

Dear Mrs Director General  
Dear vice-chairs (of ERTF and MG-S-ROM)  
Dear friends

It is a pleasure to be able to be present at the opening of the Seminar on Teaching Romani. I hope this is not only because our Government has supported the development of the curriculum framework for teaching of Romani, but also because Finland has made minorities and disadvantaged groups her priority in the human rights field in general.

Education has been identified to be a crucial factor in social inclusion by all main actors in Europe, including our own organisation, the European Union and the OSCE. The same conclusions have been drawn also in Finland already a while ago. Therefore the Government of Finland has been happy to support the project on the development of tools to support and foster the teaching of the Romani language.

When Finland joined the Council of Europe nearly twenty years ago there was little understanding of the protection and promotion of minority languages, especially the Romani. The Roma were not too keen either to spread the knowledge of their language in Finland, preferring to keep it as a kind of secret way to communicate between themselves. Since then knowledge and attitudes have developed on both sides, now there are textbooks for teaching Romani which are accessible to anyone. This year the National Board of Education has published a practical guide to schools and municipalities on how to accommodate Roma pupils to normal teaching in pre-school and elementary school levels.

One aspect of the Romani curriculum framework that is especially important from our point of view is that it has been developed with the Roma themselves. Involving Roma in all policies and activities concerning themselves is not only right and in the spirit of the Council of Europe's core values, but also a sound way to ensure effective implementation. This organisation is in the unique position to have a close cooperation with the European Roma and Travellers Forum, which allows for consultations both ways quickly and effectively.

It is a sad fact that learning results of Roma children fall below the national average all over Europe, including our country. The problem has been identified and measures are being taken, but it is a process that takes time. Every child should, from early on in its school career, have confidence in his or her own abilities and possibilities. Teaching the mother tongue, in this case the Romani language can greatly contribute to these feelings of empowerment, which will undoubtedly lead to better results. Moreover, improved linguistic skills help the overall performance in school.

It is of utmost importance that we treat the problem of Roma inclusion on all fronts, be it in education, health, housing or employment. The Council of Europe has done and is doing much valuable work in all these sectors and we promote the use of these results in other fora as well. We could move so much faster if every organisation did not make the same studies and deliberations that have already been accomplished here. It is in this spirit that Finland has chaired the OSCE this year, too. We very much welcome the recent activation of the European Union and look forward to concrete, European-wide policies for Roma inclusion.

The seminar that we are opening today will bring its contribution to the educational side of the inclusion problem. We have now the tools ready and it is time that these results are effectively disseminated to member states so that we get the maximum impact from our initial investment. I think it is correct to speak about education expenditure as an investment as it will produce considerable gains in the future. As the project funded by us is now nearing completion, new proposals for projects in this field should be planned and considered. I believe focusing on disadvantaged minorities serves well the core values and ideas of the Council of Europe.

Implementing the curriculum framework and the European language portfolio as well as making best use of Council of Europe's resources, such as the European Center for Modern Languages, can be part of the solution. It is such small but significant steps that eventually will bring about the full implementation of human rights for all.

In this vein I wish you a fruitful and productive seminar. Thank you.  
Ambassador Ertman