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Plenary session: 15. Tolerance and non-discrimination

Prevention of aggressive nationalism, chauvinism and ethnic cleansing

While we applaud the fact that both Bulgaria and Romania will accede to the European Union in January 2007, we echo the concerns expressed by the European Commission about the lack of progress in the spheres of health, housing, education and employment, and the need to combat all forms of racism and discrimination. These are all priority areas in the *Decade of Roma Inclusion* and we very much appreciate that the Bulgarian government holds the presidency of the *Decade* and look forward to a fruitful year of collaboration and progress.

In the case of Romania we remain concerned about the level of institutional violence deployed against Roma, and deplore the reckless use of firearms by police during raids on Roma communities. We echo the Commission's concern about the failure of the authorities to demonstrate a zero-tolerance policy on racism when it comes to Roma.

In the case of Bulgaria, the legalization of settlements needs to be part of a more imaginative policy approach to housing issues. Bulgaria has witnessed a rash of mass evictions of Roma, particularly in Sofia. This enduring and escalating crisis highlights one of the crucial priority issues of the *Decade of Roma Inclusion*.

Housing policies of governments past and present in Central and Eastern Europe have led to regional and geographic isolation and segregation of Roma settlements. The squalid conditions in these ghettos have been well documented. It is abundantly clear that for hundreds of thousands of Roma, their living conditions fall far short of what the World Health Organization defines as adequate. The WHO concept of adequate housing includes safe water supply; sanitary excreta disposal; disposal of solid wastes; drainage of surface water; personal and domestic hygiene; safe food protection and structural safeguards against disease transmission. The problems associated with such living conditions are further compounded by disputes concerning property rights and the legal status of settlements, discrimination by the municipal authorities over access to social

housing, and the high incidence of forced evictions. RPP holds that as a first step national governments need to press local authorities to meet their legal obligations, make use of all available funding resources and identify the most expeditious and effective means to legalize informal settlements. These settlements need to be incorporated into urban plans, public services must be available so that living conditions for Roma meet WHO concept of adequate housing. In the short term we strongly urge that the governments in both Romania and Bulgaria to seek recourse to more humane resolutions than forced evictions.

When it comes to combating all forms of racism and discrimination I would like to express my astonishment at the racist outburst of Bulgarian observer MEP Dimitar Stoyanov. Stoyanov's scurrilous attack on Livia Jaroka, the Hungarian MEP of Romani origin has been widely reported and needs no repetition. I feel sure that my Bulgarian colleagues, Roma and non-Roma, governmental and non-governmental alike share my disgust, condemn such attitudes and agree that this sort of racism tarnishes not just Bulgaria's image abroad but also that of the European Parliament.