

Esteemed Panel, Secretary General, Mrs. President, Madam Secretary of State, Senator, dear colleagues,
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Sau

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Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honored to stand before you today as woman politician, in a world where being a woman is not a political advantage – quite the opposite. And yet, I am one of the 90 women elected to Parliament in 2016, less than 20% of the 465 MPs representing *all* Romanian citizens. Our voices are still weak while other are missing altogether. The effective representation of women as a diverse, heterogeneous group, with complex interests and needs, is still an aspiration. Even more so for Roma and Traveller women, whose public and political participation continues to be extremely limited.

As a society, when we speak of Roma women we typically discuss the symptoms of the multiple discrimination and prejudices they face: we speak about their limited access to education, high drop-out rates, early pregnancy, early or forced marriage, low skills and limited participation in the labour market, we speak about health risks, exposure to violence and human trafficking... and countless other problems that Roma and Traveller women unfortunately have to face. But we seldom speak about Roma women as agents of change, as leaders and role-models, as women who can effectively drive social progress through their action. We seldom speak about their right to an equal representation.

We need to fill this gap.

we need a strong vision and the strategic approach set out in the Council of Europe's Thematic Action Plan on the Inclusion of Roma and Travellers. Our pledge today is a key action towards empowering Roma and Traveller women and promoting gender equality.

As elected officials, we are privileged. We have the power to **speak out** and **act against** abuse, violence and inequity. We should be the voice of women and girls, children and youth, elders, Roma and Travellers and all other vulnerable groups who lack political representation.

As elected officials, we are also accountable. Our duty is to promote fair and inclusive laws that defend the rights of all citizens. We need to ensure a legal framework for all to achieve their potential and contribute fully to the development of an inclusive and progressive society.

As MP, I chose to focus my efforts in particular on the rights of women, children and minority groups. Me and my team aim to map inequality in a national project so that we'd be able to effectively address problems.

One obvious problem, first hand: none of the 90 women elected to Parliament is Roma. There are MPs representing the Roma community, but no woman among them. Roma women are slightly more present in central and local administration, but remain heavily under-represented in public and political life.

At a policy level, Romania seeks to encourage young Roma to pursue higher education by affirmative measures. Not enough for Roma women and men to build both personal and professional capacity, to take action and represent their communities.

We need to build stronger political support from Roma and non-Roma colleagues, men and women, to ensure a fairer representation of all our citizens.

Mobilizing resources, creating alliances and networks that support and advance women's public and political participation - these are key actions for the effective participation of women in public and political life. It is deeply satisfying to be surrounded by more and more women, fellow politicians, who cultivate - through their actions, a political culture that is more respectful, inclusive, fair, and competence-driven.

Dear colleagues,

My message to all of us here today is that women politicians need to stand together in solidarity, regardless of their political affiliation. We need to create joint opportunities and act as role-models that enable diverse participation. We have the ability and responsibility also to empower other women to stand for elections and represent their communities.

We need opportunities to build women's capacity for meaningful political engagement. We need support structures and platforms for social dialogue. We need solidarity among ourselves, women politicians, and our male colleagues. And we need commitment.

Dear colleagues,

We are here to act. I am happy to see so many distinguished guests and colleagues representing political parties in the Council of Europe Member States. I am honored to support the Council of Europe's pledge to promote a balanced participation of women and men, particularly Roma and Traveller women, and other ethnic minority groups in the next European, national, regional and local elections.

I am fully committed to initiate and support inclusive laws and policies that enable the participation and representation of women in political and public life. I look forward to our discussions, and most of all, to our joint actions that are bound to improve Roma and Traveller women representation. I am eager to transpose best practices into Romanian legislations and I would very much appreciate your help and suggestions of ways we can ensure full and effective inclusion of Roma and Travellers, as set out in the Thematic Action Plan on the Inclusion of Roma and Travellers.

Thank you.