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Presentation of the report "The situation of Roma and Travellers in the context of rising racism and xenophobia"

**Presentation by John Warmisham (United-Kingdom, SOC),
Rapporteur**

Dear colleagues,

Allow me to start my speech with some hard facts for I believe the seriousness of the situation merits it.

In April this year, a young Roma boy was humiliated and beaten by a man in Bulgaria, because the Roma boy declared himself equal to his non-Roma fellow citizen.

A mayor in Hungary in February had houses of Roma families destroyed in order to build a football stadium and a parking lot, against a court ruling that prohibited these destructions as a violation of the principle of non-discrimination.

In Madrid and Rome, football fans humiliated Roma women by letting them do push-ups for money.

Those are examples of incidents that happen everywhere, almost every day, all over Europe. These examples and many more can be found in the explanatory memorandum. They show that before us lies a long and windy road towards a European society in which Roma and Travellers enjoy equality and dignity.

Colleagues, before I get into the details of the report, I have two points to make:

First, would like to take this opportunity to thank our expert Anna Mirga, a Romani anthropologist, and members of the Ad hoc Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues for their contributions to the report. I am also grateful to the members of the Current Affairs Committee, who have contributed by answering the questionnaire we sent out to gather information.

And secondly, I propose to make a slight change in the resolution by adding a line under paragraph 10. b). You will have already seen the amendment text. The reason I propose to include the phrase "and encourage local authorities to make use of the available social funding instruments to provide special education and vocational training opportunities for Roma and Traveller youth" is that we have to make local and regional authorities more aware of the existing European financing instruments for youth empowerment. This phrase takes into account the comments by my fellow Current Affairs Committee members in June, notably by our colleague Ms. Inger Linge.

[If SG Jagland mentions Roma issues: **I am also grateful to Secretary General Jagland for taking up this cause here today and underlining the importance of the subject.**

Dear friends,

We have before us a new Resolution and Recommendation which deal with the situation of Roma and Travellers in the context of rising extremism, xenophobia and the refugee crisis in Europe.

The Resolution calls for local and regional authorities to intensify their commitment to the inclusion of Roma and Travellers. Many of the things have been said in the Resolution of 2011 already:

- that local and regional authorities have a crucial role to play in the inclusion of Roma and Travellers,
- that local and regional authorities all over Europe are on the forefront for improving the lives of Roma and Travellers be it the access to education, employment, housing or healthcare.

However, one thing still needs to be emphasised more forcefully: the fight against anti-Gypsyism.

Both in the Resolution and in the Recommendation we called for more commitment on the part of local authorities for the fight against anti-Gypsyism.

Why do we have to focus so much on this aspect, you may ask?

The answer is quite simple: Anti-Gypsyism is the one of the most disruptive reasons that hinder the improvement of the situation of Roma and Travellers in Europe.

Anti-Gypsyism was not only the motivation for the incidents I described to you earlier. Anti-Gypsyism also has far more, wider-reaching ramifications.

When a mayor does not want to access funds for the improvement of roads or sanitation systems in a Roma neighbourhood because of fear he or she might not be re-elected: that is anti-Gypsyism.

Or when authorities do not make an effort to register newborn babies, who then grow up without identification documents and never can register for education, social welfare, employment assistance and so on... this form of making citizens stateless within their own states is structural discrimination and another form of anti-Gypsyism. The list of examples continues endlessly.

Colleagues,

This is the reality of Europe and it had been a problem for Roma and Travellers long before the refugee crisis began in 2015. Just as xenophobic stereotypes, policies and attacks have existed before the refugee crisis, anti-Gypsyist stereotypes, policies and hate crimes have existed for hundreds of years. However, it seems that since 2015, the situation is getting even more difficult.

What impact does the refugee crisis have on the inclusion of Roma and Travellers in Europe? Not only has the crisis led to a political radicalisation. Populists all over Europe are on the rise and fuel all forms of hatred against religious groups such as Muslims and Jews, or vulnerable groups such as refugees, homosexuals, or Roma and Travellers.

Also, there are concrete signs for a demotion of Roma and Traveller inclusion efforts. As some of the respondents to our questionnaire has argued, it is getting harder to obtain funding and support for Roma and Traveller inclusion projects, because the integration of refugees has now become a political priority. The de-prioritisation of Roma and Traveller inclusion is real and it is threatening the social cohesion.

The question now is: What is the answer to these challenges? It is rather simple: Everybody has to play their role. 36 out of our 47 member states of the Council of Europe, a majority of them, have developed comprehensive Roma inclusion strategies and several have included the regions in the preparation and implementation of these strategies. These promises need to be kept and implemented.

In 2011, the Congress has called on local and regional authorities to accept the challenge to make Roma and Traveller inclusion at the local and regional level a reality. In 2014 the Congress issued its Resolution on political participation of Roma youth, which is necessary to ensure the voices of the most vulnerable are heard in local politics.

And, finally, I am coming back to the fight against anti-Gypsyism: Every local councillor, mayor and governor, and also MP, MEP, prime minister and president, needs to understand that playing on anti-Gypsyism is harming individuals, the community and society. Every statement against Roma and Travellers is a step back in the struggle for a society in which we live together in dignity and equality.

Dear colleagues,

We need to fight anti-Gypsyism on all levels. I ask you to join me in this fight and to put the Congress on the forefront of a group of local and regional authorities in Europe against stereotypes, discrimination and hate crimes.

Within the framework of the Council of Europe and of the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Inclusion of Roma and Travellers, we can make a difference in the political culture. Only when anti-Gypsyism is no longer a legitimate means to gain votes - only then can we move forward.

Colleagues, I invite you to adopt the draft resolution with the amendment as proposed.

Thank you.