



10th Meeting of the European Platform for Roma Inclusion:

"Mutual accountability of all"

Brussels, 29 November 2016

Statement by **Mr Valeriu Nicolae**, Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues

Tensions among intergovernmental institutions and civil society are absolutely normal. This is how it should be. We need each other as there is no better way to achieve progress in a democracy. Certainly the way we interact sometimes is not the most comfortable, the nicest or the most efficient way but, I repeat, there is no better way. Dialogue with civil society is essential.

Everything can be done better and there will always be things that we fail in. As long as we don't give up trying however, we will be fine.

It is true that Roma civil society doesn't have the experience, expertise or financial back-up of the best civil societies out there. We need help to build this capacity, even though we, as inter-governmental organisations, will be criticized more in the short term. Such criticism is sometimes unfair – and I know this as I was one such critic in the past.

But we need to support civil society. There is clearly a shrinking space for Roma NGOs. We have less new Roma activists than we had a decade ago. Funding goes in general against critical watchdog NGOs that are essential to the betterment of the Roma situation.

We also need to coordinate better. Different intergovernmental organisations organise different types of dialogue meetings and we can achieve much better results if we work together on ensuring the coherence and focus of such dialogue meetings. We need to be stronger against anti-Gypsyism and endorse the brilliant declarations of the FRA director.

Nevertheless there has been some good progress, progress that I honestly did not imagine seeing so fast. I can go into detail on why I think there has been progress but here are some brief points:

- Recognition of anti-Gypsyism at the highest levels is unprecedented;
- There have never been as many Roma in decision-making positions as there are now;
- The money allocated to Roma social inclusion is higher now than it has ever been;
- The best tools available yet to advance the betterment of the situation of Roma.

Is this enough? Far from it.

It is hard not to see that the socio-economic gap between Roma communities and the majority population is growing in most cases. We have the most success helping those that are the better off from amongst the most vulnerable, whereas the most isolated and discriminated Roma communities are almost impossible to reach with EU funding, with very little appetite from member States to address this.

The results of FRA's latest Roma research are frightening.

My priorities for my mandate as the Special Representative are outlined in the Council of Europe Thematic Action Plan on the Inclusion of Roma and Travellers approved by the Committee of Ministers. This is not the moment to go through all of it.

However, as we talk here about responsibilities, here are some that I will assume.

Fighting anti-Gypsyism will continue to be the main priority for us. We will promote a review of the Charter against Racism of the European Political Parties that will include a specific reference to anti-Gypsyism.

Regarding technical solutions for member States, we are ready to develop together with them pragmatic solutions meant to have an impact in the lives of Roma communities. Schools as engines of social inclusion built on the progress already made through some of our previous programmes might be a way forward here.

With our experience and expertise at the Council of Europe, we will also help as much as we can with initiatives which aim to help improve Roma social inclusion.

Finally, on a personal level, I will continue spending my weekends in the ghetto of Ferentari working with children that live in some of the direst conditions I know, since responsibility implies not just words but also deeds. Things done in the short term rarely produce results. Long-term approaches are what we need.

We are here to help and we are looking forward to working with all of you in making not just the dialogue better but also the actions better.

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