

Seminar with national specialised bodies to combat racism and racial discrimination

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Interview with Christian Jura,
President of the Romanian National Council for Combating Discrimination
(NCCD)

New specialised body to find local solutions to national problems: the Romanian National Council for Combating Discrimination

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Significant progress has been achieved in Romania in the field of combating discrimination during 2003, we are told by Christian Jura, the President of the recently established Romanian National Council for Combating Discrimination (NCCD). As a new specialised body with large social responsibility, the Council is a very important initiative from the Romanian government in addition to the innovative and wide-ranging anti-discrimination legislation. Christian Jura emphasises the long-term nature of the anti-discrimination work and advocates locally tailored solutions to national problems, most notably the situation of the Roma community.

Question: In 2002 ECRI held its Round Table in Romania and published its 2nd report on Romania, which emphasised the need for implementation of anti-discrimination legislation and the climate of public opinion as the issues of particular concern. How would you assess the developments that took place since?

Christian Jura: The National Council for Combating Discrimination was established in August 2002 but it was only after ECRI Round Table in Romania in December that our organisation really started functioning. According to the European Commission progress report 2003, Romania is the only candidate country to have a specialised body for hearing and sanctioning discrimination acts. This year we have so far sanctioned 35 cases of discrimination with penalties ranging from fines to warnings. Also in 2003 we received more than 400 petitions in comparison to 150 cases in 2002. We have the power to conduct investigations and we have already conducted 15 investigations into the cases of discrimination sent to us. As the president of this new body with a great social responsibility, I am proud of the progress we have achieved in one year.

Romania already has extensive anti-discrimination legislation, which covers most fields including the right to personal dignity. We are also expecting some changes in our anti-discrimination legislation as the new government intends to improve regulations concerning direct discrimination, mediation procedures and powers to conduct investigation.

Question: What role did ECRI general policy recommendation No. 2 on specialised bodies to combat racism and discrimination play in defining the mandate and responsibilities of your institution?

Christian Jura: The decision to establish NCCD was made by the government already in 2000 but the Council was not established until 2002. I am not aware whether the working group responsible for establishing the Council took into consideration the ECRI recommendation No.2 but I can assure you that it will certainly be taken into consideration now when we are about to reform our institution. We are already working on relations with civil society and view NCCD as an open-ended forum for discussion and cooperation with NGO's and social partners. We also designed a special university program in order to disseminate information with participation of 15 Romanian universities. Also, on the basis of the recommendation No. 2 we created a network of local partnerships outside the capital, where NCCD is located. Since we have different problems in different parts of Romania, there is a need for specially tailored solutions rather than a nationwide approach. This is why local partners are very important in creating an effective system for combating discrimination.

Question: Do you expect to see any noticeable improvements in the condition of the Roma/Gypsy minority in Romania in the near future and if so, what do you see as the potential driving force for the change?

Christian Jura: The situation of the Roma is a complex problem not only for Romania but also for other European countries. It is very important to find integrated solutions for the Roma covering different fields as opposed to finding generalised solutions. In Romania, we have a generous legal and administrative framework for the Roma including a national institute for improving the situation of Roma, special committees within the different ministries and a national office for Roma. We also have a good level of cooperation with the Roma NGO's, which are quite numerous in Romania.

The Roma community in Romania is far from being homogenous; there are some major contradictions inside the community. Major division lines within the community concern the subject of education, where some want to follow the Hungarian model of separate schools and others favour same-schools policy; and the choice between "positive discrimination" practices and equal opportunities policy.

Combating discrimination is just one aspect of the fight for improving the condition of the Roma community. I think improving the situation of the Roma will be a long-term process because you need to change the mentality of our society, clarify the sensitive meaning of "integration" and, once again, find local solutions for national problems.