

Warsaw, 2 October 2008

OSCE HDIM – WORKING SESSION 6

Specifically selected topic: Implementation of the OSCE Action Plan on Roma and Sinti

STATEMENT BY THE GREEK DELEGATION IN EXERCISE OF THE RIGHT TO REPLY

Within the IAP, the *Housing Loans Program* is in progress, having served already **7.331 gypsy families with a right to 60.000-euro mortgage loan for first residence purposes** (5.896 families have already contracted with a bank to receive their loan). Having ensured the necessary funds from the national budget, the program will reach a total of 9.000 loans. The program is based on mandatory submission of identification documents and following the latest **legal review** (JMD 33165/2006), is held upon:

- **Social assessment criteria** respecting Gypsies' living conditions and lifestyle, i.e. one-parent families, families with many children, people of low income, people with physical disabilities etc;
- **Participatory procedures at local-level operating committees** -on the basis of solidarity and proximity principles- engaging local authorities; Gypsy representatives and social workers;
- **Allocation of loans** with respect to existing housing needs throughout the Greek territory.

The legal framework is currently under further review to its best implementation.

Additional **legislative tools on housing** have been introduced too, such as:

- (a) **Free and by full property-rights assignment of tracts of land** from the local authorities to their Roma citizens upon **social assessment criteria** (JMD 61261/2004).
- (b) Amendment of the law on the **approval of local urban plans on the grounds of emergency housing rehabilitation programs** for vulnerable groups of the society, including ever since, specifically the Gypsy population too.

More **infrastructure works** are under way, involving the purchase of tracts of land and the construction of development works for the establishment of new settlements or the development of living conditions in existing settlements. Up to date, the Ministry of Interior has allocated **80,54** million euro from the **national budget** on infrastructure works held by the local authorities, whereas, according to the works processed so far, payments amount to **42,20** million euro.

Further on, 30 *Socio-Medical Centres, co-funded by the ESC within the ROP "Integrated Interventions"* operate in the field of **health**, in permanent settlements, providing with basic health services, vaccinations, counselling and psychological support services. Established at local level, the socio-medical centres engage **gypsy mediators** and consist an important liaison among Roma, local and regional authorities, whereas they manage at an early stage with Roma's daily matters facilitating effective access to public services. Mobile units have been successfully operating too, in assisting the population living at distanced to the urban centre settlements, whereas, with respect to *Gypsy women needs*, one mobile socio-medical unit provides exclusively with women targeted health services, i.e. pap test and mammograms. Following the Supplementary HDI meeting, we also recall of the **pilot medical card** introduced in Trikala Municipality. The program is co-funded by the Structural Funds and means to explore an alternative way to ensuring safe access to public health services regardless of place of residence.

Children and adults' education have also been included in the IAP field activities, aiming at children's integration in the existing educational system as well as lifelong learning. Changes in the administrative requirements for school enrolment; itinerant school card; students' allowance; Second Chance Schools; Parents' Schools; Adults Education Centres; Health Education Courses; New Technologies (HERON) and Training Farmers' Programs (HESIODOS) are some of the activities undertaken to this end.

In the field of **culture**, integration in contemporary cultural life is promoted through the operation of *26 Cultural Houses and Entertainment-Workshop Centres* regarding the study and dissemination of the gypsy culture, as well as the enhancement and development of cultural skills and culture acquisition. Also, under the 2008 European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, new activities have been undertaken such as the *School Support Workshop* operating at the Illion Intercultural Centre and an *Educational, lend-and-borrow, School Kit* to be released soon, targeting students of elementary school.

And finally, in the field of **employment**, the combat of discrimination while accessing the labour market is encouraged by subsidizing new posts for Gypsies and free traders, as well as through vocational training under the EQUAL initiative. Moreover, a research (ESF technical assistance) is currently held to appraise the measures implemented so far and investigate on the development of further actions.

Beyond any mainstreaming policies though, it is worth mentioned that following the modified Municipal & Communal Code (in effect since 2007), Greek Gypsies social integration is further envisaged on the basis of **positive discrimination measures** regarding **local authorities responsibility** on planning, implementation and participation at **local programs and actions aiming to the social, economic and cultural inclusion of Gypsies**.

The ROM Inter Municipal Network had, thus, since 1995 envisaged the establishment of an institutional liaison **between the local authorities and the central government while drafting, implementing and monitoring a national strategy on Roma's social integration**. The network consists an important *Local Authorities Roma liaison*, which participates at the Social Integration Committee on a permanent basis and has Roma participation too.