

To: José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission

Cc: College of Commissioners

Brussels, 13 January 2012

Dear President Barroso,

The Commission should send a strong signal to member states to fight anti-Gypsyism

The European Roma Policy Coalition (ERPC) calls on the College of Commissioners to take a strong stand on fighting anti-Gypsyism and to address this serious type of racism and human rights concern by all political and legal means.

The situation of Roma in the EU member states is only worsening when it comes to human rights protection and social inclusion. Violence and racially-based harassments as witnessed last year in Bulgaria and the Czech Republic underline the failure of member states to foster a climate where all their citizens can enjoy and fully exercise their human rights. Roma continue to live in alienation and deprivation. They are victims of racist attacks, serious human rights abuses and regular anti-Roma rhetoric by both state and non-state actors. There is growing fear among the Roma throughout the EU that member states cannot protect them and that consequently the only solution is to flee their countries. We are deeply alarmed by such strong anti-Romani sentiments and their forms of manifestation by citizens, organised extremist groups and even state actors.

The Commission has reacted by committing itself to rigorously monitoring the implementation of the EU's equality legislation regarding Roma.¹ This legislation obliges member states to give Roma equal access to education, employment, healthcare, social protection, housing and access to goods and services (Race Equality Directive 2000/43/EC).

However, events have shown that this approach is not sufficient to offer Roma adequate protection in Europe. The Commission treats anti-Gypsyism mainly as a problem to be solved by the national judiciary. However, Roma citizens are often unaware of their rights, have no easy access to justice and face entrenched structural and institutional racism in the judiciary. This approach also neglects the

¹ An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020, 2011, p. 3.

political and societal dimension of the fight against anti-Gypsyism, which has become accepted in most European societies, is mirrored in public discourse and even used for political means.

The Commission must urgently give significant attention to these issues and broaden its approach on anti-Gypsyism. The College of Commissioner must collectively demonstrate its political commitment by systematically and publicly condemning instances of anti-Gypsyism in member states, especially by political leaders. It should also use available legal instruments and consider developing additional instruments to effectively address discrimination and segregation, given the lack of impact of the Framework Decision on Combating Racism and Xenophobia. The European Commission should make the fight against anti-Gypsyism a priority for the implementation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies and provide more support and assistance to member states in their fight against discrimination.

It is urgent that the College of Commissioners sends a strong signal to member states that there should be zero tolerance of anti-Gypsyism. Fundamental rights being a core EU principle, the Commission should press member states to ensure they are respected, as it does for economic issues.

Yours sincerely,
On behalf of the ERPC

Michael Privot
ENAR Director

