

"HOW TO BETTER USE EU FUNDS TO INTEGRATE ROMA PEOPLE"

Opening Speech

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European Commission

WELCOME

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning

Jó reggelt kívánok! [/' jo: rɛ g : ɛ lt ki: va: nok/]

- It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to this important Seminar on behalf of the European Commission, which is represented here by three DGs: DG EMPL, DG REGIO and DG AGRI.
- I am delighted to see so many people here. I want to extend a warm welcome to you all. As you know, today's seminar is a very important event, which has been organised by the Commission in close cooperation with the Hungarian Government and Roma civil society with the aim of improving the use of EU Funds for the benefit of Roma.
- The integration of Roma has become a hot issue across Europe with sensitive political, human and economic facets.

OBJECTIVE OF THE MEETING

- This Seminar follows up on **last October's high-level events** here in Hungary. Now that the problems have been identified, practical solutions need to be found.
- Yesterday, the Hungarian authorities and the Roma representatives gave **solid commitments** to addressing the problems. Today's seminar is therefore the first step in the process of dealing with the tangible problems facing the beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries of EU Funds.
- During our discussions today, we will focus in particular on **three** issues, namely:
 - (a) access to information and the question of governance;
 - (b) the capacity of the applicants and beneficiaries to apply for support and manage projects; and
 - (c) the financial procedures involved in the implementation of projects.
- I am delighted to welcome the experts from **other Member States** present, who will contribute their experience in dealing with these issues, and I wish to thank them warmly for being here today.

GENERAL EU CONTEXT

- This Seminar is well-timed from a broader European perspective. The Commission plans to issue its proposals on the **budget review** sometime next month. So critical discussions are about to start on the European Union budget for the next multi-annual financial framework. Given the limited resources available, we need to ensure that the EU budget's priorities are in line with our policy objectives.
- In November, the Commission is to adopt the **Fifth Cohesion Report**. It will present various options and approaches for future cohesion policy. They aim to increase the EU added value of cohesion policy, offer a simpler delivery system and improve governance. The report will launch a public consultation on the future of cohesion policy and all stakeholders will be able to express their views and send in comments.
- As the European Council stressed, cohesion policy will need to support the strategy and help meet the objectives and targets of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Delivering Europe 2020 will call for action at all levels — European, national, regional and local.

- The European Commission is committed - together with all its partners including many of the organisations present here today — to building a genuinely inclusive society that focuses not only on higher employment and improving skills but also on promoting social cohesion and fighting poverty. By 2020, we want to lift at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty and exclusion.
- I believe we all have responsibility — within the limits of our own powers as mayors, governors of regions, government ministers, policymakers or we in the Commission — to help make sure that the vicious circle of prejudice, poverty, low educational attainment, unemployment, bad housing conditions, poor health and social marginalisation is effectively broken.
- We must seek to 'empower' the members of Roma communities to fulfil their ambitions and responsibilities in a society where every Roma man, woman and child enjoys equal rights and equal opportunities.
- Roma inclusion needs to become a fact in every village, town and region across Europe. At local level, education, employment, health, infrastructure, transport, and housing conditions are clearly interdependent and must be developed in an integrated manner.

- A child who is hungry, who doesn't have a desk to study at or a place at school will find it far more difficult to reach higher education later. A lack of qualifications is an obstacle to finding a job and poverty is often a side effect of substandard housing and poor health.
- We all realise how the factors that make up the 'vicious circle' of poverty, that I just mentioned, combine and mutually reinforce each other. **I repeat:** we can break it only by tackling the different factors in a coherent and integrated manner.
- To underpin the whole process, on 7 April the Commission adopted a *Communication on the social and economic integration of Roma in Europe*, the first ever EU policy document dedicated specifically to Roma. It outlines the 2010 to 2012 Commission's political priorities in a wide range of areas which are relevant to Roma.
 - the Communication makes clear the Commission's commitment to improve the **effectiveness** of instruments and policy in terms of both content and process and stresses the importance of closer **cooperation** between EU, national and international players and Roma communities;

- the Communication also reaffirms the Commission’s commitment to encouraging and assisting Member States to make **full use of the Structural Funds** for supporting Roma’s integration.
- Important messages are also that the key to success is effective mainstreaming of Roma issues across all policies of relevance, and
- effective policy calls for a mix of approaches that takes account of the social, economic, cultural, geographical and legal contexts in which Roma live.

HUNGARIAN CONTEXT

- The Commission considers that **Hungary**, with the active participation of Roma civil society organisations as key partners, has already made significant progress in terms of promoting the social and economic integration of Roma and developing and implementing sound and effective policies.
- The Commission welcomes the appointment of Mr **Zoltán Balog** as Junior Minister for Social Inclusion with overall responsibility for Roma-related issues. I am confident this will bring further progress in dealing with the important issues we are discussing today.

- Like the Hungarian Government, the Commission stresses the need to 'mainstream' Roma-related issues across all policies of relevance — education, the labour market, access to housing, health and other social services.
- The Commission's regular monitoring visits and meetings with our Hungarian partners responsible for managing and implementing the programmes with Roma communities, have shown that, the actions on the ground do not always reach the Roma minorities concerned or respond effectively to their needs. This is the case, not only in Hungary, but also in other Member states with Roma communities.

EU FUNDING

- And yet in all Member States there are considerable EU resources available to help resolve the human and practical issues involved in Roma integration, and they need to be used effectively.
- The European Social Fund, the European Regional Development Fund and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development are three key financial and policy instruments that can be used for developing and implementing integrated programmes.

- They can help to improve access to education, training and jobs and to support measures for neighbourhoods with marginalised communities. Practical solutions can be developed to address complex, multi-faceted problems through the right 'mix' of Fund resources.
- In the programming period 2007 to 2013, there is more than 25 billion euros available for Hungary from the ERDF, the ESF and the Cohesion Fund (ESF: 3.5 billion euros under the Social Renewal operational programme and 147 million euros under the State Reform operational programme).
- And on top of that there are 3.8 billion euros under the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. So there is a unique opportunity to develop effective policies that address Roma-related issues in a sustainable manner.
- Another development of relevance to today's discussion is the recent amendment to Article 7 of the European Regional Development Fund Regulation. This makes it possible to invest in housing for marginalised communities, and of course they include Roma.

CLOSING REMARKS

- Ladies and gentlemen, we, for our part, are committed to doing all we can to help achieve the integration of our Roma communities. I'm glad to inform you that the Commission recently decided on several measures to address the situation of Roma.
- *Inter alia*, it decided to establish a Roma Task Force comprising senior EU officials to streamline, assess and benchmark the use and effectiveness of EU funds for Roma integration by all Member States and to identify shortcomings in their use. The first findings of the Task Force will be submitted to the College by the end of the year.
- It also decided to convene further high-level events in Member States with large Roma minorities to promote better use of EU funds for the integration of Roma. In Hungary this has set in motion a dialogue between the national authorities and Roma. A second series of high-level events will take place in Romania in October 2010. Similar events will be organised next year in Bulgaria and Slovakia.

- The Commission will put the necessary 'pressure' on the institutions managing EU funds to eliminate many of the obstacles impeding successful implementation of programmes on the ground.
- But this is a two-way process: Roma communities also need to commit themselves to participating proactively in the process of change.
- As all of you working in the field know, nothing changes overnight. It will take time before we see real change on the ground, but we must not let that discourage us.
- We all need to show that full inclusion of Roma is not only beneficial to Roma but will also have a positive impact on society as a whole, on the economy and, more widely, on people's lives across the Union.
- As Commissioner Andor stressed last week before the Parliament, Roma's successful social and economic integration calls for a sustained commitment based on cooperation of all concerned, the Commission, Member States and international organisations.
- I wish you all very fruitful and constructive discussions.