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

January-June 2012

Denmark is taking over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union on 1 January 2012. As such, ERIO welcomes the Danish EU Presidency which is taking place at a crucial time for Roma inclusion. On April 2011 the European Commission adopted a EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies to improve the socio-economic situation of the Roma communities in Europe by assisting and guiding member states to develop their national strategies for Roma integration which they committed themselves to deliver it by the end of 2011. Denmark faces both a great challenge and an opportunity to build on the progress made thus far on Roma inclusion in Europe. ERIO encourages the Danish Presidency to build on this momentum by taking the EU agenda forward for Roma inclusion. The current situation of Roma communities and the serious abuses and violations they are facing across Europe, makes it urgent for EU presidencies to challenge the human rights position of Europe's largest minority in the EU.

1. EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies

The European Commission used the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies as a tool to come to terms with the discrimination Roma face. ERIO is concerned that only 15 of the 27 member states submitted their national strategies. For the strategies to be effective, ERIO calls on the Danish Presidency to:

- Ensure that member states efficiently and swiftly transpose and implement the Framework at national and local level. The implementation should also happen beyond the EU. The Presidency should urge candidate and potential candidate countries as well as Western Balkan countries to effectively transpose and implement the Framework.

- Ensure that the monitoring mechanism of the European Commission includes support for civil society monitoring activities.

- Ensure that member states are committed to use EU financial instruments for Roma inclusion (e.g. Structural Funds).

2. Rise of Anti-Gypsyism

ERIO is deeply concerned about the rising trends in anti-Roma sentiment, anti-Gypsyism, xenophobia and far-right extremism across Europe which might worsen with the current economic crisis. It is necessary to mobilise all necessary legal and institutional efforts to fight any form of anti-Gypsyism, wherever it may occur and to provide Roma and other minorities with all the security guarantees to not be target of criminal acts. To achieve this goal, ERIO calls on the Danish Presidency to:

- Strengthen the EU's efforts to combat racial and ethnic hatred. The EU has enough instruments to take some measures to ensure the equal treatment of Roma and protect its largest minority. It must defend the values of human rights and tolerance it advocates and send a strong message that these racist acts are not acceptable and are punishable and ensuring a strong implementation of criminal law against racist and ethnic offences.

- Ensure that the EU takes the necessary measures and a strong position against hate-speech, anti-Gypsyism and intolerance in the member states, including discourses and behaviours likely to incite anti-Gypsyism and intolerance from politicians.

- Support member states in their fight against racism as a way to improve their response to racially-motivated violence against Roma. The Presidency should also urge all member states to support the adoption of and implement effectively the Framework Decision on combating racism and xenophobia.

- Call on democratic political parties across Europe to refrain from discourses and behaviours likely to incite anti-Gypsyism and intolerance and to publicly condemn any form of anti-Gypsyism.

3. Inclusive economic growth

ERIO welcomes the fact that the Danish Presidency has amongst its priorities job creation and economic growth which should be pursued in an inclusive way. In times of financial crises disadvantaged groups such as the Roma are always the most affected, economically and socially, finding themselves trapped in a cycle of poverty. ERIO calls on the Danish Presidency to:

- Be a driving force for Roma inclusion in Europe despite the current financial, economic and social crisis. Current cuts, at both European and national level, of funding for Roma rights and inclusion related activities might risk jeopardising recent progress and create obstacles to the target to lift at least 20 million people out of poverty set in the Europe 2020 Strategy. Long-term investment in equality related activities, education and employment will benefit not only the Roma but national economies and societies in general.

- Ensure that the Multi-annual Financial Framework 2014-2020 includes adequate funding for activities on Roma inclusion and that promote human rights.

Quality education for all

Roma children and young people continue to face discrimination and occupy a disadvantaged position in education systems across the EU. Many of them are placed in segregated schools or do not have access to the same quality education as those from mainstream society. Consequently, many Roma do not develop the necessary skills required to access adequate employment. Guaranteeing Roma access to quality education remains one of the main challenges of EU institutions and national governments. To achieve this goal, ERIO calls on the Danish Presidency to:

- Actively promote comprehensive school desegregation policies and programmes in order to improve the quality of education for Roma. In countries where segregated schooling of Roma is still practised, especially in Eastern and Central Europe, national governments should be encouraged to implement national strategies that ensure school desegregation.

- Promote a culturally sensitive national school curricula (from pre-school education) in order to address anti-Gypsyism and foster intercultural dialogue and understanding. It should include information on Roma cultural history and contributions.

Inclusive employment

The current economic crisis has worsened working conditions of workers. ERIO welcomes the fact that the Danish Presidency has amongst its priorities the protection of employees' rights and employment creation. Roma are in clear disadvantage compared to mainstream society when it comes to employment issues. They have very high rates of unemployment, unstable, unqualified and low-paid jobs. Guaranteeing Roma access to equal and fair employment and payment is vital to promote their inclusion and to fight their high poverty rates. To achieve this aim, ERIO calls on the Danish Presidency to:

- Fight labour market discrimination and adopt measures to improve the socio-economic situation of Roma, especially the most vulnerable groups such as women, children and the older ones.

- Encourage the European Commission and member states to implement vocational training and lifelong learning programmes to provide Roma with the necessary skills to be integrated into adequate employment and self-employment. Specific programmes should be addressed to foster the employment of Roma women, which is especially important as it indirectly addresses the issue of gender equality.

4. Protecting the rights of Roma migrants

Most of Roma migrants in the European Union, both EU citizens and third country nationals face poverty, social exclusion and discrimination. The subjects of mobility and migration have gradually become important in the context of the EU's work on the Roma issue since the freedom of movement of this minority is often strongly restricted as well. There is an urgent

need to guarantee the inclusion of Roma migrants and access to their basic rights. As such, ERIO calls on the Danish Presidency to:

- Make sure member states respect the Directive on Free Movement 20074/38 and the principle of equal treatment to ensure that all EU citizens, particularly Roma, exercise their rights to free movement and to prevent the deportation and expulsion of Roma by member states.

- Encourage member states and candidate countries to invest in the inclusion and integration of migrant Roma into host societies by supporting them with adequate and targeted EU resources focusing on health, housing, employment and education.

5. Western Balkans

Large Roma communities live in the Western Balkans and constitute the most disadvantaged minority in the region. They face strong patterns of social exclusion, extensive human rights violations and poverty. Besides experiencing an extremely low quality of life, Roma in Western Balkans are regularly the targets of racist violence and crime. To guarantee the human rights and improve the living conditions of Roma in this region, ERIO calls on the Danish Presidency to:

- Ensure that Roma are not forcibly returned to Kosovo. Forced returns are a clear violation of basic rights and a waste of economic resources. Host countries should find out a way to regularise and integrate them in the host society. The Presidency should make sure that member states carefully consider claims for asylum by Kosovo Roma on an individual basis in accordance with international and national laws and ensure they have access to a fair asylum procedure. Quality assurance in asylum decision-making should be a guiding principle of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). ERIO welcomes Denmark's commitment to advance this process during their Presidency.

- Urge both potential and candidate countries (i.e. Western Balkans and Turkey) for EU membership to improve the Roma situation in their own country during accession negotiations and before they join the EU. This should be kept as an EU entry prerequisite.