

CONCLUSIONS
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ECRI ROUND TABLE IN BULGARIA

SOFIA, 24 APRIL 2025

First of all, let me start by thanking everyone for the frank and open, and sometimes emotional, discussions that we have had today. The purpose of this round table was to engage in a constructive dialogue. We can say that this objective has been met today.

ECRI's latest report on Bulgaria served as the starting point for our discussions. We were able to share our perspectives and experiences on different topics in relation to the recommendations made by ECRI in its report.

As it stands today, one of ECRI's two priority recommendations, that is, on increasing the number and scaling up the successful work of Roma mediators in the areas of health, education and employment, has already been implemented.

I would like to sum up key points that emerged from our discussions today:

1. When it comes to preventing and combating hate speech, further steps are needed to implement ECRI's recommendations. In this respect, there are real expectations that the authorities would build on the positive actions taken to prevent and combat antisemitism to address hate speech targeting various groups that are exposed to hate speech, in particular Roma and LGBTI

persons, and that, more generally, resolute action to address racist and anti-LGBTI hate speech will be taken.

2. As regards action to prevent and counter hate-motivated violence, we were pleased to hear that Bulgaria's National Assembly adopted amendments to the country's Penal Code in July 2023, including an explicit mention of sexual orientation as a ground for aggravating circumstances for murder and for causing bodily harm. This partly responds to the recommendation made by ECRI about the inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity in all criminal law provisions addressing hate crime.

3. Concerning hate crimes against members of groups of concern to ECRI in Bulgaria, including against Roma and against LGBTI persons, there are still measures to be taken to prevent threats and violence and to ensure that the perpetrators of such crimes are held accountable.

4. With regard to the equal treatment and inclusion of Roma, positive steps have been taken to increase the number of Roma mediators, in accordance with the two most recent National Action Plans for the implementation of the National Strategy for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of the Roma. Accordingly, the number of Roma health mediators, as well as the number of Roma education mediators, but also the number of Roma labour mediators, increased steadily in recent years. In addition, there have been improvements to the wages of Roma mediators, which also helped to ensure greater job stability, thereby reducing staff turnover and improving recruitment conditions.

The authorities clearly appear to be keen on pursuing these efforts, and this must be welcomed.

That said, there are still steps to be taken to make the necessary changes to the legislation and regulations, to put these changes into practice, and to anchor a culture of equality, inclusion and respect for Roma within the Bulgarian society.

In this regard, I should emphasise that seven out of the 15 recommendations made by ECRI in its report expressly dealt with Roma-related issues. Let me quote one particular recommendation, ECRI's eleventh recommendation, which has a particular resonance for us today:

“ECRI recommends that the authorities protect Roma housing from demolitions that are not in line with the relevant safeguards (such as sufficient notice period, the possibility of legal remedies, and the provision of alternative accommodation) provided for by relevant international texts.”

I will conclude by highlighting the remarkable work done by the Commission for Protection against Discrimination in the organisation of this event and by thanking all participants for their active contribution to the discussions, be they from the central and local authorities, the Commission, the civil society or other actors. A round table without discussions is not a round table.

Finally, on a more personal note, one of my takeaways back home will be what Ms Irina Ilieva, Roma health mediator, said earlier this afternoon:

“A government is strong when it helps the weakest”.

Thank you very much for your attention.