

European Roma Summit, 4 April 2014

"EU Roma policy goes local"

Venue: Square Brussels Meeting Centre (Copper Room)

Rue Mont des Arts, B-1000 Brussels

Summary Report

The third European Roma Summit was organised on 4 April, 2014 in Brussels. It gathered around 500 EU politicians; representatives of national, local and regional authorities; and European and local civil society. During three panel discussions, participants debated progress on Roma integration. The summit focused on going local on Roma inclusion both in the EU as well as in enlargement countries.

Opening

Chair: **Françoise Le Bail**, Director-General for Justice at the European Commission

Commission President **José Manuel Barroso** reiterated that fighting poverty and meeting the needs of the socially excluded, such as the Roma, is a major priority for the Commission. He motivated the Member States to use more efficiently the new financial tools provided from the European Social Funds for securing basic services and efficient integration of vulnerable groups such as Roma.

Traian Băsescu, the President of Romania mentioned the important role of local municipalities, who are in great need of more information and tools on how to include Roma. He confirmed the need of the Member States to mainstream and allocate funding for Roma inclusion and also embraced the responsibilities of Roma themselves to this process.

Zoni Weisz, the last Sinti Holocaust survivor, expressed his concerns regarding the social and human rights situation of Roma in Europe. He also asked for Roma, particularly youth, to step out of the victim's role and to be proud of their contribution to European culture and society.

Viviane Reding, Vice-President of the Commission and Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship, stated that the adoption of the EU Framework for national Roma integration strategies has put the issue firmly on Europe's political agenda. She cited the increasing pre-school attendance of Roma children as an example of important progress made.

Ioannis Michelakis, Minister of Interior and Chairman of the Inter-ministerial Committee for Roma Issues for the Greek Presidency of the Council of the EU, highlighted the multiple challenges in education, employment, health, and housing for Roma and the challenge to uphold the right of free movement amid the fear in some Member States of a mass influx of Roma.

László Andor, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion, called on Member States to ensure that Roma inclusion is a priority for the commitment of EU funds in

the forthcoming seven-year financial period. He stated that the European Social Fund should be used more efficiently as a financial source, with more guidance needed on the use of EU funds. Appropriate funding moreover should be used by Member States to ensure that Roma inclusion is a priority.

In a video-message, **Livia Jaroka**, Member of the European Parliament, emphasised the need for more coherent and systematic monitoring of progress in Roma inclusion across the European Union.

Panel 1 - Making policies inclusive for all Roma at the local level

Speakers: **Viviane Reding**, Commission Vice-President and Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship; **Zinaida Zlatanova**, Deputy Prime Minister of Bulgaria; **Zoltán Balog**, Minister for Human Resources of Hungary; **Jiří Dienstbier**, Minister for Human Rights and Equal Opportunities of the Czech Republic; **Pekka Haavisto**, Minister for International Development of Finland; **Damian Draghici**, Senator and National Roma Contact Point of Romania; **Nicoleta Bitu**, Executive Director of Romano ButiQ Association; **Olguta Vasilescu**, Mayor of Craiova, Romania; **Barbara Loth**, Secretary of State, Senate Department for Labour, Integration and Women's Affairs of Berlin, Germany.

Moderator: Member of the European Parliament **Edit Bauer**

Attention in the first panel was drawn to the launch of the new Commission webpages aimed at supporting local authorities and civil society to better access EU-funding.

The first panel discussion moreover shed light on the Commission's progress report on the implementation of the EU Framework for national Roma integration strategies that was adopted on 2 April, 2014. It was stated that local and regional authorities have a major role to play in overcoming remaining challenges.

It was recognized that cooperation between local Roma communities and local authorities is essential to ensure Roma inclusion at the local level, while participation and active involvement of Roma in all Roma-related policy making is desired. The need for the emancipation of Roma and making Romani cultural heritage a visible part of European intercultural approach were also issues raised.

During the debate, civil society representatives highlighted other challenges Roma face as regarding social inclusion, while it was underlined that discrimination is still present and that it should be prevented that integration is understood as assimilation.

Reference was also made to the need to preserve free movement as a fundamental right for European citizens, touching upon the issue of intra mobile Roma and the role of municipalities and integration policies at the local level. Some Roma representatives asked for more unity and coordination among the Roma themselves.

Panel 2 - Making EU funding reach the local and regional authorities to support Roma integration

Speakers: **László Andor**, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion; **Jan-Ove Jerrestål**, Secretary of State for Integration, Ministry of Employment, Sweden; **Peter Pollák**, Member of the Slovak Parliament, Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Government for Roma communities; **Klára Orgovánová**, Director of the Roma Institute, Slovak Republic; **Tsonko Tsonov**, Mayor of Kavarna, Bulgaria; **Maria Winberg-Nordström**, Deputy Mayor of Helsingborg, Sweden; **Morten Kjaerum**, Director, European Agency for Fundamental Rights.

Moderator: **Kinga Göncz**, Member of the European Parliament

The importance of initiatives relevant for Roma inclusion such as the Youth Guarantee was mentioned in the second panel, as well as the possibility of using EU-funds for Roma inclusion in countries receiving EU intra mobile Roma.

Speakers in the second panel moreover raised the issue of the importance of (access to) EU funding and the better use of funds to assist local authorities to ensure resources reach Roma communities which are in need of them mostly.

It was mentioned that reducing distrust between Roma and non-Roma as well as between Roma and public authorities is vital and that the European Commission should set the example in steps taken to empower Roma. Member States should also publicly condemn Roma discrimination.

Issues raised during the debate dealt mostly with corruption and the existence of corrupt organizations abusing the Roma cause; the recognition of the Roma Holocaust at the European level and increasing right-wing extremism across Europe. The question was also raised why Roma media are not targeted in the national strategies.

Panel 3 - Making Roma integration a local reality in enlargement countries

Speakers: **George Soros**, Chairman of Soros Fund Management and Open Society Foundations; **Suad Numanović**, Minister for Human and Minority Rights Protection, Montenegro; **Nezdet Mustafa**, Minister without Portfolio, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; **Snežana Marković**, Director General for Democracy of the Council of Europe; **Nemanja Deliç**, Mayor of Sombor, Serbia; **Elmas Arus**, Chair of Zero Discrimination Association, Turkey; **Christian Danielsson**, Director General for Enlargement.

Moderator: **Janez Lenarčič**, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

The commitment of the Commission towards Roma integration initiatives in enlargement countries was reiterated during the third panel. The improvement of Roma integration in the field of education was recognized, but also the lack of Roma access to jobs due to deep rooted discrimination.

Some called for a closer cooperation among enlargement countries, EU institutions, international players, and civil society. The possibility of the creation of a Roma institute by the Council of Europe was also raised.

During the debate, success stories were mentioned regarding the cooperation of various players in Roma integration projects in enlargement countries, while some criticism was levied against the lack of involvement of the Roma in the development of Roma-related policies at the national, local, and European levels.

Closing

Chair: **Michel Servoz**, Director General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission

Androulla Vassiliou, the Commissioner Education, Culture, Multilingualism, Sport, Media and Youth stated in the closing session that in some Member States clear progress is visible, such as related to compulsory pre-school education and Roma mediators. She highlighted that mainstream education systems should become more inclusive in order to fight segregation. She mentioned the new Erasmus+ and Creative Europe programmes that would be able to fund projects with systemic impact.

Michel Servoz, Director General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission who identified commitment to Roma policies not only as a question to solidarity, but also as an economic opportunity. He also referred to the new EU Roma web pages to make access to funds more available.

Jens Geier, Member of the European Parliament, expressed the commitment from the European Parliament to step up Roma integration and highlighted the importance of the participation of Roma in the decision-making process and the necessary improvement of the monitoring processes regarding the use of funds for Roma integration.

Martina Balogova of the Country Association of Roma Initiatives, Slovakia, representative of the Roma Decade, referred to the added-value brought by the Roma Decade for cooperation between Member States and enlargement countries on Roma integration and the involvement of civil society in the monitoring of progress regarding policies for Roma integration in Roma Decade countries.

Ambassador Stefano Sannino for the Permanent representation of Italy to the European Union for the forthcoming Italian presidency of the Council of the EU, referred to the positive steps taken by the Commission to combat discrimination and called for more cooperation at all levels with the Roma communities. He explained that the forthcoming Italian presidency will keep the ambit of going local on Roma integration.