



## DIALOGUE SEMINAR

Roma inclusion: a need, a challenge, and a duty

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by Miranda Vuolasranta

### 15:15 - 16:45 4<sup>th</sup> SESSION: ROMA AS EU CITIZENS

Te aven Bahtale Roma, Khangare thaj vaver utse politikane gadze, mukh O Del te phiraven amaro dzi thaj hatjaripe ando kado seminaria adive - Ladies and Gentleman, dear organizers of this Dialogue seminar,

Firstly I want to thank warmly all the organizing parties, the Church and Society Commission of Conference of European Churches (CEC), the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE) together with the Bureau of European Policy Advisors (BEPA) in the European Commission for their joint efforts on organizing this Dialogue seminar.

This seminar has aimed to give floor to mutual dialogue, but also look on the mirror with open eyes. It gives me hope, despite of the desperate human and social rights situations of Roma in today's Europe. Hope to believe that humanity and justice, which are rarely visible in our societies from the Roma point of view, can be reached if there is enough of people demanding that these values have to be respected also in the case of Roma and related groups.

It is an honor and a great opportunity to take a stand as Roma woman here today on behalf of the European Roma, with whom I have been working more than three decades already. I give my full support to the contribution and work of the European Churches and diaconal organizations, which have drafted a joint contribution in order to support the preparations and implementation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies. The recommendations from the churches and diaconal organizations are reflecting the many times lacking human and Christian attitude to look on our suffering and needy fellow men.

In my contribution and its development proposals here today, I am constantly referring to recently published working group report with name - The Objectives of Finland for Advancing the European Policy on Roma. It is an outcome of a half year high level cooperation between government authorities and Roma NGOs who sat together drafting these policy guidelines, where Roma had equal possibility to participate and influence in future solutions concerning themselves and government policies on Roma.

*In able to verify the advancement the Roma integration policies, it is of vital importance that the Roma are enabled to participate and effectively influence the planning, implementation, evaluation and follow-up of the measures that aim at improving their living situation on local, national and international level. The participation and commitment of the Roma people in matters concerning themselves are decisive in the developmental activities.*

Commissioner Reding have during the last two years repeatedly stated the following: "Roma are still the most discriminated and socially marginalized population group of Europe, whose rights are far back from other European citizens. Solving this issue is demanding serious commitments and a lot of work from all parties the majority society and the Roma minority". I wish that you accept my free shortening of your resent statements. However, this message is valuable and strong requiring concrete actions from the Member States.

The inadequate implementation of Roma human rights is the most severe human challenge in Europe today. Within growing economic crises distress of people and dangerous extreme right activism is growing on national Member State levels. Violent attacks towards Roma individuals and communities are happening repeatedly. European politicians seems to not be worried and discussing the growing anti-gypsism and hate-crimes targeted on Roma in different regions of Europe. It appears that the realization of civil and political rights is clearly dependent on the social and economic standing of a person. In other words, poverty is closely linked to violation of many human rights.

There is a clear need for cooperation at the European level on Roma issues. In 2008 the European Council in its conclusions asked the Member States to take note of the social segregation and discrimination of Roma and put efforts to find positive integration policies. The Fundamental Rights Agency, the Council of Europe, the Roma Decade follow-up reports and many other third sector actors deserve thanks for their serious efforts clearing out the needs and development challenges of the Roma population. The recent developments at the Commission and Council level mark a clear progress in lifting Roma issues politically in the day light.

### **Funding of National Roma Integration Strategies**

In April this year, in its Communication on EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 [COM(2011) 173/4] the Commission requested the Member States to prepare national Roma integration strategies by the end of the year 2011. When developing these strategies Member States were asked to allocate a sufficient funding from national budgets and to complement it by international and EU funding. In this connection we should keep in mind that national and regional authorities do not often include Roma as a target group in the Structural Funds Programming. An additional barrier is that the current application and reporting system is complicated for many Roma NGOs. Moreover, the self-financing requirement is difficult, if not impossible, to meet.

*Simplification of the EU structural funding application and reporting procedure, giving clear instructions to the Member States to include Roma as a target group in their periodical fund programming, giving guidance and training for Roma NGOs on the use of these funding programs are all essential prerequisites to improve the use of these funding possibilities. Fund management authorities should be included in all coordination processes.*

*Clear Division of implementation and funding responsibilities between European Commission, the Member States, Regional and local authorities and the most often decentralized government branches is essential for a true implementation of the National Roma Strategies. Furthermore adequate participation of Roma in all spheres of the integration process is indispensable for the realization of these goals into everyday life of Roma.*

### **National Reform Programmes in the context of Europe 2020 Strategy**

The Commission also asked the Member States to consider the need to advance the social and economic inclusion of Roma when designing, implementing and monitoring their National Reform Programmes in the context of Europe 2020 strategy and to monitor and evaluate the impact of Roma inclusion strategies or integrated sets of measures.

*My question is: how far have the Member States taken into account the inclusion of Roma population in their National Reform Programmes? Has the Commission taken note of the Roma in its feedback and recommendations regarding the National Reform Programmes?*

It is important to mainstream the advancement of Roma inclusion and equality as part of the social policies and activities and services designed for everyone. This requires making visible the situation and needs of the Roma people. Enhancing Roma policies should not be separated from the general policies set for to reach social equality in our societies. Therefore, it is essential that the situation of Roma is taken into account in the National Reform Programmes.

The needs of different population groups, in other words poverty as phenomenon can be socially proportionately linked. Needs of people are different and their possibilities to access the regional development activities foreseen in the regional and local development programs are not similar. The reason is that Roma villages might be out of town planning, without electricity, lacking proper roads, sanitation, and public transportation and so on. Poverty and development challenges can appear relatively differently, this is the reason why these programs are not necessarily covering and including Roma if they are not seen as a clear target group in all levels of the National Reform Programmes. In addition, targeted positive measures are needed where the Roma are at a disadvantage compared to other people.

*On the whole, mainstreaming Roma inclusion in all relevant EU policies should be strengthened. Advancing Roma inclusion should be clearly a part of the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion activities and follow-up of the Europe 2020 Strategy.*

### **Long-term and short-term solutions**

Although we would all agree that Roma integration requires a long-term measures and solutions and a holistic view on social equality, we should start somewhere right now. Improving children's education is absolutely one of the long-term solutions, taking at least one generation. However, this long-term solution is closely linked to the needs of housing and parents who are able to motivate and take responsibility of their children. In order to give hope for the socially marginalized Roma suffering of deep poverty today the parents need to find light for the topical and acute need of support.

To give one concrete example to you from Finland *one of the most important short-term solutions has been to organize **adult vocational education** and to enhance the employment possibilities of adult Roma. Vocational training has been financially supported by the state, which has secured the basic income of Roma*

*families while the parents have got a profession. Many positive results have been achieved: the employment of Roma has been improved and at the same time basic rights related to housing, education of children and health care has been secured.*

### **ID papers – Citizenship and lacking basic rights**

Ladies and gentlemen,  
in the EU Member States there are millions of Roma lacking Identity papers (ID papers), in other words citizenship and Health Insurance Card.

As a result of political changes in Europe approximately 50 years ago, many ethnic groups, including Roma, were forcibly removed. In the 1990s when former socialist countries went through transition, these groups were left out without citizenship. There are also a big number of people being born and living in rural villages who don't have identity papers because of extreme poverty. These people are nonexistent.

As a startling example, I pick up one of my recent visits to Croatia, which has recently concluded its accession negotiations with the EU and is likely to become the 28<sup>th</sup> Member State in 2013. I visited a village nearby Zagreb, where tens of Roma women came crying to me, appealing me to raise up their need of citizenship and right to health care services. Their spokeswoman said to me the following: “We where forcibly moved here two generations back during Tito’s ex-Yugoslavia. Our fathers bought the land where we have been living, but when the land was reformed here, we lost the legal right to the land. The former ownership was declared as cancelled without any compensation. After 1990s we were suddenly not welcome any more. Thousands of us have not got Croatian citizenship, we are declared as non-Croatians. We have no ID-papers, no access to health care services we are non-existent and nobody cares. I have given birth to nine children in bear ground, because I did not have money to seek medical care. Six of my nine new-born children died. I had to bury them with my own hands. I had no right to bury them into churchyard, because they where not registered. My dead children are still existing to me, but nobody else is remembering them, except me and my God who gave life to them. Please help us, and bring our cry to the decision makers.”

*It is therefore of utmost importance that the Commission requests Member States to register the newborn. Also maternity care and giving birth in hospitals should be provided to everyone free of charge. Furthermore Commission should quickly and definitely make a survey on the EU countries on the issue of people lacking ID-papers and citizenship documentation.*

### **Securing access to health care is one of the basic human rights**

As a result of the global financial crisis, unemployment has increased rapidly also in Europe. Those who become unemployed first are the least educated. In order to survive they are migrating looking for better living conditions in the rich west. The EU regulations on free movement of people are drafted for highly educated persons. Now we are confronted with a growing poverty migration phenomenon. The Member States are not prepared to receive these uneducated migrants. There are hardly any information and immigrations services available for these people.

The most vulnerable among these people are Roma from the new EU Member States. It is a well known fact from the EU Midis report that the unemployment rate of the Roma in the new Member

States is around 70-100 %. Nobody wants to hire poorly educated Roma. In many Member States, access to health care is bound to employment. In case you are without a job you don't have a right to health insurance. When these people migrate to other EU Member States they don't have a European Health Insurance Card and therefore they fall through all basic social security systems, including to right to basic health care.

In addition to living without rights, people without identity documents are at a great risk of becoming victims of trafficking and organized crime.

*Access to healthcare has been selected as one of the four crucial areas of EU Roma integration. Commissioner Reding stated in the second Roma summit in Córdoba in 2010 that only 10 percent of the European Social Funds had been used. Could the Commission explore, in cooperation with Member States, how these funds could be used more effectively to ensure that both those Roma who living in the Member States would get the Health Insurance Card and those Roma migrating would get the right to European Health Insurance Card?*

### **Attitudes towards the migrant Roma within the European Union**

With regard to migrant EU citizens, or the so-called beggar phenomenon, we can see that it is rapidly growing. Inside the European Union, the attitudes towards the Roma coming from other EU countries have varied by countries and even by cities and towns.

Through the ages, striving for a better standard of living has led to migration. Within the European Union, moving is also encouraged. This has again become visible in the growing immigration waves, when people are seeking better living conditions and work inside of Europe.

The internal immigration and free movement regulations of EU, adopted by the Member States, are not formed to answer into this growing poverty migration. According to the EU 2020 Strategy there are more than 80 million people living under the minimal living circumstances in EU region today. The receiver countries, western welfare States, are not prepared to welcome this poor people. The growing economic crises are pushing more and more people to move. Immigration offices with information and guidance services on different social systems in member States are lacking.

*Each member state is primarily responsible for its own citizens' – also Roma citizens' – well-being and living conditions like housing, education, health care and right for non-discriminatory treatment. In the case of the Roma, the question is about a developmental and political challenge. This is why European Union actions are needed for strengthening Member States' undertakings in advancing Roma inclusion. These actions could, as described in the Basic Principles approved by the Member States, be linked to implementation of the EU legislation and improved usage of the financial instruments such as the Structural Funds.*

The most common reasons for the Roma migration are extreme poverty, serious lack of perspective and extensive discrimination. Our modern social system, both national and international regulations have closed Roma out, blaming them of vagrancy and criminality. Europe did in fact during the recent decade re-nomadize them, because of its negligence in their rights. These people are not seen as human living beings, which deserve to be treated equally with other people.

Begging is an old phenomenon in many European regions. To give alms has belonged to some religions for centuries. But for example in the northern Europe and in many welfare States begging



is not seen as a legitimate means of earning one's living. Many EU Member States have already drafted administrative or even legal regulations which are making begging, in other words peoples suffering of poverty and social marginalization, a criminal act.

This situation is an outcome of hundreds of years of exclusion and institutionalized racism. The social responsibility of Roma as citizens has been neglected for centuries by their respected States. The majority doesn't see Roma as equal citizens, my neighbors but as foreigners who don't belong here. Many of these countries would gladly wash their hands completely of their Roma minority, preferring to see them as a European problem.

This is the most urgent gaping wound related to the citizenship question of the European Roma, which has during recent years turned visible in the rapidly growing beggar phenomenon on the streets of big cities of rich west. It is one of the most unpleasant, down silenced and politically sensitive issues in today's Europe.

In the EU regulations European Union Member States should ensure that any measures taken that affect directly or indirectly EU citizens of Roma origin are in compliance with principles laid out in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, The Directive [2004/38/EC] on the rights of citizens of the Union and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of the member States and in conformity with the Directive [2000/43/EC] implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin.

The European Union Fundamental Rights Agency has discussed the attitudes of the receiving states towards the migrant Roma in its meetings and studies. The Roma are primarily perceived as a security or public order issue.

The question of national and EU citizenship, equality, respect of the existing international human rights law and other non-discrimination regulations are all bound together. The Europe is getting rapidly unequal and socially separated to different social classes, where rich can enjoy rights and poor are not seen as deserving the same rights.

*Dear audience in this Dialogue seminar dear Commissioner Reding,  
Therefore, allow me to ask: Should this question of EUs internal immigration regulations be re-opened and explored for update by the Member States and the Commission in consultation with representatives of those concerned?*

*The group of migrant Roma is not homogeneous. Among them, there are also families looking for more permanent migration. Any expulsion should be undertaken in accordance with international human rights law and fully respect the dignity of the individuals concerned.<sup>1</sup>*

In the spring of 2008 the City of Helsinki Social Services Department asked the Helsinki Deaconess Institute to found a project to get into close contact with the Roma begging on the streets to find out reasons for their arrival. The name of the project became *Rom po drom* ('Roma on the road') and it continued for two years.

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<sup>1</sup> Council of Europe, Committee of Experts on Roma and Travellers (MG-S-ROM), 2010. Opinion on Migration and Freedom of Movement of Roma in Europe (MG-S-ROM (2010) 14), 7 December 2010, Strasbourg.

In the final report of the project, it is concluded that the most important factor for improving the situation of the Roma is the advancement of the social development in their countries of origin. At the street level you can only address the immediate humanitarian need. One of the conclusions of the *Rom po drom* project was that beggars, street vendors and street artists should be able to be met in a place where their life situation could be discussed in peace.

As regards the migrant Roma it was recommended that:

- The European Union should support and, if necessary, pressure Member States to take such actions to improve the position of the Roma as they had committed to take when entering the Union.
- The European Union Member States should take appropriate measures to “disseminate information concerning the rights and obligations of Union citizens and their family members on the subjects covered by the Free Movement Directive, particularly by means of awareness-raising campaigns conducted through national and local media and other means of communication” (Article 34 of the Directive 2004/38/EC). Information on the requirements and processes for exercising their rights as EU citizens should also be included.
- Local and regional authorities should be encouraged to work with relevant local agencies, civil society (including Roma) and local employers, to develop and implement interventions specifically supporting the integration of Roma citizens in the local labour market. Equally, local and regional authorities should be encouraged to create networks of municipalities having Roma migrant populations to provide forums for the exchange of good practice on the management of Roma migrants. Roma migrant representatives should be fully involved in this process.
- The activities of both the national and international third sector for improving the living conditions of the Roma should be supported both in the countries of departure and arrival.
- Cooperation between authorities (social welfare, health, police and educational authorities, for instance) in the countries of departure and arrival should be increased in order to obtain a realistic picture, and to increase accuracy in information services. Migrant Roma who are EU citizens should be treated as individuals and potential job seekers in the countries of arrival. Even though the Roma often travel in groups, collective interventions (like expulsions) should not be carried out.
- National and international networking between such municipalities and towns that have experience in short or long term Roma migration is worth endorsing. Within the network, good practices on encountering the Roma, arranging services and possible integration would be shared. Moreover, the network could develop information services designated to the Roma about their rights and responsibilities.

#### **Ladies and Gentleman as conclusion**

The European Commission should establish quickly a permanent cross-DG Unit to coordinate, monitor and evaluate the implementation of the National Roma Strategies. This Unit should promote the direct involvement of Roma in policy development both on national and EU level.

Typically, the best tool in designing and follow-up of the European Union work on Roma is the Platform for Roma Inclusion, the so-called Roma Platform that was founded two years ago. The Roma Platform gathers the representatives of the Commission, national governments, and Roma and international organizations. It is led by the respective EU President Country. By the end of the

year 2010 the Roma Platform has gathered four times. *Strengthened and more efficiently functioning Platform, including Roma expertise and third sector participation could considerably contribute to the formation and follow-up of the European Union policies on Roma. However, the nature of these Roma Platform gatherings should not be on seminar type, but more a discussing meetings. The Commission should take the lead of the Roma Platform, like it does with the high level expert groups concerned with disabilities and health issues, for instance. Thus, development of Roma affairs and continuity of the Platform would be ensured. The Commission should provide the Platform meetings with meeting rooms and other technical support like interpretation services, also in Romani.*

The Platform meetings should not depend on the human or material resources of the EU President Country. Also, the role of successive Presidencies would still remain important in channelling the outputs of the Platform into the work of the Council. The recommendations and opinions prepared in the Platform should be reflected in the agendas of the future EU Presidencies and be fed into the contents of the conclusions of the relevant thematic Councils, in order to effectively mainstream Roma-specific questions into sectorial policies.

Using the Informal Contact Group<sup>2</sup> in preparations for the Roma Platform should be continued in order to avoid overlapping of work between different European Institutions.

I do trust that there is a strong political commitment in the Council and Member States' side to implement these duties to equalize the situation and living conditions of Roma at the same level with majority populations in EU Member States. I also strongly encourage the Commission to strengthen its follow-up on all this.

Thank you for our attention!

Reference: The Objectives of Finland for Advancing the European Policy on Roma  
Finland's Handbook on the European Policy on Roma – Working Group Report 2011; Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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<sup>2</sup> The Informal Contact Group is an unofficial coordination group in Roma affairs of the EU, Council of Europe, OSCE, and other international organizations.