

Brussels, 25 August, 2010

Statement by Viviane Reding, Vice-President of the European Commission and EU Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship, on the Roma situation in Europe

"During the past few weeks, the situation of the Roma – the largest ethnic minority in the European Union – has attracted the attention of policy-makers at both national and EU levels.

As EU Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship, I have been closely following issues involving the Roma since I took office. I believe that the Roma are an important part of the population of the European Union, and that it is of paramount importance that they are well integrated into the societies of our Member States. On 7 April, on a joint initiative of László Andor, the EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, and myself, the European Commission adopted a Communication on the social and economic integration of Roma in Europe ([IP/10/407](#); [MEMO/10/121](#)). The subject was discussed the day after at the Roma Summit in Cordoba – which both László Andor and I attended – and the Commission's Communication was endorsed by the Ministers in charge of Employment and Social Affairs in June.

Against this background, I have been following with great attention and some concern the developments over the past days in France as well as the debate sparked in several other Member States. On the one hand, I fully acknowledge that it is the sole responsibility of Member States to ensure public order and the safety of their citizens on their national territory. On the other hand, I expect that all Member States respect the commonly agreed EU rules on free movement, non-discrimination and the common values of the European Union, notably the respect for fundamental rights, including the rights of people belonging to minorities.

It is clear that those who break the law need to face the consequences. It is equally clear that nobody should face expulsion just for being Roma.

I have therefore asked my services to fully analyse the situation in France, in particular whether all measures taken fully comply with EU law. In this context, I welcome French Prime Minister François Fillon's announcement that he will send a letter on this matter to the European Commission. The points that will be raised in this letter will of course be fully taken into account in our analysis of the situation. I will inform the College of Commissioners about the outcome of our analysis next week.

As I could see from the reactions to the Commission's Roma Communication of 7 April, there is a broad consensus in Europe that what is needed now are concrete and forward-looking measures to improve the social integration of Roma. We need, in particular, to tackle the root-causes leading Roma to abandon their homes and move across borders. We outlined in our Communication on 7 April numerous measures involving housing, access to the labour market, education and health – all measures that could make an important and useful contribution to improving the situation of the Roma. Of course, these areas fall primarily within the responsibilities of national governments or even of regional or local authorities. Nevertheless, the Commission has committed itself to supporting the activities of national governments in this field by financial measures from the EU Structural Funds.

The European Commission is prepared to have a very open, frank and honest dialogue with all Member States on how best to take on – using the Treaties and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights as the basis – our joint responsibility for the Roma. I call notably on the French authorities to engage in such a dialogue with all EU Member States. If needed, the European Commission stands ready to act as a broker between Member States and to monitor and assess progress being made.

I regret that some of the rhetoric that has been used in some Member States in the past weeks has been openly discriminatory and partly inflammatory. The situation of the Roma is a serious matter. It should be on the agenda not just in August, but throughout the year, and it should be treated carefully and responsibly by policy-makers. National decision-makers have an important role to play to ensure both public order and the social integration of all Europeans who choose to live within their territory. Because Europe is not just a common market – it is at the same time a Community of values and fundamental rights. The European Commission will watch over this."

See also:

Roma people living in the EU: Frequently asked questions – [MEMO/10/383](#)