



**Ministry of Foreign Affairs
and International Cooperation**

Undersecretary of State

Sen. Benedetto Della Vedova

Rome, 10 FEB 2016

1152/267162

Dear Commissioner,

I took note of your kind letter, dated January 26, 2016, concerning reports of evictions of Roma families in different Italian Municipalities, in particular Rome and Milan, and I do thank you very much for drawing my attention to this very sensitive and delicate matter.

First of all, I would like to recall “the heterogeneity of Roma and Sinti”. As mentioned in the National Roma Inclusion Strategy, 2012-2020 and in line with the research carried out in 2010 by the Council of Europe, we do acknowledge that “Roma, Sinti and Caminanti people (RSC), living in Italy, are characterized by the heterogeneity of: groups; dialects and specific linguistic varieties; and cultures.

The consecutive rounds of measures, over the years, aimed at the integration, inclusion and the legal recognition of the Roma, Sinti and Caminanti communities as a minority (national or linguistic) underline the complexity of their situation. This *status quo* may be better understood if one takes into account the fact that when considering RSC communities, we are referring to: Italian citizens; citizens from other EU countries, non-EU citizens; foreigners who were granted asylum or subsidiary protection; (*de facto*) stateless people, born in Italy from stateless parents.

Moreover, at present, the RSC communities are not concentrated in a specific area but in a scattered manner, throughout the country. The Roma, Sinti and Caminanti communities fall in fact within the so-called *polythetic* category, consisting of elements being similar in something but with different features; the flexibility of this conceptual structure has allowed, over the years, the insertion in this group of a variety of people, with different cultural backgrounds. Accordingly the word “Roma” refers to a wide range of groups and sub-groups, characterized by a number of similarities, which include language, way of life, cultural traditions, and family organization. Furthermore, it should be considered that over time, the cultural specificities merged with elements of the rest of the population, creating mixtures and irregular forms of life compared to the Roma archetype.

It is estimated that nation-wide there are about 120,000/180,000 Roma, Sinti and Caminanti: half are Italian; and the rest is made up of foreigners, mostly in Italy on a permanent basis. Roma settlements are mainly present in the suburbs of large urban area.

*Mr Nils Muiznieks
Commissioner for Human Rights
Council of Europe
Strasbourg*

As for foreign Roma, Roma from the Balkans live in equipped settlements or benefit from various social housing-related solutions in Rome, Milan and in other Italian Municipalities. Only when problems arise, within the above mentioned equipped settlements, with regard to living conditions, such as criminality, sanitation, social and medical services, local Authorities can order eviction. This always requires formal notice and adequate advance warning.

As for Roma from Romania, they still keep very strong connections with their country of origin, where they periodically go back in order to help their community of origin, also thanks to resources gotten in Italy. They usually live in improvised/spontaneous and/or unauthorized settlements. The latter give rise to many problems, with regard to public order and public health, with very poor sanitation facilities, cases of exploitation of women and children, early school drop-out, and so forth.

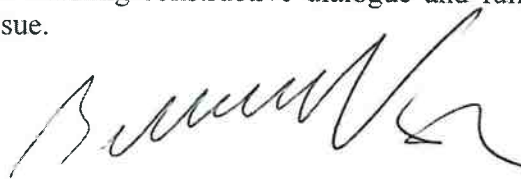
When local Authorities dismantle the above unauthorized settlements, this is done for the very interest of the people involved. They act in full compliance with existing normative framework and procedures (i.e. Art.50, Legislative Decree No. 267/200), and do their utmost, to provide Roma with adequate, alternative housing solutions.

Within this framework, we recall that, between 2013-2014, UNAR as the National Roma Contact Point, issued in Italian and transmitted to local Authorities, the UN Guidelines on Forced Eviction.

As mentioned in Your letter, the National Roma Inclusion Strategy, 2012-2020, was adopted in February 2012. However, budgetary constraints relating to the overall economic crisis and the Stability Pact have impacted on the availability of adequate financial resources.

Against this background, the Italian Government is strongly committed to implementing, with a result-oriented and step-wise approach, each and every commitment and action contained in the above Strategy. In this regard, it is worthy of mention that under the new EU Funds Planning, 2014-2020, for the first time ever, a specific Objective 9.5 has been devoted to Roma inclusion.

The promotion of Human Rights is one of the cornerstones of our domestic and foreign policies. Accordingly, the Italian Government attaches the utmost importance to comply with relevant international, regional and supra-national obligations, commitments and pledges; and I wish to confirm our firm commitment to maintaining constructive dialogue and full cooperation with the Council of Europe on this specific issue.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'B. Berlusconi', is written in a cursive style at the bottom right of the page.