

Speech of Commissioner Andor

**Opening of the High Level Event:
Contribution of EU funds to the integration of Roma
Bucharest, 12 October 2010, 9.30 – 11.00**

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to have been invited to speak at the opening of this High Level Event on the contribution of EU funds to the integration of Roma.

Our discussions over the next two days 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. I am fully committed to the fight for equality and economic and social opportunity for all Roma people.

We live in one of the richest regions of the world. And yet countless children and young people grow up in urban ghettos or in segregated rural settlements.

These young people have the same hopes and dreams as their peers across Europe – and yet, simply 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. And it is a waste of talent against the backdrop of an ageing population and a shrinking workforce.

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

Roma communities are affected by multiple interrelated problems that often trap them in a vicious cycle of disadvantage. 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.

We will only be able to break this cycle if we adopt a long-term multi-dimensional approach. And it will require the combined effort of all actors – national and local authorities, local communities and the Roma themselves.

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

One of my main tasks will be to help decision-makers at all levels to translate EU-level recommendations into concrete actions.

I can assure you that the issue of Roma integration will remain on the political agenda and that the Commission will provide the political leadership to ensure real results.

One of our key tools will be the new Europe 2020 strategy. It contains a strong social dimension, with a clear focus on boosting employment and combating poverty.

While our actions are equally valid for all Europeans, they are particularly relevant for Roma. It is vital that Roma integration be firmly anchored within all our policies – whether they relate to the labour market, education, infrastructure development or regional policy.

Overcoming exclusion requires programmes that are not ethnically exclusive, but that 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. All

Europeans are equal – whenever they live and whoever they are. And all Europeans should have access to the same rights and the same opportunities.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We have come a long way since the European Council Conclusions in December 2007, which, for the first time, recognised the urgent need for the inclusion of Roma people.

The first European Roma Summit held in Brussels in 2008 then called for a joint commitment to tackle the widespread discrimination and exclusion faced by Roma. It also highlighted the role that the EU Structural Funds play in helping Member States to implement their policies and programmes.

The Cohesion Policy, as a whole, provides considerable support to regions in need of development. EUR 350 billion has been allocated across the 27 Member States for the period 2007-2013.

This is a substantial commitment of resources and effort. And I want to see part of this spent on initiatives that deliver real results for the Roma community.

Together, the ESF, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) address some of the most pressing problems for Roma communities.

The European Social Fund (ESF) is a major funding opportunity. It supports many projects that target Roma and other social excluded groups to promote their integration into the labour market.

The ERDF was recently amended to make housing interventions in rural areas for extremely poor and marginalised communities eligible for funding – this includes many Roma communities. Housing interventions should form part of an integrated approach and include actions in areas like education, health, social affairs, employment and security.

I believe that 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 done in terms of strategic planning, coordination and implementation, but ultimately not much has changed on the ground.

We need to make our policies more effective — both in process and in substance.

As you know, on 7 April the Commission adopted a Communication on the social and economic integration of Roma in Europe. This is the first ever EU policy document dedicated specifically to Roma.

As part of this, on 7 September the Commission decided to establish a Roma task force to analyse the follow-up given by Member States to the communication of April 2010.

In particular, the Task Force will assess the effectiveness and use of EU funds by all Member States for Roma integration. It will then be possible to identify underpinning deficiencies in the use of funds.

We want to know if and where funds are not being used or are not being properly implemented. The first findings of the Roma Task Force are expected by the end of the year.

Furthermore, in April next year we will present an **EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies**. In this connection, we will invite Member States to present their own strategies for the inclusion of Roma which could feature in their national reform programme.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The European Union 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.

I hope that your discussions translated into a solid commitment by the authorities and by the Roma community to work together to address their common challenges. And I can assure you that the Commission will be monitoring developments closely in the coming months!

It is clear that overcoming the obstacles facing the full economic and social integration of the Roma will not be easy. But neither is it impossible and I count on your support to make it happen.

I wish to thank all our Romanian partners for their hard work and commitment in organising this event. And I wish you all a successful two days.

Thank you for your attention.