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**Journalism Excellence Awards Ceremony**  
**“Ethical media reporting on Roma and combating racism and antigypsyism through the media”**

**Speech by Michael O’Flaherty**  
Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

Strasbourg, 18 June 2024

Good evening, everybody. It is a great pleasure to be here on the occasion of the Journalism Excellence Awards.

When I was invited to speak, I was startled to realise that this was the first edition. I think that this excellent initiative must continue year on year.

The more I learned about the EQUIROM initiative, the more I appreciated its value. I want to express my deep appreciation to the colleagues of the Council of Europe and of the European Union for putting together this really important project.

Any initiative working **with** the Roma community on the European continent is of high importance. The Roma community – the largest minority in the Council of Europe member states and in the European Union, comprises some 12 million people. They are one of the most important generators of our cultural identities.

So much of what we have, what we know as European, has its origins in the vast and diverse richness of Roma culture and history.

We, including those of us like myself who are not Roma, should take every opportunity to celebrate and to cherish that legacy.

But, of course, we celebrate and cherish this legacy in the context of Europe's great scandal. The scandal of the persistent cross-generations marginalisation of our Roma brothers and sisters.

This is the tragic, sad, avoidable history of harassment, of discrimination, of pushing to the edges, of the direction of hate, of the phenomenon that we call today antigypsyism.

Every bit of it is intolerable and all of it to levels deeply unacceptable across all our societies.

So, what do we do? We have to push back.

How do we work with our Roma brothers and sisters to stand up for their human rights?

Many strategies must interplay at the same time.

One of the most central and important is engaging the media to reject the fake narratives messages and to send powerful signals in support of the Roma community.

Media is vital to any free and functioning society. Media in all its diversity remains absolutely essential to the well-being of our democracies, and they are no less integral to the work with Roma.

There are at least four dimensions to ethical journalism in support of Roma communities.

The first dimension, the essential one, is to inform. It is so important that our engagement be evidence-based: not myth-based but based on actual realities.

Secondly, to analyse. Another vital role of well-informed journalism is to help educate us to understand not just the facts, but what the facts mean.

Third, to guide. Journalism must continue to play a vital role in helping us figure out where to go, by providing facts, analysis, and a way forward.

Last, a very important role of journalism is to make us cross, to make us angry, to galvanise us, to get us off our seats, to inspire us to action and make a difference.

All these dimensions are so well captured in the work of the Prize winners that we are honouring this evening.

To conclude, I would like to suggest six ways in which we can continue to invest in strong, brave, ethical journalism about the Roma.

The first one is to keep the prize. It is a splendid idea that will take its roots and will produce ever greater fruits. So let this not be a one-off event.

Second, continue to enrich and develop the toolboxes to support ethical journalism, including in the context of reporting on Roma issues. We can't just develop a toolbox now and leave it unchanged forever. It must be in constant evolution.

Third, those of you journalists who report on media stories, do not just report the bad stuff. Do not just report the harassment, the discrimination, the antigypsyism. Report on the treasures of the community, report on the enormous cultural diversity of that community and how it feeds into our societies.

Fourth, as you report on Roma's situation, tell the story of the general population, the problem of antigypsyism and that of hatred.

These are not the problem of the Romani community but the problem of our general populations and that story needs to be told. We need to be shamed to change our behaviour.

Fifth, promote journalism in the Roma community. Let's promote Roma journalists so that the community itself plays a central role in the reporting.

In that context, I applaud that one of the prize winners tonight is herself from the Roma community. Finally, my very last word to you is that in this area, as with everything to do with standing up for the human rights of Roma, let those of us who are not Roma never work **FOR** Roma, but always, always work **WITH** Roma.

Thank you.