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## **Roma Integration – an Endless Story**

After the fall of Berlin's Wall and the start of the process of democratization of the former communist countries, the international community offered extensive financial support to countries in transition. The respective countries - especially those with a strong former repressive communist propaganda machine and highly nationalistic regimes - which in the past systematically developed a policy of forced assimilation of the Roma minority and "exposed" their population of the diversity of 2-3 national minorities, other than the Roma obviously, they succeeded to pave the way for a high level of racism, sexism and intolerance against other vulnerable groups, such as LGBT or religious minorities.

The Wall is down, so the Roma minority, simply forgotten after 19 years of transition. Recently, the same states, with European aspirations, are still considering that tackling the Roma issues is already made by the external funders, philanthropists or, where is not the case, the "Roma problem" should be 'transferred' to the EU level, based on the 'solidarity' principle...

### **The Roma integration - a resource consuming process**

Housing is to be considered at the heart of Roma inclusion and we cannot speak of an effective inclusion without providing Roma with decent housing conditions that is allowing them to benefit from better living conditions, access to education, employment and public

services, spheres in which many Roma across Europe are still facing widespread discrimination. As you can see, lots of questions should be tackled and many resources are to be mobilized.

Among the resources needed for tackling the problems that Roma face, the most important are the TIME and the PEOPLE – the sooner we all mobilize ourselves, both the Roma and public authorities, the more sustainable effects will become visible in our societies.

There are some *sine qua non* conditions to step forward in this process:

There is the need to mobilize the political will – but do we all have the necessary skills and knowledge to do so? The most illiterate citizens in the field of civic activism are the Roma, who have internalized the stigma associated in the last period and who are looking in their palms and see no power. Why should I vote or why should I vote, if you – the politician – are not “paying” that much as the opponent learnt us? Why should I protest against the mayor who bought my vote and then he forgot the promises of paving my street for another four years? Why should I complain to the police when being abused while the police itself is abusing the Roma communities as a whole when looking for individual criminals like Pavlov’s dog – first in the Roma settlements... How to keep them accountable? And why?...

There is a need for adequately designed and guided projects, in which the so called “beneficiaries” are active players, with the aim to empowering those people and give a sense of their work, to help them breaking the circle of exclusion.

Many problems Roma nowadays are confronted with are direct results of the assimilation process during the communist regime. The lack of exposure to diversity, of intercultural education in multi-ethnic societies of both Roma and non-Roma, is the root of all current problems and it is now “producing results”. Consequently, there is a huge need to adjust our educational systems (targeting both children and adults), both in the business and public sectors.

Apart from this, the transparency and exchange of information should govern all our actions – governments, international organizations and NGOs – as a key for success.

Coming back to the central topic of this session, and focusing on *the challenges for the International Organizations* while trying to ensure or promote equal opportunities, we have observed that in many cases decision makers are hiding hypocritically behind the conflict of competences between the institutions, the decision making process, the bureaucratic steps and procedures that are in place – without a political decision to act effectively.

A building is made an institution by its people...

So, fighting internal bureaucracy as a major barrier of change is another challenge for the international organizations. Here the human quality is essential and more investment in the personal development of both civil servants and politicians might improve the situation.

Also, how the international donor community is investing in civic activism at the grassroots, as well as in awareness raising campaigns that will help people advocate more effectively for themselves and expose the mainstream population to the diversity they were refused for decades of communism as well as fighting the stereotypes and prejudices, that's another challenge.

There are numerous parallel investments in projects with limited visible effects. For instance, successful benchmarks or pilot projects are simply disseminated without any follow up and the investment is more likely to continue without any impact.

There is a need for an international donors' forum - in which the major players, be they governments or international organizations – but especially the inter-governmental organizations operating at European level, such as the European Commission, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, the UN agencies, the World Bank and so on – can exchange their information, their strategic plans, so that the investments become more effective, avoid overlappings and ensure synergetic actions.