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**COUNCIL OF  
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



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## **PRESS RELEASE**

3089th Council meeting

**Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs**

### **Employment and Social Policy**

Brussels, 19 May 2011

President

**Mr Zoltán Balog**

Minister of State for Social Inclusion of Hungary

# **P R E S S**

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## **Main results of the Council**

*During this extraordinary EPSCO meeting, dedicated to Roma integration, the Council took note of the presentation by the Commission of its communication on an **EU framework for national Roma integration strategies up to 2020**.*

*It held an exchange of views on the socio-economic inclusion of Roma and adopted conclusions.*

*The Council also endorsed an opinion of the Social Protection Committee on this issue.*

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- Documents for which references are given in the text are available on the Council's Internet site (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu>).
- Acts adopted with statements for the Council minutes which may be released to the public are indicated by an asterisk; these statements are available on the Council's Internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.

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Mr László ANDOR

Vice President

Member

**ITEMS DEBATED****An EU framework for national Roma integration strategies up to 2020**

The Council discussed the issue of Roma inclusion, for which this extraordinary meeting had been convened. It took note of a communication on an EU framework for national Roma integration strategies up to 2020 ([8727/11](#)) that the Commission had issued in response to calls for action voiced by member states and the European Parliament.

The Commission stressed that action must be taken at EU and at national level aimed at a better economic and social integration of Roma, with due respect for the non-discrimination principle and human rights. To that end, all existing legal and economic instruments have to be applied. The Commission will seek to ensure that the strategy is implemented and that the funds available are used properly. It will monitor the progress achieved and report annually.

The Council focused on two questions: how to advance Roma inclusion by means of a comprehensive national approach and how to ensure a more effective use of funds.

It welcomed the framework for Roma integration strategies, and especially the four priority areas - education, employment, healthcare and housing - where gaps between the Roma community and the general population need to be closed. It also underlined the importance of Roma inclusion in the context of pursuing the targets set in the Europe 2020 strategy.

Ministers stressed that Roma are EU citizens, who often face serious social and economic disadvantages, discrimination and exclusion, living in deep poverty, and lacking the opportunities available to other EU citizens. Integrated action addressing the four priority areas is therefore needed.

Stressing the need to design measures in the light of specific national circumstances, ministers highlighted the importance of "explicit but not exclusive targeting" of Roma in the more general context of social inclusion policy. The social and economic inclusion of Roma also entails guaranteeing their legal rights, including those of Roma victims of human trafficking, and promoting the empowerment and participation of Roma themselves.

Ministers pointed out the importance of education and training in ensuring that Roma have equal access to the labour market. Special attention should be given to the rights of women and children. Roma inclusion can also be promoted through the active involvement of Roma associations and social mediators, including at regional and local levels.

Roma inclusion strategies should be mainstreamed within EU and national policies. Most ministers stressed that available EU funds, including the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund, have to be used in a flexible way and that rules should be simplified in order to avoid bureaucracy.

Many ministers argued that the role of the European Platform for Roma inclusion should be strengthened, so as to intensify the exchange of good practices and experience between member states.

The Presidency intends to report the outcome of the various discussions to the General Affairs Council on 23 May and to the European Council on 24 June.

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

**An EU framework for national Roma<sup>1</sup> integration<sup>2</sup> strategies up to 2020 - Council conclusions**

**THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,**

**RECALLING:**

1. that the European Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, as it follows from Article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union and in particular from Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union;
2. the fact that combating social exclusion, discrimination and inequality is an explicit commitment of the European Union as set out, inter alia, in Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union as well as Articles 9 and 10 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union;
3. that Article 19 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union specifically empowers the Council to take appropriate action to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation; the Council has exercised these powers when adopting Directive 2000/43/EC implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin;
4. the Presidency Conclusions of the European Council (December 2007<sup>3</sup> and June 2008<sup>4</sup>); the Council Conclusions on the Inclusion of the Roma (December 2008<sup>5</sup>); the Council Conclusions on the Inclusion of the Roma and the Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion annexed thereto (June 2009<sup>6</sup>); the Council Conclusions on Advancing Roma Inclusion (June 2010<sup>7</sup>); the European Council Conclusions adopting the Europe 2020 Strategy (June 2010)<sup>8</sup> and the Council Conclusions on the Fifth report on economic, social and territorial cohesion (February 2011)<sup>9</sup>;

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<sup>1</sup> The term “Roma” is used in line with the definition contained in the Commission’s Communication (8727/11, footnote 1).

<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of the present Council conclusions, "integration" and "inclusion" both refer to measures for improving the situation of Roma living in the Member States' territories.

<sup>3</sup> 16616/1/07 REV 1.

<sup>4</sup> 11018/1/08 REV 1.

<sup>5</sup> 15976/1/08 REV 1.

<sup>6</sup> 10394/09 + COR 1.

<sup>7</sup> 10058/10 + COR 1.

<sup>8</sup> EUCO 13/1/10 REV 1.

<sup>9</sup> 6738/11.



5. the European Parliament Resolutions on the Situation of Roma women in the European Union (June 2006); on the Social situation of the Roma and their improved access to the labour market in the EU (March 2009); on the Situation of the Roma people in Europe (September 2010); and on the EU strategy on Roma inclusion (March 2011);
6. the Communication of the Commission on the social and economic integration of the Roma in Europe<sup>1</sup>, and the accompanying Staff Working Document "Roma in Europe: The Implementation of European Union Instruments and Policies for Roma Inclusion – Progress Report"<sup>2</sup>;
7. the European Roma Summits which took place in Brussels on 16 September 2008 and in Córdoba on 8 April 2010;
8. the Opinion of the Committee of Regions on the Social and economic integration of the Roma in Europe (December 2010);
9. Regulation (EU) No 437/2010 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 May 2010 amending Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006 on the European Regional Development Fund as regards the eligibility of housing interventions in favour of marginalised communities<sup>3</sup>;

**STRESSES THAT:**

10. despite efforts at national, European and international level to advance Roma inclusion, many Roma still face deep poverty, profound social exclusion, barriers in exercising fundamental rights, and discrimination, which often means limited access to quality education, jobs and services, low income levels, sub-standard housing conditions, poor health and lower life expectancy. This situation does not only affect Roma, but also has an economic cost for society as a whole, including through the waste of human capital and loss of productivity;
11. the size and the social and economic situation of the Roma population are different in each Member State; therefore national approaches to Roma inclusion should be tailored to the specific circumstances and needs on the ground, including by adopting or continuing to pursue policies that address marginalised and disadvantaged groups, such as Roma, in a broader context;

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<sup>1</sup> 8439/10.

<sup>2</sup> 8439/10 ADD 1.

<sup>3</sup> OJ L 132, 29.5.2010, p. 1.

12. the active involvement and participation of Roma themselves is essential for the improvement of their living conditions and for the advancement of their inclusion;
13. the protection of fundamental rights, notably by combating discrimination and segregation, in accordance with existing EU legislation and the international commitments of the Member States, is essential for improving the situation of marginalised communities including Roma;
14. improving the situation of Roma is not only an urgent social priority, but can also strengthen economic growth in the long term; successful inclusion policies will contribute to the Member States' efforts to reach the goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy, particularly the headline targets in the fields of employment, education and social inclusion;
15. the Member States have the primary competence for designing and implementing policies aimed at advancing the social and economic inclusion of Roma, and action taken at the EU level should take into consideration the different national circumstances and respect the principle of subsidiarity. Advancing Roma inclusion is also a common concern and interest of the Member States and the EU, and cooperation at EU level brings significant added value, improving competitiveness, productivity and economic growth, as well as social cohesion;
16. socio-economic aspects, and territorial aspects where relevant, should serve as the main basis for designing Roma inclusion policies in key fields such as education, employment, housing and healthcare, in line with the Common Basic Principle of "explicit but not exclusive targeting"<sup>1</sup> and in accordance with a human rights perspective. Specific measures to prevent or compensate for disadvantages linked to ethnic origin can also be taken;
17. special attention should be paid to the interests and difficulties of Roma women and girls, who face the risk of multiple discrimination, and thus a gender perspective needs to be applied in all policies and actions for advancing Roma inclusion;
18. there is an urgent need to stop the inter-generational transmission of poverty and social exclusion; with this in mind, the situation of Roma children needs to be improved from the earliest possible age in order to allow them to fulfil their potential. Education and training, with special attention to the gender perspective, as well as close cooperation with families have a crucial role to play in this;

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<sup>1</sup> Common Basic Principle 2.

**WELCOMES:**

19. the Communication of the Commission on an EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020<sup>1</sup>, which invites Member States to adopt or develop further a comprehensive approach to Roma inclusion, and encourages them to set achievable national goals in the fields of education, employment, healthcare and housing, as well as to put in place a monitoring mechanism and make existing EU funds more accessible for Roma inclusion projects, in accordance with the size and the social and economic situation of the Roma population living in their territories and taking into account the different national circumstances;

**INVITES THE MEMBER STATES:**

20. to improve the social and economic situation of Roma by pursuing a mainstreaming approach in the fields of education, employment, housing, and healthcare, taking into account, where appropriate, the Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion, as well as by ensuring equal access to quality services, and to apply an integrated approach to these policies and make the best use of the funds and resources available;
21. to set or continue working towards their goals, in accordance with the Member States' policies, in the fields of education, employment, healthcare and housing with a view to closing the gaps between marginalised Roma communities and the general population. Particular attention should be paid to the need to ensure equal access in practice. The goals could focus on the following priority areas, paying special attention to the gender dimension:
- (a) access to quality education, including early childhood education and care, as well as primary, secondary and higher education, with particular reference to the elimination of possible segregation at school, the prevention of early school leaving and ensuring successful transitions from school to employment;
  - (b) access to employment, with particular reference to non-discriminatory access to the labour market, as well as active labour market policies, labour market programmes, adult education and vocational training, and support for self-employment;
  - (c) access to healthcare, with particular reference to quality healthcare including preventive healthcare and health education; and
  - (d) access to housing, with particular reference to social housing and the need to promote housing desegregation, and making full use of the financing that has recently become available in the context of the European Regional Development Fund<sup>2</sup>;

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<sup>1</sup> 8727/11.

<sup>2</sup> OJ L 132, 29.5.2010, p. 1.

22. to prepare, update or develop their national Roma inclusion strategies, or integrated sets of policy measures within their broader social inclusion policies, for improving the situation of Roma, by the end of 2011, taking into account their specific circumstances, as well as to consider the need to advance the social and economic inclusion of Roma when designing, implementing and monitoring their National Reform Programmes in the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy;
23. to appropriately monitor and evaluate the impact of the Roma inclusion strategies or integrated sets of measures as referred to in paragraph 22;
24. to ensure, where appropriate, that available EU funds are used in line with national, regional and local Roma inclusion policies;
25. to identify and implement necessary measures for improving access to and ensuring the effective use of EU funds for the social and economic inclusion of Roma, including, for example, modification of operational programmes, making greater use of technical assistance and improving the predictability of financing by increasing the duration of projects and maximising the uptake of funds;
26. to promote desegregation in all policies and to avoid reproducing segregation, so as to overcome this problem in the long term;
27. to appoint a National Contact Point or use an already existing body in order to ensure effective monitoring of the Roma inclusion strategies or integrated sets of measures as referred to in paragraph 22 and to foster the exchange of good practices and discussions on evidence-based approaches in the area of Roma inclusion policies;
28. to promote the active involvement of Roma civil society and all other stakeholders, including at the regional and local levels, in policies to advance Roma inclusion;

**INVITES THE COMMISSION:**

29. to continue the work of the Roma Task Force, so as to mainstream Roma inclusion within EU policies and assess the role of EU funds in efforts to advance Roma inclusion in the EU as well as in the context of enlargement policy, thereby also fostering the exchange of best practices and contributing to the discussions on the future of the EU financial instruments and their more effective use;
30. to pursue rigorous monitoring of the implementation of Council Directive 2000/43/EC which is a powerful instrument for combating discrimination based on ethnic origin;

31. to appropriately assess the success of Member States' Roma inclusion policies in accordance with their respective approaches, and within existing coordination mechanisms such as the Open Method of Coordination;

**INVITES THE COMMISSION AND THE MEMBER STATES, in close cooperation and in accordance with their respective competences:**

32. to consider mainstreaming the fight against segregation and extreme poverty, as well as the promotion of equal opportunities for marginalised communities, including Roma, across all relevant policy areas, including in the context of the EU funds, and based on clear and verifiable criteria;
33. to ensure that the various EU funds available work together in a more integrated and flexible manner in the future, providing an appropriate framework for integrated, long-term actions for advancing Roma inclusion;
34. to improve the implementation and strengthen the effectiveness of EU funds used in favour of marginalised and disadvantaged groups including Roma, notably through the assessment of results;
35. where appropriate, to identify the main socio-economic factors characterising the territorial concentration of marginalised and disadvantaged groups including Roma in order to map these territories, and use relevant policies to improve the situation;
36. to enhance cooperation between relevant stakeholders in order to facilitate the exchange of best practices and mutual learning regarding evidence-based policies and successful methods, including by extending and improving existing networks and initiatives such as the EU Roma Network and the high-level events organised by the Commission;
37. to strengthen the role of the European Platform for Roma Inclusion, thereby intensifying the exchange of good practices and discussions on national policies between the Member States and cooperation with civil society; to strengthen the role of the Commission in the preparation and running of the Platform as well as in ensuring its continuity; and to ensure that its results are fed into policy developments both at EU and national level;
38. to draw on the experience of international organisations such as the Council of Europe<sup>1</sup> and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe as well as international initiatives such as the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015;

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<sup>1</sup> See, in particular, "the Strasbourg Declaration on Roma":  
<https://wcd.coe.int/wcd/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1691607&Site=CM>

39. to advance the social and economic inclusion of Roma by guaranteeing their legal rights, especially those of Roma victims of human trafficking, by intensifying the fight against human trafficking by making full use of instruments available at the EU level, including the recently adopted Directive 2011/36/EU<sup>1</sup>;
40. to foster positive changes in attitudes towards Roma by improving public awareness of Roma culture and identity and combating stereotypes, xenophobia and racism;
41. to promote the empowerment, active involvement and necessary participation of Roma themselves, at all levels of policy development, decision-making and implementation of measures, including by raising awareness of their rights and duties, as well as to consolidate the capacity of Roma NGOs and encourage the better involvement of civil society and all other stakeholders.

The Council endorsed the Social Protection Committee's opinion ([9618/11](#)), which broadly supports the Commission's communication.

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<sup>1</sup> OJ L 101, 15.4.2011, p. 1.

## **OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**

### **EMPLOYMENT**

#### **Employment guidelines**

The Council adopted a decision approving the employment guidelines of the member states for 2011 ([8340/11](#)). Given that the employment guidelines for 2010 were only adopted in October 2010 ([15184/10](#)), in principle for a duration of four years, the guidelines for 2011 will be maintained unchanged.

The guidelines for the employment policies form one part of the integrated guidelines, the other part being the broad guidelines for the economic policies of the member states. The integrated guidelines contain five EU headline targets, of which three belong to the guidelines for the employment policies of the member states and concern labour market participation, the fight against social exclusion and poverty, and the quality and performance of education and training systems. The member states shall take account of these guidelines in their employment policies.

### **APPOINTMENTS**

#### **Committee of the Regions**

The Council appointed Mr J.F.M. (Hans) JANSSEN (The Netherlands) ([9637/11](#)) and reappointed Mr Henning JENSEN (Denmark) ([9840/11](#)), as members of the Committee of the Regions for the remainder of the current term of office, which runs until 25 January 2015.

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