

Closing Remarks

by Ambassador Janez Lenarčič

Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and
Human Rights (ODIHR)

at the Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting

on

‘Sustainable Policies for Roma and Sinti Integration’

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Hofburg, Vienna



Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is safe to say that we had a very productive two days as testified by the reports of the three moderators who so well summarized the key issues discussed during the working sessions. I would also like to highlight the valuable contribution of the civil society preparatory side event to the meeting which provided a wealth of ideas and proposals for action.

I have been particularly encouraged to hear so many examples of good practices that exist in the OSCE region; for example, the program of integration of Roma in Catalonia/Spain, educational projects in Croatia, and efforts by municipal authorities to integrate Romanian Roma in Bologna.

We have also listened closely to the concerns you have expressed. It is clear that the improvement of the situation of Roma and Sinti is unfinished business. We all need to do more. Concrete action to combat racism and discrimination against Roma and Sinti must become a top priority.

We have heard that significant gaps remain dividing Roma communities from mainstream society in areas such housing, education, employment and access to services and justice. Recent migration movements clearly present a challenge to our societies and require responses in line with OSCE commitments and other international standards. Singling out and vilifying one particular minority group can never be the answer.

The Action Plan provides a clear road map for addressing these concerns. The good examples mentioned earlier prove that this can be done if there is sufficient political will and determination.

The discussions have clearly identified that the recipes for success involve inclusion of Roma themselves in policy-making and implementation; proactive approaches at the local and regional level; and ensuring sustainability of policies by providing adequate financial, institutional and human resources.

Where do we go from here?

First, the outcome of this meeting and the recommendations will be reflected in the status report on the implementation on the Action Plan which my Office will prepare. I would like to use this opportunity to call upon the participating States to provide input and updates on their activities and policies by the end of this month.

Second, we should all take a close look at the recommendations and good practices as incentives for concrete action. We all know that the weak link is implementation of policies to improve the situation. I urge everybody – especially local and regional authorities – to take on their responsibility towards all communities and transform the commitments into a reality.

We have the recommendations on how to proceed, we have the tools available and we have a proper underpinning in the commitments contained in the Action Plan on Roma and Sinti. We will have another chance to take stock of the first steps

towards real action at the HDIM this fall. Finally, as this meeting draws to a close, it is time for the thanks. I want to thank the speakers, moderators and rapporteurs for the important work they have done to help us organize and clarify all our thoughts and ideas. Thanks should further be given to all participants, especially those from regional and local authorities and NGOs, for sharing their experiences and proposals and for carrying the messages forward. Let me also thank the Finnish Chairmanship for their strong support, and the dedicated ODIHR team for their hard work.

My Office looks forward to a continued partnership with authorities, National Institutions, partner international organizations and NGOs to support the implementation of the recommendations made today. And the last message and thanks go, as usual, to the interpreters for the good job they've done to make sure that we can all have a dialogue together.

Thanks to you all and have a safe trip home.