

Agenda Item 8.3

Dear colleagues,

The Congress sees political participation of Roma as one of the key conditions to full inclusion in the society and a peaceful intercultural cohabitation. However, anti-Gypsyism continues to remain a major obstacle to political self-representation. Many Roma do not run for political offices as they fear to be confronted with racism or hate speech.

But: Only if Roma have a political voice, only if they are represented in municipality councils, and only if they use their political mandate to represent the interests of the Roma communities; only then they can stand up for their rights and fight anti-Gypsyism.

Let me recall the strong statement from the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Thorbjørn Jagland, to mark the International Roma Day last month. Mr Jagland stressed, that over 12 million Roma and Travellers live in the Council of Europe member states but yet their political activity is nearly invisible. In particular he highlighted that it is even worse when one has a look at the percentage of women in elected positions: At all levels of government the number is close to zero.

This must change. Political parties can and they should take measures to encourage Roma and Traveller women to enter the world of politics. They need to address gender bias and change their party structures to remove barriers. But meanwhile it is also the responsibility of local and regional authorities to encourage and support Roma to become politically active and visible.

We as the Congress encourage municipalities to form structures for political participation for example in our national Roma networks. Moreover the topic is addressed in the Declaration against anti-Gypsyism: The mayors who sign the Declaration commit themselves to strive for the fair representation of Roma and Travellers at all levels of democracy.

As I already announced earlier in this meeting, until today 100 elected representatives from all over Europe have signed the Declaration and committed themselves to the support of Roma candidates. Please help us to disseminate the Declaration in all member states. Let us try to raise, double or even multiply this number until the next CAHROM meetings.

Thank you,