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NOTE

from:	General Secretariat
to:	Delegations
Subject:	Situation of the Roma people - Council and Commission statements, plenary session of the European Parliament, 9 October 2013

On behalf of the Council, Mr LEŠKEVIČIUS, President-in-office of the Council and Vice Minister for European Affairs of Lithuania, delivered the statement set out in Annex I.

On behalf of the Commission, Ms REDING, Vice-President of the European Commission, responsible for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship, delivered the statement set out in Annex II.

On behalf of their respective political groups, Ms JÁRÓKA (EPP, HU) expressed concern at the recent increase of anti-Roma statements and actions throughout the European Union, as well as the poor results of social inclusion programmes during the past 20 years. She considered that, following EU enlargement and the subsequent Roma migration within the EU, Western Europe democracies had proved to be no better than those they had been criticising, with their responses ranging from causing tension to evictions and often expulsions. She called for a strong strategy to tackle the marginalisation of the Roma community, which was, in her opinion, the root of social tension and economic migration. Ms JÁRÓKA also stressed the need for a cultural shift among the Roma – from a cluster of closed, defensive and disparate communities to an open, self-aware and integrated European minority.

Ms GÖNCZ (S&D, HU) emphasized that the European Roma integration strategy could produce results only if there was a clear political commitment to combat discrimination. She evoked the situation in Hungary and regretted the situation in Sweden where persons belonging to the Roma community were listed by the police, as had been revealed recently.

On behalf of ALDE, Ms GÖNCZ was supported on the last point by Ms WIKSTRÖM (SE), who strongly criticised the practice of the Swedish police to record Roma people and considered that this revelation had sent a shockwaves across Sweden and the whole EU and constituted a major legal scandal. Ms WIKSTRÖM called on the Commission to follow carefully the results of the ongoing investigation. She also mentioned the expulsions of Roma from France and Italy and the attacks against Roma in Hungary as examples of systematic violations of the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Ms FLAUTRE (Greens, FR) considered that the EU strategy for Roma integration was very comprehensive, and that there had been examples of successful integration, and criticised inappropriate statements from senior political figures. She called on the Commission to show its commitment on possible infringement procedures.

On behalf of ECR, Mr KIRKHOPE (UK) considered that intra-European migration of Roma communities created serious challenges in the UK, Germany and other Member States. He stressed that integration was absolutely paramount for the long-term benefit of the migrant Roma communities, as well as of the countries which were receiving them, and asked the Commission to be active in this area and to address also the concerns of the non-Roma population.

Mr GUSTAFSSON (GUE, SE) expressed his indignation that a whole group of people were treated as criminals, discriminated, recorded, deported and displaced. He said that he was ashamed of what had happened in Sweden, where the police had registered nearly 5000 people, including 1000 children, who had never committed a crime, but only because they were Roma. He drew particular attention to women and girls' vulnerability. Mr GUSTAFSSON expressed concern at the discrimination against Roma which continued in EU countries, and shared the Commissioner's view that political will in Member States was needed to stop discrimination against Roma.

Mr NUTTALL (EFD, UK) shared his experience of visit of a Roma camp in Bulgaria and said that many Roma people would leave after 1 January next year, and would head to the UK. He said that there were gangmasters within the Roma community who forced children to work as everything such as pickpockets and prostitutes, that this was already happening in other European countries and in January it would happen in the UK as well. He stressed that there would be a backlash, and UK government would not and cannot do anything about it because of the European Union's laws. Mr NUTTALL considered that the best way to help Roma people was not to export them round Europe and that it was for their own national governments to take the necessary measures for their integration.

Mr STOYANOV (NI, BG) criticised the approach of left-wing MEPs and especially the French socialists and called them to integrate Roma in their own country. He made reference to deportations and called for more attention to be given to this issue in future.

Individual speakers made interventions in the same spirit as those of their political groups. Several MEPs from countries facing difficulties on Roma integration took the floor - Ms MATHIEU (EPP, FR), Ms GUILLAUME (S&D, FR), Mr ILCHEV (ALDE, BG), Mr PREDA (EPP, RO), Ms CRETU (S&D, RO), Ms CORAZZA BILDT (EPP, SE), Ms HEDH (S&D, SE), Mr SOGOR (EPP, HU). Differing interpretations were given in relation to the current situation concerning Roma, i.e. in Sweden, and a number of questions to individual speakers were raised.

In her closing remarks, Ms REDING stressed that Roma were human beings and EU citizens and, as such, they had the same rights and the same obligations as other citizens. She considered that, in order to help Roma to solve their problems, politicians throughout the EU, be they European, national or regional, had the same obligation to give a helping hand as they had towards all EU citizens.

Responding to questions, Ms REDING said that efforts were needed at European, national and regional level in order to insure that all funds dedicated to programmes for Roma people reached their target. She stressed the important role of mayors in this respect and the need for them to be helped in the integration of Roma people. She also considered that more emphasis was needed in dedicating money from the social funds to poverty and integration. Referring to the meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Council the previous day, Ms REDING said that the question of free

movement and non-discrimination directives had been on the table and that she asked everybody not to confuse immigration with free movement, which is one of the most cherished rights of all European citizens. Ms REDING called for an end to stigmatising citizens because they were from another ethnic background and stressed that, concerning free movement, this was not utilised enough by citizens. She considered that there would not be an influx of Roma on 1 January 2014. She expressed her shame at some of the remarks made during the course of the debate.

Mr LEŠKEVIČIUS closed the discussion by stressing once again that all ethnic groups, including the Roma, were protected by the EU Anti-Discrimination Directive that prohibits discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin in a number of areas, including conditions for access *inter alia* to employment, training, social protection and education. He recalled that the directive also included a positive action clause that allowed Member States to adopt specific measures to prevent or compensate for disadvantages linked to racial or ethnic origin. Mr LEŠKEVIČIUS recalled the Council's readiness to continuing the cooperation with the Commission and the Parliament in this important area.

**Statement of Mr Vytautas LEŠKEVIČIUS, Vice Minister for European Affairs of Lithuania,
on behalf of the Council****9 October 2013**

President, Honourable Members,

I am grateful for the opportunity to address this important issue. The situation of the Roma people is a human crisis. Millions of our fellow EU citizens lead desperate lives on the margins, in deep poverty, and without any realistic opportunity of improving their situation. Many of them reside in the poorest regions of Europe. They are the poorest of the poor - frequently forgotten. The Council very much shares the concern of this Parliament over the situation of Europe's Roma, our largest ethnic minority.

The promotion of Roma integration is primarily a matter of social justice. It is not acceptable that any ethnic group be so excluded in Europe in the twenty-first century. Our inability to protect and provide for a minority group risks calling into question our international credibility. It is difficult for the European Union to criticise ethnic injustice on the world stage if we are unable to integrate and protect our own minorities.

But improving the situation of Europe's Roma is also an economic imperative. We cannot afford to waste the potential of so many of our citizens. They have the capacity to offer so much to society and to their own community.

Whilst everyone is born with the potential for self-fulfilment, a child raised in deep poverty has little chance of bringing that potential to fruition. Many of the Roma in Europe today go without essentials such as decent housing, proper education, healthcare and with very little chance of securing employment.

Once entire communities fall into extreme deprivation, whatever their ethnic identity, they can only recover through long-term policies which provide for their social inclusion. That is why we must continue to put emphasis on developing an integrated approach which covers the full range of social issues.

The Council has already expressed its concern at the continuing social problems of the Roma communities, focusing on the four key aspects of education, employment, healthcare and housing. In May 2011 the Council adopted conclusions which established an EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020. This work drew on Parliament's own report on "the EU strategy on Roma inclusion" drawn up by Lívía Járóka, which made a significant contribution to the European Union's work in this area.

The Council specifically called on Member States to pursue objectives in the four areas I have just mentioned, with the aim of closing the gap between marginalised Roma communities and the general population.

President, Honourable Members

Improving the situation of Roma is a vital long-term policy goal. And it needs to involve a wide range of actors. The EU institutions have a vital part to play. The Commission has a particular role to play in monitoring and coordinating our overall approach. But the main responsibility lies with the Member States. The policies for ensuring the social inclusion of the Roma have to be addressed primarily at the national level. It is also crucial that Roma representatives, NGOs and local authorities are all involved in the development of these policies.

Like the Parliament and the Commission, the Council has returned to the issue of Roma integration regularly in recent years. The Council is currently examining the Commission's proposal for a Council Recommendation. This instrument will support the implementation of the national strategies that have been developed within the EU Framework that was put in place two years ago. The Presidency hopes to see the Recommendation adopted in December. I am convinced that this will provide additional impetus to our joint efforts in this important area.

I thank you for your attention

**Statement of Ms Viviane REDING, Vice-President of the European Commission, responsible
for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship
on behalf of the Commission**

Mr President, Honourable Members,

The situation of the Roma people in our continent often leads to emotional and polarising debates. It calls our own definition of tolerance and our understanding of solidarity into question, and it involves us all: the European Union, the Member States, the local authorities, the Roma themselves: each and every citizen.

The vast majority of Roma living in the European Union are European citizens. The European Commission makes sure that the EU legislation is respected when it comes to the Roma, as it is for all other EU citizens too. To that effect we are following the situation in each Member State, in particular with the Directive securing the free movement of persons within the EU and the Directive prohibiting any discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin.

The European Commission is also committed to stopping social and economic exclusion of the most vulnerable of our EU citizens, including the Roma communities, of course, and in this respect, the European Commission has proposed that every Member State commit to do so with measures that are defined at national level, in relation to the dimension and challenge they face, and implemented at local level. The Commission also insists on the need to empower local Roma communities, because social inclusion brings better results when targeted communities are involved in the process.

But the path towards Roma integration is not straightforward, nor can we expect it to be short. There are no quick fixes here, and we know it. Let me recall the Commission's role in stepping up Roma inclusion. We have defined three major difficulties.

First, the lack of coordination between actors promoting Roma integration, in particular across the European Union. That is why the creation of the network of Roma national contact points, which was initiated by the Commission with the strong support of Parliament, has moved us forward in this respect. We finally see synergies among Member States. Similar synergies are taking place among international organisations, with the creation of a coalition of international organisations in which the Commission participates.

Second, the lack of political will from national decision-makers. We have managed to put the Roma issue on the agenda of the Council in 2011 (by 'we', I mean the Commission and the European Parliament, by joining forces on this subject). Following our call for action, all Member States have adopted national Roma integration strategies. Our aim is to keep exercising political pressure and facilitating peer review, while at the same time providing guidance to Member States in that domain.

The third difficulty is the difficulty faced by stakeholders in mobilising the financial means to implement their plans and the commitments made at European and national levels. At national level we are seeing some progress, but we need now to reach out to the local authorities, making sure that they get what they need and that they develop meaningful plans to integrate Roma communities. The Commission is aware of the social and economic challenges that Roma inclusion represents for all local authorities. That is why we have put a lot of effort into facilitating the use of the European Structural and Investment Funds for projects dedicated to Roma integration during the new programming period 2014-2020. In particular, the Commission has set the convincing implementation of the national Roma integration strategies as one of the conditionalities for the delivery of funds. In addition we are leading a dialogue with national and local authorities in order to facilitate exchanges of information on how better to use the funds for Roma integration.

Last June the Commission came with a set of recommendations in order to enhance the implementation of the national Roma integration strategies by the national authorities. This proposal, which is currently being discussed in the Council, gives concrete recommendations to support local and regional authorities, which are the key actors in Roma integration and have been left alone for too long.

The European Commission also recommends facilitating transnational cooperation at regional and local level. Finally, we recommend fighting prejudices by placing particular attention to the protection of children and women.

Next Spring the Commission will report to the European Parliament and to the Council on the impact of the national strategies for access to education, healthcare, employment and housing.
