

Statement of the European Roma Grassroots Organisation for the 15<sup>th</sup> Working Session  
of the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting  
11<sup>th</sup> of October 2006

Surely the Action Plan for Roma and Sinti is an excellent document and the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti has been the only institutional structure which promoted Roma at the International diplomatic level. But it is not my role to praise what is good and considering the major failures of Intergovernmental Institutions and National Governments in improving the situation of over 12 million Roma in the OSCE space it would be hypocritical to do so. I believe in Diplomacy but I also strongly believe that the role of the NGOs is to say what Diplomats can't say it but need to hear it.

Facts are:

The diplomatic mechanisms of OSCE failed repeatedly to address the crisis situation involving Roma and Sinti.

The war in ex-Yugoslavia did nothing but highlighted the explosive potential of anti-Gypsyism based on long term discrimination and dehumanization of Roma. So did the events in Slovakia from February 2004. Widespread and accepted anti-Gypsyism despite obvious is still to be recognised and addressed as an indicator of stress and potential conflict within the OSCE area. This is a serious threat to the European stability and needs redress through mechanisms and not rhetoric. The recent anti-Gypsy incident in the European Parliament should be taken seriously.

No mechanism to implement the Action Plan, lack of benchmarks, timeframes, budgets and indicators.

The Action Plan risks remaining nothing but a largely ignored and unknown document which will be brought into attention of diplomacies once or twice a year with very limited or no relevance at the level of Roma communities or national governments. Despite clear reluctance to monitor the Action Plan, paragraph 55 seems to request it. There are many intergovernmental initiatives plus the Roma Decade of Inclusion which can ensure such a monitoring .

The events around the OSCE Action Plan have been attended by low key bureaucrats and diplomats. Accordingly there are practically no significant results which can be linked directly to the Action Plan.

Reduced or no involvement and participation of Roma

There is an increasingly visible discrepancy between the rhetoric of the national governments and Intergovernmental Organisations and the implementation within the same bodies of the measures they recommend for the others. There are no Roma in any of the representative and decision

making bodies of the intergovernmental organisations, OSCE included. Roma are the worst represented European ethnic group within the bureaucratic mechanisms of national governments and international organisations (in contradiction with the Action Plan)

Lack of interest in empowering Roma human resources and wrong focus

There wasn't and is no long term policy targeting the building of human resources. There are for instance no national governments with a program targeting the involvement of Roma in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs. UN and OSCE should have played a major role in such initiatives but they never did (in contradiction with the Action Plan). The main failure I believe remains in the wrong focus of Roma related initiatives which are targeting only the stereotypical Roma and not at all the integrated and successful ones. It is going to take a few generations and tens of years to recruit diplomats, professionals and politicians from poor and excluded communities and just a few well designed awareness campaign to do so from the hundred of thousand of Roma which are professionally successful but reluctant due to strong Anti-Gypsyism to affirm their ethnic identity.

Roma political representation is of low quality and unfortunately continues to be encouraged.

Roma for Roma idea is doing nothing but follows the disastrous experience of nationalistic movements in Europe. European and International Intergovernmental Institutions should encourage national parties and governments to promote Roma representation within and at the European and International Level and not in segregated Roma structures.

Under funding and understaffing of the OSCE /ODHIR

It is true that OSCE is the best example we have when it comes to empowering Roma. The huge amount of work required by the Action Plan for Roma and Sinti by itself makes the activity of the CPRSI a logistical nightmare and leads to what is often seen as erratic and not well enough prepared actions. An estimate for the budget for a Roma Unit for the European Union (compared with the Gender and Disability Units) is at minimum 80 million per year. This is for half of the Roma in the OSCE space. The Action Plan if to be properly applied would require specialists for at least 6 chapters and at minimum 12 people.

Lack of enough specialized structures and lack of targeted actions

To deal with the problems of a population of over 10 million which is historically excluded, under represented and discriminated there is an

urgent need of structures capable to do it. Nobody, doesn't matter how optimistic would be would imagine that the Basques problems in Spain could be addressed by an office of the size of CPRSI. OSCE is viewed at the level of the ministries of foreign affairs as a 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> level priority and therefore the attention the Action Plan gets is minimal. Only linking it with the frameworks of European Commission, the UN, the Council of Europe and the Decade of Roma Inclusion and developing niche expertise within these frameworks would lead to a significant overall change.