



Recommendations of the European Roma Information Office (ERIO)¹ to the French EU-Presidency on Social Inclusion of Roma

The European Roma Information Office (ERIO) welcomes the commitment of the French Presidency to promote a “more protecting Europe”, “to defend Europe’s social and economic model from the pressures of globalization”. Such commitment is more than welcome in times when the social model has been losing its real social components for giving more importance to the profit-making logic of the free economy. This is reflected in the re-orientation of the Lisbon Agenda towards an approach of “jobs and growth”.

France will take over the EU-Presidency in the European Year of the Intercultural Dialogue -2008. Unfortunately the developments of the last months in Italy leave the impression that no intercultural dialogue is taking place: racist riots against Roma, massive expulsions of Romanian citizens of Roma origin and racist harassment spread through political discourses. Similar developments in the past have demonstrated that such kind of incidents could take place everywhere in Europe.

Such kind of incidents, accompanied by the evidence that Roma continue facing extreme patterns of social exclusion and discrimination, have led European institutions to show a stronger interest for achieving Roma inclusion. The European Council has encouraged Member States to promote Roma inclusion and has asked the European Commission to review its policies targeting Roma. ERIO welcomes such signals of interest from European institutions what should be reflected in effective policies towards Roma inclusion. ERIO would like to contribute by proposing recommendations to the French EU-Presidency for promoting policy intervention in areas of urgency for EU institutions and national governments.

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. The ultimate goal of ERIO is to contribute to the eradication of racism, discrimination and social exclusion faced by the majority of Roma in Europe.

European policies towards Roma

ERIO welcomes that the European Parliament, European Commission and European Council, have been addressing the problems of social exclusion faced by Roma throughout Europe. Although ERIO recognizes the commendable efforts of the European Commission for promoting the inclusion of Roma, we stay in the middle of a rumbling road towards this goal. The lack of coherence in the EC policies targeting Roma is reflected in the lack of complementarity between them and in the poor outcomes achieved till now despite of considerable investment and in the absence of Roma targets in many programmes and instruments. Although ERIO recognizes that the main responsibility lies in the Member States, this should not mislead discussion on responsibilities which have to be assumed by European institutions. The improvement of EU policies targeting Roma is of main importance for the inclusion of Roma. In order to achieve this goal, ERIO calls upon the French EU-Presidency:

- To encourage the European Council to demand from the European Commission to develop and implement a European Framework Strategy towards Roma communities. Such kind of Strategy should include long-term objectives with clear targets, measurable indicators and benchmarks. The establishment of a task force on Roma, as was already suggested by the European Commission, external monitoring mechanisms and channels of consultation with the European Roma Civil Society should be also included.

Freedom of movement

The freedom of movement is a human right acknowledged in the Charter of Human Rights and as one of the basic rights of the single area of the European Union. Nevertheless, the right to free movement of many citizens of Roma origin is systematically limited. Some Member States prefer to choose a restrictive interpretation of the EU legislation possibility to expel EU citizens. Similar has been the recent case in Italy where mass expulsions of Romanian citizens of Roma origin have been taking place. Such approach is in conflict not only with international human rights standards but also violates fundamental rights and the principle of equal treatment stated in EU Charter of Human Rights and EU Directives regulating the free movement within EU. Roma should be treated as other EU citizens in the exercise of their right of movement. In order to achieve this goal, ERIO calls upon the French EU-Presidency:

- To encourage Member States to respect the principle of equal treatment and the European standards for free movement by interpreting the relevant legislation in a way which ensures that EU citizens exercise their rights to free movement. Member states should also to take into consideration the relevant case law of European Court of Justice.

Migration and integration

The racist riots against Romanian citizens of Roma origin in Italy have put again Roma communities in the headlines of the European newspapers. The current public and political debate has strengthened a picture of Roma as immigrants, without considering that most of the Roma coming to Western European countries are EU citizens. This should be stressed here. These Roma citizens fall in a grey zone. On the one hand, they are addressed with security measures put in place normally for Third Country Nationals, being limited especially in their rights of free movement. On the other hand, they are mostly not entitled to access to integration programmes for immigrants because they are EU citizens. Most of Roma migrants in Western European countries, both EU citizens and Third Country Nationals, are facing poverty, social exclusion and discrimination. The legal and institutional instruments should be guaranteed to ensure the inclusion and equal treatment of Roma, EU-citizens and Third Country Nationals, living in Western European countries. In order to achieve this goal, ERIO calls upon the European French Presidency:

- To encourage Member States to provide Roma people with all the necessary means for facilitating their integration into the host societies. Roma, EU citizens and Third Country Nationals, should have unrestrictive access to integration programmes. Such integration programmes should be designed by a way that the particular needs of Roma communities are taken into consideration.
- To encourage the European Commission to develop and launch a Green Paper on Education and Migration which addresses the needs not only of migrants but of minority children as well. Most of Roma children are facing in their countries, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, the same barriers and even worse than those which migrant children face in Western European countries.

Refugees and asylum

The situation of Roma refugees in Member States coming from former Yugoslavia, especially those from Kosovo is alarming. In many Member States, they cannot exercise their basic civil rights, and are often barred from working or following higher studies. In addition to experiencing social exclusion in asylum countries, Roma are often threatened or forced to return to their countries of origin despite the fact that conditions are still far from adequate for return. The human rights of asylum seekers, also of those of Roma origin, should be guaranteed according to international treaties of human rights. In order to achieve this goal, ERIO calls upon the European French Presidency:

- To call upon Member States to take active measures to halt expulsions and forced returns of Roma from the former Yugoslavia as far as the situation remains dangerous for them in their countries of origin or if conditions are inadequate for their safe return.

- To call upon Member States to simplify bureaucratic procedures defining the legal status of Roma refugees in host countries. They should be given the opportunity to stay in the host country if no legal obstacles are in place. National policies should ensure their integration into the host country's society. The legal provisions applied for refugees and foreigners should always respect the principle of non-discrimination.

European Social Policies

The fact that over 71 million people are living in poverty in Europe evidences the urgent need of reshape and implement properly policies and legislation for eliminating social exclusion and poverty. Most of Roma are living in poverty throughout Europe. The European Commission is drafting a renewed Social Agenda which should address the challenges of socio-economic changes taking place in Europe. Unfortunately, the priorities set up by the European Commission in the Communication COM (2007) 726 "Opportunities, access and solidarity: towards a new social vision for 21st century Europe" reflects the assumption that European and people residing in Europe are living in a society of full employment. Constraints of the globalised free markets which lead to systemic unemployment and the social consequences of this are not taken into consideration. No strategic goals towards social inclusion of the largest parts of Roma who are facing extreme patterns of poverty and discrimination are outlined. For achieving Roma inclusion the urgent needs of Roma communities should be met. In order to achieve this goal, ERIO calls upon the European French Presidency:

- To call upon the European Council to adopt a Communication on the Social Agenda which acknowledges realities of people, as the largest parts of Roma, facing social exclusion, poverty and discrimination throughout Europe and, correspondingly, which sets up the vision for a Europe guided by the principles of solidarity, equal treatment and non-discrimination.
- To call upon the European Parliament to approve a Resolution on the Social Agenda in line with principles of solidarity, equal treatment and full respect of fundamental rights and calling up to Member States to design and implement social policies towards the inclusion of the most disadvantaged groups.

Intercultural Dialogue

France is taking over the EU-Presidency in the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue-2008. ERIO welcomes this initiative of the European Commission and hopes that it will contribute to promote a societal dialogue between equal partners. Roma, as other disadvantaged groups facing social exclusion and discrimination, are not equal partners in this intercultural dialogue. Furthermore, Roma culture is seen almost everywhere as an inferior culture. 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 majority societies. In order to achieve this goal, ERIO calls on the French EU-Presidency:

- To call on the European Commission and Member States to ensure that the promotion of intercultural dialogue feeds in European and national policies as a proper follow up of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue-2008. Such policies should promote a dialogue fostering the inclusion of people who are excluded from a societal dialogue and should be directed at empowering Roma who do not have the opportunity to participate as equal partners in the intercultural dialogue.
- To call on Member States to focus on intercultural dialogue in the Open Method of Coordination in the field of Culture. The involvement of Civil Society Organisations in the OMC – Culture should be ensured as well.
- To encourage Member States to promote Roma culture through the establishment and consolidation of Roma cultural centres. To encourage the European Commission to support and fund projects promoting Roma culture.

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