



Fifth meeting of the European Platform for Roma Inclusion Budapest, 7-8th April 2011

Synthesis Report

Context:

The fifth meeting of the integrated European Platform for Roma inclusion¹ took place in Budapest on 7-8th April 2011. The meeting was hosted in Hungary and was co-organised by the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the EU and the European Commission.

The meeting took stock of recent developments in Roma integration at European level and focused on the presentation of the recently adopted Commission Communication on an EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies by 2020; on the European Parliament Resolution on Roma inclusion of 9th March 2011 (on the basis of the Report from MEP Livia Jaroka) and on territorial aspects of poverty and social exclusion.

I. Opening event

An opening event took place on 7th April in Millenary Theatre, organised by the Hungarian Presidency. Along cultural performances by Hungarian artists, statements were made by high level policy makers.

- Viktor Orbán, Prime Minister and Zoltán Balog, Minister of State for Social Inclusion of the Ministry of Public Administration and Justice recognised and welcomed the political commitment of the European Commission to bring Roma integration high on the agenda of the European Union. They both underlined the commitment of the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the EU to promote awareness and take actions to help Roma integration. Viktor Orbán announced that in the next three years, Hungary will create 100.000 jobs for the Roma in Hungary.

- Viviane Reding, Vice-President of the European Commission and EU Commissioner for Justice thanked to HU Presidency of the Council of the EU for taking up the Roma integration as a political priority of its Presidency. She also thanked Livia Járóka, the Rapporteur who initiated the European Parliament Resolution on a European Roma integration strategy. Vice-President Reding stressed that the EU Framework is a tremendous achievement, resulting from a political consensus among various stakeholders. She also called for joining the forces

¹ For more information on the Platform see www.ec.europa.eu/roma

at all levels, for changing the mindset of Roma and non Roma communities and finally to see Roma as an opportunity and not any more a burden.

- László Andor, EU Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs stressed that an EU framework is a new chapter. He underlined the social dimension of the framework and expressed the hope that MS will use more efficiently the available funds and use the technical assistance offered by the European Commission. Commissioner Andor insisted upon the role of Member States to support Roma integration.

- Livia Járóka, Member of the European Parliament recalled the longstanding commitment of the European Parliament for the issue of Roma integration, and its latest achievement: the Resolution on the EU Strategy on Roma inclusion, adopted on 9th March 2011.

II. Working meeting

The working meeting took place on 8th April in Museum of Ethnography.

Opening

The meeting was opened by Tibor Navracsics, Deputy Prime Minister. He stressed that Hungary has a tradition in developing a cohesive society respecting each other's cultures. He highlighted the Hungarian system of minority representation: Hungary has the highest number of Roma people represented in the national Parliament and first MEP of Roma origin.

Hungarian Minister of State for Social Inclusion Zoltán Balog welcomed the EU framework as a "bold, courageous document" He called for the support of the civil society to raise awareness about the situation of Roma and their rights and highlighted that non-Roma majority and Member States must all be convinced that Roma integration is in their own interest. He also called for the support of all stakeholders in order to reach meaningful and powerful Council conclusions.

Viviane Reding, Vice-President of the Commission, presented the EU Framework as a beginning of a new future. "It is a very good and strong document", she said. An EU framework has been discussed with various stakeholders and discussions resulted in great political consensus. She underlined that the EU Framework has been designed for social and economic integration, as for the discrimination many of the Member States and the Commission have the instruments into place. She highlighted 4 crucial areas for taking the actions – education, employment, housing and health. She called for robust monitoring mechanism and highlighted the role of FRA in collecting the data. In upcoming months, the paper will be discussed in various Council's meetings and in June in the meeting of the European Council. Number of Member States will try to water down the document from the table, she said, therefore it is of absolute importance to fight together. VP Reding called for the support of Roma NGOs and the majority to raise the awareness of the issue in their own Member States and help to prevent such attempts to water down the document. Finally, she announced that the Commission decided to take a stronger role in the Platform.

Commissioner László Andor welcomed the cross-party support for the European Parliament Resolution that contains a wealth of stimulating ideas. He highlighted two important issues within the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies by 2020. First, he recalled that exclusion of Roma is not in line with the Europe 2020 goal of a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Second, he insisted upon the role EU funds have to play for Roma integration and he called for more efficient use of available EU funds until and beyond 2013. He pointed out on the use of such instruments as microfinance facility and social economy. Nevertheless, he concluded that EU funding can not solve the problem of Roma social exclusion and discrimination and that a political will and joining forces at all levels is needed.

Member of the European Parliament Livia Járóka stressed that there are solid available tools to achieve the integration of Roma. She argued for adopting a territorial approach when designing, targeting and monitoring measures for Roma integration: this will allow to identify particularly disadvantaged areas at micro-regional level, from which both communities - Roma but also non Roma will benefit. MEP Jaroka called for the European Commission to undertake the coordination, monitoring and reporting on the implementation of Member States' national Roma integration strategies. She underlined the importance of addressing as a parallel process the economic and social integration of Roma in enlargement countries.

Reactions to the latest EU developments

The following speakers presented their views on the latest EU developments: Jeroen Schokkenbroek (Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues at the Council of Europe), Ákos Topolánszky (Member of the European Economic and Social Committee), Anton Niculescu (Romanian State Secretary) and Isabela Mihalache (Deputy Director at the European Roma Rights Centre, on behalf of the European Roma Policy Coalition). In addition, George Soros delivered a video message and Zeljko Jovanovic (Open Society Foundations) commented on the EU Framework in the afternoon session.

All of these representatives of international organisations and the civil society welcomed and acknowledged the political commitment of the European Commission to Roma integration which resulted in the adoption of the EU Framework. However, a number of criticisms were also expressed: they were hoping that the Commission will involve them closely in the consultation process and drawing of the EU Framework; they expected to put more focus on human rights dimension, gender issue and child poverty. Finally, some expressed concerns about the lack of ambition of some of the goals set in the EU Framework, in particular in education. .

Territorial aspects of poverty and social exclusion: theory and practices

Commission Director Rudolf Niessler recalled that 16.8 billion € are at the disposal of the Member States in the frame of the European Regional Development Fund, for interventions aimed at the social integration of all. He invited Member States to amend their operational programmes co-financed by Structural Funds and European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development in order to better support the projects targeted Roma. He also recalled that technical assistance is available to improve the capacity of Roma targeted projects. Finally, he stressed that good interventions and more effective and concrete actions can be achieved

only if data are collected. In this respect, mapping extreme poverty and using a territorial approach of social inclusion was recognised as very valuable.

Nóra Teller, researcher of the Metropolitan Research Institute and Katarina Mathernova, senior adviser at the World Bank presented their methodology and practices for targeting measures on the Roma via a territorial approach identifying particularly disadvantaged territories (or pockets of poverty). They both underlined the importance of poverty mapping as an extremely useful tool, not only about Roma integration, but also in order to get rid of poverty in broader terms.

Ms. Zsuzsanna Kondor, Head of the Hungarian Development Agency and Jenő Setét, Hungarian independent expert shared their experience of using a territorial approach. They both raised successes and challenges when adopting a territorial approach of poverty, from which a number of lessons can be drawn. A positive impact on the ground was acknowledged as the territorial approach has indeed allowed to reduce segregation in the targeted micro-regions and had a positive effect even on the neighbouring areas also. Nevertheless, one of the main challenges raised concerned the fact that local authorities usually refuse to admit that there is segregation and social exclusion somewhere on their territory.

On the basis of the Spanish practice of a territorial approach to poverty and Roma social exclusion, José Manuel Fresno, independent expert, started by highlighting that the territorial approach is a very valuable approach but is not an answer to all problems in terms for Roma inclusion. In particular, in order to reach the Roma, it has to be combined with cross-cutting policies and measures specifically designed for the Roma. the territorial approach needs to be complemented with an integrated approach paying attention to the four fields of education, employment, health and housing. He insisted upon the fact that the local approach has to take place in the frame of a national framework and that good interaction must exist between national and local levels in order to influence both national and local policies. Finally, he stressed that information and knowledge must be collected at national and local levels in order to feed in the design and monitoring of policies and to give the possibility to adapt policies if necessary.

Closing

Jean-Marc Jalhay, Chief of Staff at the Belgian Secretariat of State for Social Integration and Combating Poverty recalled the achievements of the previous Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU in relation to the social inclusion of Roma. In particular, the paper on early childhood development and the inclusion of Roma families was presented.

Malgorzara Rózycka, representative of the Polish government, presented the plans of the future Polish Presidency of the Council of the EU with regard to the social and economic integration of Roma: in August an event will take place on the Roma holocaust; in November the Polish Presidency will organise the Equality Summit which will touch upon the issue of Roma discrimination; and the next meeting of the European Platform for Roma Inclusion will take place before the end of the year.