

Statement of the European Roma Rights Centre



EUROPEAN ROMA RIGHTS CENTRE

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On the occasion of the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting:
Tolerance and non-discrimination I: Roma and Sinti
29 September-10 October 2008, Warsaw

Good morning,

In recent years, some of the states of the OSCE region have introduced different initiatives and policies for the inclusion of Roma into mainstream society; in many cases due to the Decade of the Roma Inclusion which was launched in 2005. However, the effective implementation of these policies which should enable Roma to enjoy the human rights guaranteed under international and domestic legislation remains a cause for deep concern. In this regards the 2008 OSCE report on the implementation of the Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti underlines that the “area of particular concern is the absence of mechanism to provide and ensure sustainable support for Roma and Sinti integration.”

The European Roma Rights Center (ERRC) is very much concerned about the fact that a significant number of OSCE participating states have failed to develop any kind of strategy for the inclusion of Roma into mainstream society and the protection of their rights although vast majority of Roma in these countries are living at the margins of society and face serious human rights violations.

The ERRC reminds national governments that they have an obligation and a positive duty to undertake action to address the particular situation of the Roma. This obligation of the states was affirmed by the European Committee of Social Rights in its ruling on Collective Complaint *ERRC v. Bulgaria*, which emphasised that “for the integration of an ethnic minority such as Roma into mainstream society, measures of positive action are needed” and held that indirect discrimination may arise by failing to take adequate steps to ensure that the rights and collective advantages that are open to all are genuinely accessible by and to all.

The ERRC uses this occasion to call upon the governments of EU member states and the OSCE’s Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues to work on developing common European standards for Roma inclusion, based on the effective engagement of institutions and Member States of the

European Union, Roma representatives and civil society organisations in order to close the existing social gap between Roma and the rest of society. This is of crucial importance having in mind that what happens at the EU level impacts all other states in Europe that aspire to join the EU and even in the broader context. In addition, the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues should play a key role in facilitating the engagement of the EU and therefore it should take a proactive role in coordinating the activities and developing overarching guidelines for the solution of the problems that Roma face today in the OSCE region.

Thank you very much for your attention.

The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) is an international public interest law organisation engaging in a range of activities aimed at combating anti-Romani racism and human rights abuse of Roma, in particular strategic litigation, international advocacy, research and policy development, and training of Romani activists. For more information about the European Roma Rights Centre, visit the ERRC website at <http://www.errc.org>.

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