

SLOVENIA

Statement for the HDIM 2007, Working session 6&7 - OSCE Action Plan on Roma and Sinti: Participation in Political Life, Overcoming Discrimination Thursday, 27 September 2007

Madam Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Although the EU already spoke in the name of Slovenia, we would nevertheless like to add some remarks from our national perspective, especially to underline the positive steps that the Slovenian government has taken in order to implement the OSCE Action Plan on Improving the Situation of the Roma and Sinti.

The Slovenian authorities are fully aware of the difficulties faced by Roma and Sinti communities in the OSCE region and are ready to undertake effective measures in order to eradicate discrimination against them and to bring about full equality of opportunities, consistent with the OSCE Action Plan and other relevant OSCE commitments and international documents. In this respect we are pleased to inform you that on 30 March 2007 the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia adopted the Roma Community Act, which entered into force on 28 April 2007. This Act defines the scope of the special rights accorded to the Roma and Sinti communities, and the duties of national and local authorities in implementing those rights. It also sets out the financial obligations of the Republic of Slovenia and its local self-governing communities in guaranteeing the special rights of the Roma and Sinti communities.

The Roma Community Act fulfils the condition of comprehensiveness laid out in the OSCE Action Plan. It includes many aspects of the protection of Roma and Sinti rights, especially in the areas of childcare, education system, employment, vocational education and training, labour integration and preservation of their language and culture, as well as improving the living conditions of the Roma and Sinti.

However the main contribution of this Act concerns the participation of the Roma and Sinti in public and political life, which is crucial for their successful integration into wider society. The Act established the Roma Community Council, a body that represents the Roma and Sinti communities *vis-à-vis* state authorities. This Council may send proposals, initiatives and opinions on issues within its competence to the most important Slovene national authorities (the National Assembly, the National Council and the Government) and local community authorities. Furthermore, when national authorities and the local community authorities make decisions on issues relating to the status of the Roma and Sinti communities, they must first obtain the opinion of the Roma Community Council. Special working bodies can also be established at the local level to represent Roma and Sinti interests.

We would like to underline that the Roma Community Act complements other sector-specific acts to ensure further positive developments regarding the Roma and Sinti communities. It is also worth mentioning that the Republic of Slovenia is one of the first European states that regulates Roma and Sinti issues with such a fundamental and comprehensive act.

Madam Chair, in conclusion, we would like to recommend to other OSCE Participating States that have not yet done so, to follow our example in adopting relevant legislation necessary for the implementation of OSCE Action Plan.

With regards to the statement made by the representative of Amnesty International, we would like to say, that the Roma Community Act is a clear expression of the Slovenian government's will to resolve the issue of Roma children's education, since it stipulates that the Republic of Slovenia shall provide adequate conditions for the integration of members of the Roma and Sinti communities into the childcare and education systems, shall provide the conditions necessary to increase the level of education in the Roma and Sinti communities and shall provide a suitable scholarship policy.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

ANNEX:

The Roma Community Act stipulates that the Republic of Slovenia:

- a. Shall provide adequate conditions for the integration of members of the Roma and Sinti communities into the childcare and education systems, shall provide the conditions necessary to increase the level of education in the Roma and Sinti communities and shall provide a suitable scholarship policy.
- b. Shall devote particular care to promoting employment, vocational education and training, as well as the labour integration of the members of the Roma and Sinti communities.
- c. Shall promote the preservation and development of the language of these communities, as well as the activities of the Roma and Sinti communities relating to culture, awareness-raising and publishing.
- d. Shall provide adequate conditions for suitably arranging the Roma and Sinti settlements and improving the living conditions of members of the Roma and Sinti communities.
- e. Shall enable the Roma and Sinti communities and their members to exercise their special rights in the area of co-decision in public affairs concerning their communities. The Act sets up two new bodies:
 - at the local level, a special working body in each of the municipalities that must provide at least one Roma or Sinti town councillor, as defined in the Local Self-Government Act. Special working bodies may also be set up in other local self-governing communities (other municipalities or regions).
 - at the national level, the Roma Community Council of the Republic of Slovenia. This Council represents the Roma and Sinti communities *vis-à-vis* state authorities. It may send proposals, initiatives and opinions on issues within its competence to the most important Slovene national authorities (the National Assembly, the National Council, and the Government) and local community authorities. Furthermore, when national authorities and the local community authorities make decisions on issues relating to the status of the Roma and Sinti communities, they must first obtain the opinion of the Roma Community Council. Special working bodies can also be established at the local level.