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NOTE

from : The Presidency
to : COUNCIL (Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs)

**Subject : Advancing Roma Inclusion
- Information from the Presidency
(Any other business item)**

Delegations will find attached a note from the Presidency.

**Advancing Roma Inclusion:
Information from the Presidency**

I INTRODUCTION

Around 10-12 million Europeans, and some 8 million EU citizens, are Roma -- more than the combined population of several Member States. Many Roma live in abject poverty, without proper access to education, health care, housing and employment. There is also growing awareness of the specific problems facing many Roma girls and women, in particular. The social exclusion of Roma is aggravated by discrimination -- sometimes even violence -- and the call for EU policies to support Roma communities has been growing steadily in recent years.

II ACTIVITIES AT THE LEVEL OF THE COUNCIL

Recognising the very specific situation faced by Roma across the European Union, in December 2007, the European Council invited the Member States and the Union to use all means to improve their inclusion¹. In the three sets of Conclusions that it has adopted on this issue during the past three years, the Council has consistently affirmed the importance of policies to advance the social and economic inclusion of Roma², stressing that although the Member States have the primary responsibility for advancing the social and economic integration of Roma, cooperation at the EU level brings significant added value.

¹ Presidency Conclusions 16616/1/07 REV 1, 14 February 2008. See also 11018/1/08 REV 1, 17 July 2008.

² 15976/1/08 REV 1, 26 November 2008; 10394/09 + COR 1, 28 May 2009; and 10058/10 + COR 1, 3 June 2010.

Underlining the need to use existing instruments more effectively, the Council has also highlighted the importance of an integrated approach: given the profound extent of marginalisation faced by many Roma, simultaneous action is clearly needed in the fields of education, health care, employment and housing. Desegregation is also crucial, as is the involvement of Roma themselves in all policies concerning them. The Council has welcomed the Commission's many initiatives in this field, including the recent Communication on "The Social and economic integration of the Roma in Europe"³.

The Council and the European Parliament recently amended the Regulation on the European Regional Development Fund, so as to improve the availability of financial support for housing interventions in favour of marginalised communities, including Roma communities⁴. Hitherto restricted to renovations in urban contexts, the funds in question can in future also be used for the replacement of sub-standard houses in both urban and rural areas and for renovations in rural areas, within the framework of an integrated approach.

In addition, the Council played a role in the inception of the Integrated Platform for Roma Inclusion and welcomed the organisation of Roma Summits under the recent French and Spanish Presidencies. These and other informal events have brought together the various stakeholders, raised public awareness and facilitated the exchange of good practice. The Platform, which has met three times, has developed "Ten Common Basic Principles for Roma Inclusion". The Spanish Presidency recently drew up a Roadmap for the Platform, which identifies key issues and proposes a set of working methods, outputs and ways to disseminate them. The goal is to encourage cooperation between all stakeholders, with the support of the Commission.

³ 8439/10 + COR 1, Council Conclusions on Advancing Roma Inclusion, 7 June 2010.

⁴ Regulation 437/2010/EC. OJ L 132, 29.5.2010, p. 1.

III INITIATIVES BY THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COMMISSION

In March 2009, the European Parliament added its weight behind the developing momentum by adopting a Resolution to enhance the social inclusions of the Roma on the labour market⁵. Moreover the Parliament also added 5 million euros to the 2009 budget for the 2010-2011 project “Pan-European Coordination of Roma Integration Methods” thus backing its declaration with funds.

The urgent need for action is highlighted by the new measures taken by the Commission, which has assigned a Task Force to look into the problems regarding the use of EU and national funds to promote Roma integration.

IV THE BELGIAN PRESIDENCY

The social and economic integration of Roma is one of the key social issues listed by the current Trio Presidency in its eighteen-month programme⁶, and the Belgian Presidency is addressing it in several different contexts. The Belgian Presidency supports an integrated approach to the social and economic inclusion of Roma and has mainstreamed this issue in several high-level events. Roma issues were debated during the Child Poverty Conference, and will be discussed at the Equality Summit and the Consensus Conference on Homelessness. Finally, the fourth meeting of the Integrated Platform for Roma Inclusion will give specific attention to the relevant issues. (For further details, see Annex).

The Belgian Presidency hopes that the mainstreaming approach, together with the specific focus placed on early childhood, can help to advance Roma inclusion in Europe in the long term. Meanwhile, there is an urgent need for practical measures on the ground.

⁵ P6_TA(2009)0117, The social situation of the Roma and their improved access to the labour market in the EU, 11 March 2009.

⁶ 17696/09, Note on the future Spanish, Belgian and Hungarian Presidencies, 18 month programme of the Council, 22 December 2009.

1. Conference "Who Cares? Roadmap for a recommendation for combating child poverty" (2-3 September 2010)

In preparation of the Conference, a document was produced by NGOs, which included recommendations for improving the social inclusion of Roma children in Europe. At the end of the conference, Spain, Belgium and Hungary signed a Trio Statement which strongly called for a Recommendation on the fight against child poverty and child well-being. The Trio also called for quantified sub-targets regarding child poverty in the context of the Headline Target for poverty reduction within the Europe 2020 Strategy. The Trio stressed that it wanted the fight against child poverty to be included as a top priority within the 2020 European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion. The Trio urged the Member States and the European Council, in close cooperation with the European Commission, to *“Give specific focus to children in extreme poverty, especially the most marginalised and those subject to discrimination, such as migrant children, including undocumented children, and children from minority backgrounds, in particular the Roma, and children with disabilities.”*

2. The Consensus Conference on Homelessness (9-10 December 2010)

In preparation of this Conference, a paper will once more be produced by NGOs, which will include recommendations concerning Roma. The issue of Roma and homelessness will be specifically addressed during the Conference, both from a broad academic point of view, as well as as from a grassroots perspective. The ultimate goal of the Conference is to achieve consensus on key issues regarding homelessness in order to pave the way for a European strategy against homelessness.

3. The Equality Summit: "Equality and Diversity in Employment" (November 14-16 2010)

The Summit will discuss non-discrimination and diversity policies, particularly in the light of *Directive 2000/78/EC*⁷ on the one hand, and of *Directive 2000/43/EC*⁸ on the other.

At the Summit, the matter of travellers and Roma will be on the agenda as a cross-cutting issue, to be discussed in four different workshops. The workshop “Diversity and the role of the social partners”, in particular, will examine the best practices developed by individual Member States and how to implement them throughout the European Union.

4. The 4th meeting of the Integrated European Platform for Roma Inclusion (13 December 2010)

The 4th meeting of the Platform will build on the achievements of the 3rd meeting organized under the Spanish Presidency, which resulted in the tabling of a Roadmap for the Platform. In the Roadmap, the key issue of Early Childhood Education and Care has been highlighted. With this context in mind, the Belgian Presidency has chosen the theme of early childhood as the main focus of the 4th meeting. This will offer an opportunity to exchange views and to disseminate best practices and successful strategies (such as the role of mediators), with a view to advancing Roma integration in the context of early childhood.

⁷ Directive 2000/78/EC establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation.

⁸ Directive 2000/43/EC implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin.