

Speech of Dominique Bé
Opening of the High Level Event:
Contribution of EU funds to the integration of Roma
Cluj-Napoca, 14 October 2010

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to speak at the opening of this High Level Event on the contribution of EU funds to the integration of Roma here in Cluj Napoca.

Our discussions today take place at an important time. Recent events have shown that the challenges facing Roma need to be addressed urgently.

We must tackle ignorance, prejudice, racism and violence. The European Commission is fully committed to the fight for equality and economic and social opportunity for all Roma people.

Europe is one of the richest regions of the world. And yet countless Roma live in ghettos or in settlements. Because they are Roma, they do not have the same opportunities as others.

This is unacceptable in a European Union based on solidarity and unity. All Europeans are equal. All Europeans should have access to the same rights and the same opportunities – whenever they live and whoever they are.

We have a collective responsibility towards the 10 to 12 million Roma who make up Europe's biggest ethnic minority.

Roma communities are affected by multiple problems. Inadequate education diminishes young people's economic chances; bad housing conditions often lead to poor health; and poverty prevents people from improving their living conditions.

Many of the areas that require action - employment, education, housing and health - fall under the responsibility of the State. But the EU can also provide support.

Overcoming exclusion requires programmes that are not ethnically exclusive, but do take into account different needs and cultures.

Roma people do not need a separate labour market, or separate schools and they should not be living in ghettos.

EU Funds can help Member States to implement their policies and programmes for the inclusion of Roma.

The EU provides considerable support to regions in need of development. EUR 350 billion - that is ... Lei - has been allocated across the 27 Member States for the period 2007-2013. ... have been allocated to Romania alone.

This is a substantial commitment of resources and effort. And part of this should be spent on initiatives for the Roma community.

Together, the European Social Fund, Regional Development Fund and Agricultural Fund for Rural Development can address some of the most pressing problems for Roma communities.

Every promising programme for Roma inclusion should benefit from EU support.

But these projects have to be done with the Roma communities, not for them. We need to see co-ownership with the local, regional and national authorities, so that Roma inclusion becomes a reality in villages, towns and regions across Europe.

To date, a lot has been said and done in terms of planning, coordination and implementation, but not much has changed on the ground.

We need to be more effective — both in process and in substance.

The Commission just decided to establish a Task force to assess if, where and why funds are not being used or are not being properly implemented for Roma integration. The first findings are expected by the end of the year.

The issue of Roma integration will remain on the EU political agenda.

The EU cannot solve the complex problems facing the Roma alone. We need joint action from the Member States, regions, municipalities and civil society organisations. And we need to see a better use of EU funds for the integration of the Roma.

On Tuesday Commissioner Andor called for commitments by the Romanian authorities and by the Roma community to work together to address challenges in using EU funds for Roma inclusion. The Commission will be monitoring these developments closely in the coming months!

Finally I wish to thank all our Romanian partners for their hard work and commitment in organising this event.

Thank you for your attention.