see the situations and challenges faced by Roma as a problem that the rest of the society needs to solve. Roma are part of society and we are all part of the problem. Only by tackling the underlying reasons for Roma exclusion and migration, and creating the appropriate conditions to foster cohesive societies will we be able to confront this serious security and human rights issue.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In 1979, Mother Teresa won the Nobel Peace Prize. There is always a fancy banquet for the winner. Mother Teresa requested that her banquet be cancelled. She wanted the banquet budget to be used to feed the poor instead: 7,000 US Dollars for a dinner for 2,000 people on Christmas Day.

I hope this story will inspire all of us to turn words into deeds. We have the knowledge. We have the expertise. We have the means and the resources.

But what we lack is the political and also the personal will and courage to utilize them in a truly practical and effective way.

For my part as High Commissioner, I will not give up on the Roma situation. I will continue – within the remit of my mandate and with the resources available to me – to lobby on this issue. I personally count on the support of each one of you here today in advancing our common goal, namely, living up to the expectations of our people, both Roma and non-Roma.

Thank you for your attention.