



Statement by Mr Jeroen Schokkenbroek
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for Roma Issues

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First of all, I should like to thank Mr. Rudko Kawczynski, President of the European Roma and Travellers Forum, for his kind invitation to speak in this Forum.

I will explain to you in more detail some aspects of our current activities mentioned before by our Secretary General.

The aim of the **European Roma Mediators Training Programme (ROMED)** is to consolidate the existing training programmes and more effectively use existing Council of Europe resources, standards, methodology networks and infrastructure, in close cooperation with national and local authorities. The objectives are to promote real and effective intercultural mediation, to ensure the integration of a rights-based approach, to support the work of mediator by providing tools for planning and implementation of their activities.

The programme does not foresee to hire directly these mediators, but to mainstream the Council of Europe approach into their practices and policies. We have contacted mediators already working on the ground, most of them Roma, with experience in mediation and social intervention. These contacts were also facilitated by the support of the ERTF, as was mentioned before by the Secretary General.

The programme intends to highlight the value of the work of mediators and enhance their effectiveness, fostering a stronger implication of local and regional authorities in addressing the situation of the Roma population living in their areas. That is why we are in contact with these local authorities, which have to play an important role in this process. In a mid-term perspective, we want a deeper commitment of these authorities and to improve the communication between the Roma communities and the people responsible for policies regarding education, health, housing and social affairs.

The programme is based on four phases: a first round of four days training, which includes a one day joint session with local stakeholders, in order to reinforce the aforementioned links and to give visibility to the work of the mediators.

The second phase consists in six months of practice, to implement the approaches and use the tools and skills introduced during the training in the mediators' daily work. Local stakeholders and national Focal Points will provide support. The role of Focal Points is crucial for the implementation of the programme. They will support the work of the mediators and provide feedback to Strasbourg about their experiences.

The third step is a second round of training of 3 days, focusing on a review of practical activities implemented.

And finally, an evaluation meeting will be held to review achievements and define follow-up and policy responses.

Roma organisations are playing a key role in this programme. They are providing support for the implementation of the programme at local level, feedback and suggestions to the focal point, and contributing to the evaluation process and the identification of suggestions for policy adjustments.

Until now, the first in-country training sessions have been held in Kosovo, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria and Moldova, and other countries will follow before the summer.

Another important feature of our follow-up to the Strasbourg Declaration is the **training programme for lawyers**. As you know, protection of human rights is a core mission of the Council of Europe.

The Organisation has developed key legal human rights instruments such as the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Social Charter with European protection mechanisms which are of direct relevance to the rights of Roma people. However, both experience and principle tells us that human rights protection is most effective at national level. It is much more effective and faster to solve cases of discrimination at domestic level. Our training programme seeks to improve the capacity of lawyers to argue cases of discrimination and other human rights violations against Roma people before national courts.

Another activity that we are conducting is the setting up of a **European database of good practices concerning the social insertion of the Roma** in the member states. We know that there are many projects, tools, and didactic materials across Europe that have proven to be effective in many fields: projects to promote the access of Roma to the education system and to the labour market, to facilitate their access to the healthcare and social services, and to improve their living conditions, especially regarding housing.

The idea is that we don't need to reinvent the wheel. If we can disseminate already existing practices and projects across Europe, we will help practitioners, Roma NGOs, and local stakeholders to adopt these projects to their needs. The database aims to include all those practices, and we will address a wide range of already existing sources in order to collect such information, including the ERTF and other Roma organisations.

I would like to finish with some words regarding the **intergovernmental Ad hoc Committee of Experts on Roma Issues (CAHROM)** which was set up in February.

The Committee is instructed to study, analyse and evaluate the implementation of policies, like the national programmes and action plans, and identify good practices of member states concerning Roma, with a view to promoting implementation of relevant Council of Europe standards and contributing to the aforementioned European database on policies and good practices for the integration of Roma.

This Committee will exchange information, views and experience on member states' policies, good practices and measures relating to Roma at national, regional and local level, and in the context of relevant instruments of the Council of Europe, in order to assist member states in the development and implementation of

the effective policies for Roma integration. It is important to bear in mind the specific situation in each member state.

The Committee will prepare recommendations, advice and opinions for the Committee of Ministers, including ad hoc opinions on emerging issues requiring urgent attention, and will draw up guidelines for the development and implementation of policies which promote the rights of the Roma, taking into account the findings of the relevant monitoring and other mechanisms of the Council of Europe.

The Committee will seek synergies with the work of other international organisations active in this area, in particular with the European Union which is currently developing its own framework document on Roma integration.

As the Secretary General said before, the ERTF has been given observer status to the CAHROM. I think that this is an excellent opportunity for the ERTF to make the voice of the Roma community heard and I encourage you to take an active part in this important new body, by participating in the discussions with your comments, ideas and proposals.

More generally, I believe that all the different activities I have mentioned provide very good occasions for the ERTF to give input. Be assured that I myself and my team would warmly welcome such strengthening of our cooperation.

Thank you very much.