



Recommendations of the European Roma Information Office (ERIO)¹ to the Swedish EU Presidency

Sweden will take over the EU Presidency at a time of important changes. In 2009, the European Union will have a new Parliament and a new Commission. The outcomes of the recent elections of the European Parliament reflect the rise of extreme right-wing parties throughout Europe. These parties fuel anti-Gypsy sentiment and other forms of racism in European societies. Nowadays, we are witness to more dramatic forms of anti-Gypsyism: other than the every-day discrimination, Roma are faced with collective racist attacks and the threat of organised racist paramilitary groups as was the case in Hungary. These hate crimes that the Roma are being faced with requires resolute action from Member States, European institutions as well as all EU citizens.

Meanwhile, the Roma, both EU and non-EU citizens, are systematically restricted in their rights to freedom of movement. Roma migrants belong to one of the most vulnerable groups in Western European countries even faced with mass expulsions. For this reason, ERIO welcomes the notion that the concept of migration is listed within the priorities of the Swedish EU Presidency. The adoption of a "Post-Hague" Programme for Freedom, Justice and Security focusing on the respect of human rights of immigrants would be a big step forward towards a more democratic and inclusive Europe.

The idea of a Europe free of discrimination is fluctuates with the large populations of Roma that face poverty, even extreme poverty, and are treated as second class citizens. The equal treatment and social inclusion of Roma should remain as one the top priorities of European institutions and Member States. The Swedish Presidency could contribute to achieve this goal by driving EU policies, fostering Roma inclusion as a European Framework Strategy towards Roma Inclusion. ERIO would like to contribute to the Swedish EU Presidency by proposing recommendations for undertaking policy intervention at the EU and national levels in areas of crucial importance for Roma.

Towards a European Framework Strategy towards Roma

Roma organisations are waiting with high expectations to see if concrete measures will be undertaken by the European Commission promoting the social inclusion of Roma on what it has to report by the end of the first half of 2010. This has been requested by the

¹ The European Roma Information Office (ERIO) is a human rights advocacy organisation promoting the rights of Roma communities throughout Europe. ERIO lobbies European institutions, national governments and international organisations in order to bring about improvements in policies concerning Roma communities. ERIO cooperates intensively with Roma organisations and supports them in establishing their concerns and demands to European and national decision-makers.

European Council in the conclusions of the General Affairs Council of December 2008. So far, the Commission has set up an integrated European Platform for Roma Inclusion. This Platform aims at promoting the exchange of best practices concerning Roma inclusion and is a valuable initiative through which synergies can be promoted and lessons learned exchanged. Nevertheless, the promotion of Roma inclusion is a challenge which requires major policy measures such as the adoption of a European Roma Framework Strategy through which European Commission and Member States could further advance towards effective policy making. In order to achieve this goal, ERIO calls upon the Swedish EU Presidency to:

- Encourage the European Commission to develop a European Framework Strategy for Roma. This strategy should contribute towards filling the gap of policy design and implementation between the European Commission and Member States; improve the accountability of Member States regarding policies promoting Roma inclusion; improve policy coordination within the European Commission; and set up practical guidelines for an effective allocation of funding in programmes targeting Roma
- Request the European Commission to create a European Platform on Roma Issues, a forum from which concrete steps forward will be taken in terms of policy arrangements for Roma inclusion as the draft of a European Framework Strategy of Roma Inclusion. This Platform should become an instrument through which mechanisms of policy assessment and accountability can be defined. The integrated Platform should involve the national agencies in charge for the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) on Social Protection and Social Inclusion for fostering policy coordination, setting up common indicators and exchanging good practices.

Roma in the European Year of the Fight against Poverty – 2010

ERIO welcomes the idea that the European Union has declared 2010 as the European Year of the Fight against Poverty. According to several surveys, Roma, especially women and children, are one of the groups at the highest risk of living in poverty. The poverty and social exclusion faced by Roma is strongly linked to discrimination and racism faced by large parts of the Roma population throughout the European Union. Urgent measures are needed to tackle extreme poverty affecting the Roma population, especially in the new Member States. EU and national policies, especially in the countries with significant Roma populations, the attempt to tackle poverty and social exclusion, should focus on Roma communities. In order to achieve this goal, ERIO calls upon the Swedish EU Presidency to :

- Call upon the European Commission to address the plight of the Roma as a priority in the framework of the European Year of the Fight against Poverty – 2010. Actions and events, carried out at European and national levels should focus on the poverty faced by Roma, especially in countries with significant Roma populations.
- Call upon the European Commission and Member States to focus on Roma in the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) on Social Protection and Social Inclusion. Especially, in countries with representative Roma populations, policies

and measures tackling social exclusion and poverty affecting Roma should be included in the National Action Plans and in the Peer Reviews on Social Inclusion and Social Protection.

- Call upon Member States, especially those with representative Roma populations, to undertake urgent measures to tackle extreme poverty, especially in the fields of health and housing.

Migration and the Post-Hague Programme

ERIO is concerned about the statements delivered by European officials and representatives of national governments at the Post-Hague Programme. According to the new European Policy Programme for Freedom, Justice and Security, which will replace the Hague Programme (2005) it will focus on further restrictive mechanisms to limit the entrance of Third Country Nationals to the European Union and on policies of forced departure. Measures aimed at the improvement of the living conditions of asylum seekers and refugees are not in the focus of the Post-Hague Programme. Although most of the Roma living in Western European countries are EU citizens, there are many Roma who are Third Country Nationals, especially from the former Yugoslavia. Some of them are refugees; others are allowed to stay in the host countries because of humanitarian reasons; others are illegal immigrants. In most cases they belong to a very vulnerable group, facing social exclusion, poverty and discrimination. A high number of them do not have access to the labour market, higher education as well as adequate housing and health care. Legal and institutional arrangements ensuring full respect for the fundamental rights of Roma, and their social inclusion, should be guaranteed. In order to achieve this goal, ERIO calls upon the Swedish EU Presidency to:

- Propose a new European Policy Programme for Freedom, Justice and Security, which will replace the Hague Programme (2005) that ceases to address migration as a security issue, but rather focuses instead on the inclusion of migrants, ending the criminalisation of so-called illegal migrants, and develops framework conditions for their regularisation.
- Encourage Member States to guarantee, without restrictions, the right to free movement of Roma EU citizens and residents, by respecting the principle of equal treatment and applying no restrictive standards when it comes to enforcing national and European legislation on fundamental rights. The European Commission should constantly assess whether national governments are acting according to European laws.

Rise of the extreme right and anti-Gypsyism

The recent results of the European Parliament elections are an alarming signal concerning the rise of extreme right wing oriented parties in Europe. anti-Gypsyism is assuming new levels of violence. Roma are not only subject to being victims of racist attacks but also of racist criminal acts committed by well organised extreme right-wing oriented groups as in the case of the Czech Republic and Hungary. Right-wing parties fuel anti-Gypsy sentiment in society and are, in many cases, the mouthpiece of such criminal groups. It is unacceptable that such kinds of criminal groups and their political

supporters have a place in European society. It is necessary to mobilize all the required legal and institutional efforts to staunchly combat any form of anti-Gypsyism, wherever it may occur, and to provide Roma and other minorities with all the security guarantees so as they are no longer the targets of criminal acts. In order to achieve this goal, ERIO calls upon the Swedish EU Presidency to:

- Call upon Member States to undertake effective action to put in place all the necessary legal and institutional arrangements to combat racism and criminal racist attacks against Roma and media campaigns spreading negative stereotypes of Roma communities. National governments should work towards achieving a societal consensus, especially with the participation of media enterprises and political parties, to eradicate anti-Gypsyism in their countries.
- Call upon democratic political parties across Europe to publicly condemn any form of anti-Gypsyism and to separate themselves from the negative portrayals of Roma in the media and political discourses as well as from extreme right-wing oriented parties.

European Agenda for Culture and Intercultural Dialogue

The European Agenda for Culture has introduced the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) in the field of Culture. Through this instrument, Member States fix guidelines and common objectives that they regularly will review through a common system of reporting. The OMC applied in other fields as social inclusion has failed so far to be an instrument through which real policy coordination can be reached. The OMC of Culture has even weaker mechanisms as those implemented in another fields. Until now, no Action Plans or exercises of peer-reviews are included. Adequate consultation channels with the Civil Society are missing. It is especially noticeable that in the OMC's structure, there is no working group focusing on fostering intercultural dialogue. This is crucial considering that the European cultural agenda has to promote a societal dialogue and to recognise minorities' cultures. Roma, like other disadvantaged groups facing social exclusion and discrimination, are not equal partners in societal dialogue. Furthermore, Romani culture is considered in many nations to be inferior. Roma should participate as equal partners in a societal dialogue and their culture should benefit from the same degree of promotion as the cultures of national majorities. In order to achieve this goal, ERIO calls on the Swedish EU-Presidency to:

- Call on Member States and the European Commission to focus on intercultural dialogue in the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) in the field of Culture. The involvement of Civil Society Organisations in the OMC – Culture should be ensured as well.
- Encourage Member States to promote Romani culture through the establishment and consolidation of Roma cultural centres.
- Encourage the European Commission to support and fund projects promoting Roma culture.