



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
High Commissioner on National Minorities**

Address by
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OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

to the Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting

**IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACTION PLAN ON IMPROVING THE
SITUATION OF ROMA AND SINTI**

(Dedicated to the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the 2003 OSCE Action Plan)

[CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY]

Vienna, Austria – 8 November 2013

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be here in Vienna today to continue the discussions on the review of the progress made in the implementation of the OSCE Action Plan. Yesterday we already started good discussions on the key findings and lessons learned based on the [Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights] ODIHR's Status Report and today we will continue on what more needs to be done.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the ODIHR and its Contact Point on Roma and Sinti Issues, Mr. Andrzej Mirga and his staff, for their dedication and hard work and for compiling such a comprehensive report, which will help us to focus on more efficient implementation of the Action Plan in the years to come.

I will focus my brief introductory remarks today on some of the trends, developments and remaining challenges. As the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities was also tasked by the Action Plan to take certain measures, I will also briefly reflect on what we have done to fulfil the tasks. Being relatively new in office, I can really only speak of the engagement by my predecessors. At the end of my presentation, I will provide you with some of my initial thoughts on how I see the role of my Institution in addressing these issues in the future.

Let me start by quoting from another report:

“The result of my study, as reflected in this report, indicates the main fields in which action is needed: 1) combating discrimination and racial violence; 2) improving access to and quality of education; 3) improving general living conditions; and 4) increasing the effective participation of Roma and Sinti in public life, especially with regard to matters affecting them.”

These words sound familiar and relevant even today, but they are taken from the foreword of the second report by the first High Commissioner on National Minorities, Max van der Stoep, issued in March 2000. During his tenure, the Institution produced two major reports on the situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE area.

So my first observation is that despite progress in some areas, we are still facing the same challenges and, as the ODIHR's Status report correctly asserts, we have not yet made a breakthrough in any of the policy areas covered by the reports, as it was so well described yesterday.

I am hopeful, however, that today we have the necessary frameworks and tools in place to tackle the challenges more effectively. We have developed strategies and action plans and put legislation in place to combat discrimination and hate crimes in many participating States. For instance, Roma polices are now standard in most participating States. We also have more funding for programmes, as the Status report describes.

What we often seem to be lacking is genuine political will and determination to implement the laws and policies so that they result in real outcomes and an improved situation in reality. Leadership is required at all levels. It is also important to monitor the implementation of laws and policies. The role of independent institutions and oversight mechanisms is crucial in this respect, together with civil-society actors, and in particular, Roma themselves.

Good suggestions were made here yesterday by the keynote speaker, Ms. Liva Jarovka from the European Parliament. One of them was on proper frameworks for consultation. We need to work harder to truly include the Roma and Sinti communities in decision-making at all levels.

I would like to remind you of *The Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies* issued by my Institution last year. According to the Guidelines, "the process of integration can only be facilitated if opportunities for participation are provided to all members of society. Effective participation in public affairs and all aspects of social, economic and cultural life, including of persons belonging to minorities, is both a right in itself and an essential precondition for equal opportunities in practice." These processes should be based on mutual trust and respect for diversity, creating a feeling of security for all in society.

Coming back to the ODIHR Status report, it describes worrying trends of growing intolerance, anti-Roma rhetoric, discrimination, stigmatization and violent acts against Roma. These require condemnation and effective action. Strong and responsible leadership is

crucially important in fighting negative stereotypes and racism. The question I have is do we see enough of it in the participating States and at different levels of responsibility?

As the report points out, we have not yet made breakthroughs in any of the areas where improvements are so badly needed, although in some areas visible progress can be seen. Roma and Sinti continue to face critical problems described in detail in the report. The report also makes recommendations for combatting hate crimes and discrimination against Roma and Sinti, improving housing, ensuring access to healthcare and enhancing participation in public and political life. Ensuring that Roma children are guaranteed an equal opportunity to gain a quality education is a special area of focus in the report. These policy areas are almost identical to the ones identified by Max van der Stoep in his reports, although there have been changes in the context over time.

The Action Plan also tasked my Institution to take certain measures within its mandate on early warning and conflict prevention. It is clear that the lead in the OSCE for the Action Plan is with the ODIHR's CPRSI, as a specialized body with the required expertise. The role of the other OSCE Institutions and structures can only be a complementary one, but there is need for co-operation. The implementation of the commitments taken is, of course, the responsibility of the participating States.

My Institution's involvement on Roma and Sinti issues generally aims to raise awareness in the OSCE participating States of the importance of Roma and Sinti issues in their national minority policies and to advocate for these issues being put on a higher level on national integration agendas. Our aim has been to bring in a stronger perspective of integration and inclusion of Roma and Sinti. These efforts, if successful, can positively contribute to the security and cohesion of society, thereby helping to prevent conflict. The concrete fields where my Institution provides expertise and has offered its assistance are in the fields of civil registration, education, combating racism and discrimination and participation.

As mentioned yesterday, lack of registration and statelessness disproportionately affect Roma and Sinti communities across Europe. The Zagreb Declaration, and the collaborative efforts we have taken together with the European Commission and UNHCR in consultation with ODIHR, and with the participants to the Zagreb Declaration, aims to resolve these issues in

the countries involved. I will continue following up on the implementation of the agreed measures during my country visits.

The education of Roma and Sinti children and youth is an issue of major concern, particularly their lack of access to quality education and the issue of segregation. The problem in many countries continues to be low enrolment rates and high dropout rates for Roma children. We have been active in a number of countries in the effort to improve the inclusion and integration of Roma throughout the education system.

We have also taken part in several field visits and assessments to some of the participating States in the last few years together with the ODIHR CPRSI. This co-operation has proven fruitful and my Institution stands ready to continue this type of activity in the future, as required.

Another example of co-operation is the study on *Recent Migration of Roma in Europe* commissioned by the OSCE HCNM and the Council of Europe Commissioner on Human Rights in 2009.

To conclude, it is my intention to continue the engagement of my Institution to address the problems facing Roma and Sinti in the OSCE region that are within my mandate and where we can add value and be relevant. We can do so during country visits, thematically, or, as in the past, in co-operation with other actors.

I look forward to hearing from you how you see the current challenges and how we could best continue to make progress and improve the situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE region.