



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

High Commissioner on National Minorities

Statement

by

Brendan Moran

Director of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

to the

2008 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

Working session 6

Tolerance and non-discrimination I (continued)

Check Against Delivery

Warsaw, Poland – 2 October 2008

Mr. Chairman

In his statement at the opening session of the HDIM on Monday, the High Commissioner mentioned three areas that have occupied much of his attention in the last year, one of which is the situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE area.

This is not a new area of concern for the High Commissioner. His predecessors have previously expressed their concern about discrimination and racism against Roma and issued reports and recommendations on their situation in 1993 and again in 2000.

The current situation of Roma and Sinti in Europe presents certain important links to the HCNM mandate. The mandate of the High Commissioner on National Minorities allows him to work on situations in regard to tensions involving national minority issues and provide "early warning" and as appropriate, "early action". In addition to the short-term conflict prevention, the HCNM has to look at the important long-term aspects of the situations. It is clear that the many problems faced today by Roma and Sinti and the recent developments in the OSCE region have implications in one way or another on security. These implications concern either the security of Roma and Sinti communities themselves or possible negative developments in relations between the Roma and other ethnic groups, whether these belong to the minority or the majority. Therefore, the work of the HCNM on Roma and Sinti relates closely to the core of the HCNM mandate: security, early warning, early action and conflict prevention.

The movements of Roma and Sinti within Europe in the last 20 years have brought along many implications which maybe only today are becoming visible. In some cases it has put extra strains on many local communities where they are arriving: how to provide employment, education possibilities, accommodation and social services for all newcomers, and how to create successful integration mechanisms. When the integration and inclusion of recently arrived Roma and Sinti is mishandled or takes too long, this situation may create friction and even violence among communities. In such cases, it is imperative that the authorities intervene to stop the violence and prosecute those responsible for it. Such actions furthermore need be strictly non-discriminatory and comply with the requirements of the rule of law.

In order to get a good understanding of the scope and origins of the current issues related to migration movements Roma within Europe, which has been happening in the last 20 years from different origins, the High Commissioner on National Minorities is working on a report to analyze the new migration movements of Roma and Sinti in Europe. This comprehensive

study, which is being carried out together with the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights and with ODIHR contribution and advice, will look into the new migration trends of Roma and Sinti in Europe in the last 20 years or so: since the fall of the iron curtain; at the time of the Yugoslav wars; since the enlargement of the EU in the years of 1990s and 2000s. The study will also look at the implications of such migration movements and what are the policy responses by the governments. The findings of this report are to be published by the end of this year.

The High Commissioner will also continue as part of his regular work to follow Roma and Sinti issues, and in particular the inclusion and integration of Roma and Sinti in the societies of the countries that he is engaged with, as has been done by the High Commissioner since the very establishment of this institution. The High Commissioner on National Minorities will also be available, as always, to assist the OSCE participating States in dealing with their national minority issues, including issues of the Roma and Sinti, according to his mandate.

Of great interest for HCNM is also the question of lack of registration as well as statelessness affecting in particular Roma and Sinti. There are thousands of Roma who live in Europe without proper identification documents, thus, without genuine opportunities to work, get an education, have access to health care or social benefits, vote in elections, and in general to participate in the activities of the society as its full-fledged member. By not providing the Roma and Sinti proper identification, registration and citizenship states push tens of thousands of Europeans in the margins of the society.

The situation of Roma and Sinti is naturally a European issue, as is the ensuring the Roma and Sinti equal opportunities with the majority populations across Europe. On European level, the freedom of movement cannot be limited based on ethnicity, neither can economic possibilities and the right to pursue a better life for oneself and for one's family.

However, the OSCE participating States do naturally have a primary responsibility over their own nationals, and also over how they treat those that are resident in their countries. The National Roma Strategies should therefore be used to create better integration and inclusion policies for Roma and Sinti. The strategies should not be empty documents but should be sufficiently funded and put into practice.