

OSCE HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING 2006

EU statement for the working session 15: Tolerance and non-discrimination II

11 October, Warsaw

Mr. Chairman,

Roma and Sinti, among others, represent persons belonging to European minorities, since large or small communities of these populations live in almost all European countries, throughout OSCE area. OSCE, through its Action Plan for Roma and Sinti and the activity of the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti issues, brings a valuable contribution to solving the complex problems faced by these populations.

In recent years, the increased awareness regarding the condition of Roma and Sinti communities has led to serious policy concern. This is the case of the EU and other international actors, where the need to work closely together has often been acknowledged. The Decade of Roma Inclusion and the OSCE Action Plan for the Improvement of the Situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE Area represent a good policy framework. However, they should be fully used in order to increase co-operation between International Organisations, Governments, as well as between Governments and NGOs. Cooperation is essential for trust building and better mutual understanding.

In this regard, we welcome the International Conferences on implementation and harmonization of national policies for Roma, Sinti and Travellers, that took place in Warsaw, Poland, in October 2005, and in Bucharest, Romania, in May 2006, organized jointly by Council of Europe, OSCE Chairmanship, ODIHR, the European Commission and the Austrian EU Presidency in 2006, EUMC and the Decade of Roma Inclusion.

In reaction to the need of clearly identifying Roma issues in its comprehensive anti-discrimination policies and for social inclusion, European Commission has set up an Inter-Service Group, which includes members of 14 General Directorates, to ensure that a coherent multidimensional approach is being applied. In addition, the European Commission has recently established a high-level group of experts in order to improve the social and labour market integration of ethnic minorities. The group would focus on the issues of multiple discriminations and on the socio-economic condition of ethnic minorities inside the EU. Policy recommendations would be formulated on ways to deal with social and labour exclusion of disadvantaged minorities, including the Roma.

Moreover, the anti-discrimination policy framework of the European Union includes the Directives 78/2000EC and 43/2000 EC, which are highly relevant for disadvantaged groups, such as Roma and Sinti who are - according to the EUMC - the most discriminated ethnic minority in Europe. We can also recall the European Parliament's Resolution, of April 2005, on the "Situation of Roma in Europe", asking the European Commission to prepare a communication on ways in which EU "...can best coordinate and promote efforts to improve the situation of Roma and to adopt an action plan with clear recommendations to Member States."

Along with the enlargement process, EU Member States with a longer or more recent membership have strengthened their efforts to improve the situation of Roma and Sinti. The condition of the Roma requires coherent and sustained policies of economic, social, political and societal inclusion. Roma need equal opportunities to participate in a democratic system, equal access to education, employment and housing, as well as equal access to social services and support for non-governmental initiatives targeting Roma communities. These policies would have to regard the acknowledgement, respect and support of the specific Roma and Sinti culture and language, as prerequisites for any substantive improvement of their condition.

Therefore, it is important to ensure Roma and Sinti the opportunity to participate fully in the economic, social and political life. As a first step, we need to work together to overcome centuries of biased, prejudiced discrimination and social exclusion. Participation requires real involvement; the problems Roma and Sinti face could only be solved with the will and support of the Roma and Sinti communities themselves. An assistance-oriented approach to their problems should be discouraged and the initiatives stemming from within the respective ethnic communities be supported. An inclusive Romani grassroots movement that would focus on equal opportunities should replace the existing project-based approach.

Roma and Sinti should be given the means to decide for themselves. Alongside with the support of the Central or regional Government or of local authorities, Roma and Sinti communities must participate and be fully associated with their own inclusion and development. This task would require a coordinated action in a number of fields, in particular those of education, employment, housing, health and social services. The responsibility for finding a solution to these issues will mainly lie with national bodies and with regional and local authorities, as the latter are the places where the Roma are most likely to participate and be represented. While the civil society and the Roma themselves have a responsibility to be involved, in their respective countries, in the integration process, EU should also play its part in finding viable solutions. These might take various forms, such as raising awareness campaigns and others.

The European Union provides substantial funding for measures promoting the inclusion of Roma and Sinti communities. For example, social inclusion in labour and education fields is promoted, both in EU States with longer or more recent membership, through programmes like: PHARE, the European Social Fund i.e. Several Community programmes encourage the exchanges of experience and support specific projects in employment, education, vocational training and research inside the EU and in third countries. The duplication of horizontal gender and disability units in the framework provided by the Decade of Roma Inclusion could be a future temporary measure, considering the recent experience of the EU in addressing the situation of Roma and Sinti, as well as EU accomplishments in combating discrimination based on gender and disabilities.

One of the problems that these populations, still largely nomadic, encounter is the question of stationing areas. In certain EU countries, legislations allow populations to find not only a solution to this stationing problem but also access to appropriate educational, social and health equipment. Discussions about means of identifying and sharing good practices are going on in the EU.

Discrimination and racism acts against the Roma and Sinti have often been underlined by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), a body of the Council of Europe and, also, by the reports of Vienna-based institution, the European Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia.

The issue of refugees and of internally displaced persons in Kosovo, where Roma represent a particularly vulnerable group, has being carefully followed and requests a lasting solution. We should

also address the double discrimination that Roma women often face. Roma women are particularly vulnerable to human trafficking. All these issues are interlinked and effective progress depends on stronger political commitment and action taken by relevant authorities at all levels.

Recommendations:

- i. Education should be a priority in all policies regarding Roma and Sinti. The OSCE must, therefore, pursue its work in this field.
- ii. Roma-related policies should be elaborated and implemented by the relevant authorities “for Roma, with Roma”, as explicitly underlined in the OSCE Plan for Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE Area.
- iii. Acknowledgement, respect and support for Roma and Sinti culture and languages should be prerequisites to adopting and implementing national policies for the inclusion of Roma and Sinti.
- iv. We welcome the recommendations made by the above-mentioned international conferences on the implementation of Roma, Sinti and Travellers-related policies held in Warsaw, Poland, in October 2005 and in Bucharest, Romania, in May, 2006 outlining the need to set up task forces, with national and international representation and resources, to fight against racism and discrimination, in particular in policy areas relevant for Roma and Sinti (e.g. defining the legal status of the settlements and housing facilities inhabited by Roma families, curbing the practices of segregated classes and schools for Roma and Travellers children and youth, combating racist attitudes of the general public towards Roma and Sinti).

The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Candidate Countries Turkey and Croatia ¹, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Montenegro and Serbia, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this statement.

¹ Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process

