

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

High Level Conference
"Empowerment of Roma Youth as a Driving Force behind Change"

Bratislava, 10 October 2016

Distinguished Ministers, Secretary of States, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

For the last year I also felt what the Commissioner Jurova said she feels. I saw that problems are very serious and extremely complex and expectations are very high and not at all easy to fulfil. The pressure on people that work on Roma issues in bureaucracies is high and not always fair – I know this because I was among the ones that did exert lots of pressure. I found out on my own skin that powerlessness and frustrations are not things reserved for the civil society alone.

Here some of the reasons for this frustrations - Slides 1 to 23.

But I am very hopeful. I think we are in a better situation than we were ever before. The opening panels of Roma conferences years ago were at the level of directors of departments and if lucky at the level of secretary of states. Nowadays deputy prime ministers and ministers is the expected level. We have a much bigger number of Roma in decision making positions and significantly more investments made targeting Roma inclusion.

Pragmatic and focused actions work. Identifying correctly the core of the problems will let us find the right solutions. We have some very good examples.

Children born without an identity will end up being youth without an identity. No IDs usually translates into broken futures.

We can solve the ID papers problem. We have almost done it in Romania and in less than 4 months.

The most important development phase for children's brains is between 0 to 3 years old. Children that have limited stimulations, are poorly nourished and live in poor condition will struggle with sickness and their brains will develop at a much slower rate than other children. They will start with a gap that most probably will just increase during their childhood and teenage years.

There are many countries in Europe that developed very innovative and efficient solutions that solved these problems. Sensorial rooms and methods to attract mothers of young children to kindergartens that have such rooms are not hard to design and extremely cheap compared with the costs of having generation after generation of uneducated children that end up at the margins of their societies. School mediators and health mediators can also be of great help if managed properly. We at the Council of Europe have some very good experiences and some important lessons learned within our ROMED program.

Every child in kindergarten law in Romania is expected to at minimum triple the number of Roma children in kindergartens. Children that went regularly to early childhood education have a lot lower rates of drop-outs from schools. Their families are a lot less likely to leave their communities for uncertain futures abroad.

ROMACT which together with ROMED are our flagship programs- are models of great cooperation between European Commission and Council of Europe and they show great potential. The cooperation among local administrations, Roma and non-Roma experts and Roma communities have resulted in some of the most interesting initiatives we saw up to this moment.

It is not that hard to make a difference even in some of the most poorest and difficult communities. Washing machines, clothing, shoes, meals, sports facilities, good people that want to make a difference, patience,

accepting that failures are part of success are just a few things that I know from doing it myself that work. Small changes in FEAD structural funds can easily provide some of the above mentioned incentives to many Roma families.

Schools as engines of social inclusion can be the solution of making sure that the youth of tomorrow will not have the same past and therefore the bleak future of too many of our Roma youth today.

We need to work together and coordinate a lot better among all of us what we do. Projects that are financed for 1 or 2 years rarely if ever can have systemic results in the communities. Social inclusion is indeed a long term process but it will be a never ending one if we are not more strategic about it.

We have to have a plan that looks thorough to the entire life cycle of Roma youth if we want results. And we need to work together on it. We cannot have just pre-school education projects without following-up with investments in quality inclusive education for the period of compulsory schools.

On and off initiatives are dangerous as create expectations that will end up not fulfilled. Frustrations and distrust in international funding are some of the very dangerous results.

Yes we do need to invest in helping children and families to pursue education but we also need to ensure that education fits the needs and talents of the children and youth. We need to stop expecting only children to adapt to our educational systems – we need badly to get the educational system to adapt to our children and youth needs.

Within the NEETs, Youth Mobility and Youth Guarantee Schemes -technical schools can be a great solution to address the significant drop-outs of Roma youth. The second chance programs linked to technical schools could allow tens of thousands of teenagers to go back to school and not only get an education but learn a job. Such investments are much better solutions than investments in short term trainings that proved to produce almost no results when it comes to full employment.

In concrete terms we should try a long term pilot of using schools as engines of social inclusion. Based on the achievements and failures of such a pilot we should design our public policies.

We have at the Council of Europe a Roma Youth Action plan and we are preparing a Roma youth academy. We believe that Roma Inclusion Strategy should have a dedicated chapter on youth. We are ready to work with all of you and help with all that is in our powers.

But nothing we will do can work if we do not make sure that anti-Gypsyism stops. Racism goes beyond logic and destroys lives. As long as we tolerate the levels of anti-Gypsyism we see nowadays the chances for our Roma youth to become successful and vibrant contributors to our societies are minimal.

Anti-Gypsyism remains deeply ingrained in our societies. Statements that if said about any other European ethnic group would have led to huge scandals and ends of political careers are in the case of anti-Gypsyism ways to build political careers sometimes in mainstream parties all over Europe.

A European Charter against anti-Gypsyism and for better representation of Roma – including Roma youth open for signature to all political parties could be a common initiative of us – intergovernmental institutions that could lead to progress in fighting anti-Gypsyism.

Last slide – DOSTA Campaign

There are ways to fight effectively anti-Gypsyism. What we are doing in the European football can be extended and I hope all intergovernmental institutions and governments will join our campaign to fight anti-Gypsyism.

Less anti-Gypsyism translates in a much better life and opportunities for our youth and not only for them.

7 years ago I was picking up a child that looked like 8 but was 12. He passed-out due to an overdose. Brought him to a hospital and started working with him. He stayed in school and then he went for high school and I lost contact with him.

Yesterday I met him in a vegetable market in Bucharest. I wanted to buy some fruit for the children in the ghetto I work with in the week-ends. He did not want to take money from me. There were small incentives as those mentioned above that changed completely the life of this young man.

He has a small business and he is doing fine. We can do that for hundreds of thousands of Roma youth. We are ready to work with all of you to do so.

Thank you