

Declaration

The Enlarged Europe - A Common Future for All International Conference on the Roma

Representatives of political parties, non-governmental organisations, policy-makers, scientists and different institutions from across Europe took part in a conference in Bucharest from 10-12 October 2003 organised by the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity, with the participation of the Willy Brandt Programme for Successful Enlargement (PES Group in the European Parliament), and with the active co-operation of the host organisation, the Social Democratic Institute "Ovidiu Sincai".

The conference was held in order to gain a better understanding of the situation of the Roma community, especially in the light of Romania's future accession to the European Union and to discuss what practical solutions can be undertaken, based on the social democratic values of improving the living standards of the under-privileged and promoting and ensuring solidarity between all social and ethnic groups in society, in order to support the Roma in Romania and in the other accession countries.

The participants from Central and Eastern Europe urged those from Western Europe to encourage the use of existing anti-racism legislation to prevent negative stereotyping of the Roma in the Western media. Such actions could lead to an improvement in the conditions of the Roma.

The Conference discussed the visa policies of Western European countries. It agreed that a balance had to be found between the legitimate service for freedom of movement and the need to address genuine public concerns about security. Such a policy balance should seek to address the perception by ordinary citizens in both Western and Eastern Europe that current system is not working.

The conference noted that the government of Romania has taken numerous measures to improve the social, economic and political conditions of the Roma community with significant success in many areas. The conference also noted that the plight of the Roma community is in no way restricted to Romania alone, but is, to different extents, common for many European countries, including existing EU members, accession countries and non-EU members.

The conference noted that the social conditions in which the Roma live are worse

than those of the vast majority of Romanians, that the Roma continue to be victims of discrimination and prejudice, and that this situation has to improve significantly in order for Romania to be able to successfully join the European Union. A major responsibility lies with the Roma community itself, represented by its different organisations and spokespersons, at local, national and international level. The conference declared its readiness, in the presence of these groups, that European social democrats will do their best to help them in their struggle for a better life and social justice.

The participants were of the opinion that the social democratic parties and their governments should develop a coherent policy which associates the social integration of the Roma population and the preservation of its identity, while recognising that this is a European issue which requires European solidarity.

The Conference stressed the importance of direct cooperation and development of solidarity also with Roma women, of education and anti-poverty programs in improving the social and economic conditions of the Roma, enabling real equality of opportunity. It specifically supported to use positive discriminations to achieve genuine social inclusion of the Roma in all aspects of society. Such measures will also help bring to form a new generation of Roma community leaders.

The participants appreciated that it would be worth for the EU to give due consideration to the establishment of a **European Centre for Roma issues** which might:

- i. Initiate and co-ordinate coherent policies concerning the Roma issue;
- ii. Draft legislation and/or frame legislation on Roma topics;
- iii. Monitor and assess the programmes and policies related to the Roma issue;
- iv. Identify and mobilize donors in support of the actual or future regional and local programmes for Roma communities.

The participants called upon to PES and its member parties to give a greater profile to the fight against Roma discrimination as part of their wider and on-going campaigns against racism, xenophobia and gender based discrimination. They asked for the issue to be addressed by the PES in the 2004 European elections.

Specifically, the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity, an umbrella-organisation of many social democratic parties which are members of the Party of European Socialists, declared that it would be open to work with the Roma community, if there were a demand, in its field of expertise: every aspect of political know-how through training and schooling projects, seminars and conferences.

In addition, the Social Democratic Institute "Ovidiu Sincai", the think-tank of the Social Democratic Party of Romania, declared that it would be ready to continue to work specifically on the problems of the Roma, through both scientific research and practical projects, aimed at improving the situation of the Roma in Romania, through different educational and other programmes

The European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity and the Social Democratic Institute "Ovidiu Sincai" therefore declare that we will continue our co-operation in order to advance the aims of the conference, namely a common future in Europe for all, including, specifically the Roma. It is time to start talking to and co-operating with the Roma community instead of discussing the "Roma-issue" amongst ourselves.

Bucharest, 12 October 2003

On behalf of the European Forum for
Democracy and Solidarity:

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Member of the European Parliament,
Vice President of the PES
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On behalf of the Social Democratic
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Adrian Severin
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