

László Andor

Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

"Second European Summit on Roma Inclusion"

Second European Summit on Roma Inclusion

Cordoba, 9th April 2010

*Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my privilege to draw to a conclusion this second European Roma Summit.

I would like to thank the Spanish Presidency for organising this event so well. Because this Summit is an important event. Important for the Commission. Important for Europe as it is a key part of the process of addressing the situation of Roma people as successfully as possible.

I come from Hungary, from a country where the Roma issue is in the focus of public attention, for many reasons.

I can understand the fear and pain caused by ignorance, prejudice, racism and violence. So I am fully committed to fight for equality and dignity, economic and social opportunity for all Roma people.

The Summit has emphasized the need for positive changes. Too many Roma people are trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty, inadequate education, unemployment, bad housing and poor health.

The Summit has discussed the importance of early childhood education as a key factor in breaking the cycle of exclusion. For a child who cannot obtain proper education, finding the chances of enjoying economic and social benefits are greatly diminished.

The speakers highlighted that poor housing is closely related to poor health, and poverty prevents people from improving their living conditions.

Furthermore, we recognize that addressing the causes of multiple disadvantage piecemeal, we can only break the cycle by tackling all its components at the same time.

A lot has been done in terms of strategic planning, coordination and implementation, but we have to admit: not much has changed on the ground.

In the College I urge – and will continue to do so - to combat all forms of social exclusion. I consider it to be my main task to convince the relevant decision-makers at all levels to translate European communications and recommendations into concrete actions in the Member States and in local communities.

Our support for Roma inclusion needs to be explicit, but not exclusive, and must aim at ensuring all Roma people to enjoy equality and opportunity.

Roma people do not need a separate labour market, they do not need schools that prolong the segregation of Roma children, and they should not live in renovated Roma ghettos. All Roma people are entitled to be accepted on equal terms everywhere.

As many Roma representatives have pointed out, this has to be done with the Roma communities, not for them – and certainly not instead of them.

Over the last two days, a lot has been said about strengthening capacity and ownership.

Roma communities should co-own all EU-projects which are designed to help them, along with the local, regional and national authorities, so that Roma inclusion becomes a fact in villages, towns and regions throughout Europe.

Yesterday Vice-President Reding pointed out that the Europe 2020 Strategy has a strong dimension of social inclusion. It focuses largely on fighting poverty and developing skills for jobs. These aims are valid for everybody, and they are especially relevant to Roma.

This Summit has shown that Roma inclusion cannot be a stand-alone policy. It must be firmly anchored in a framework of fundamental rights and practical policy — employment and labour-market, infrastructure development, education, regional policy and in all other dimensions.

We need to use all available European and national funds available to respond the needs and circumstances of Roma people in a culturally sensitive and reasonable way in all our policies.

Overcoming exclusion requires programmes that are not ethnically exclusive: they focus on people facing the same socio-economic problems or who are at risk of discrimination – and respect their cultural particularities at the same time.

It is also important that every promising programme for Roma inclusion should be able to draw co-funding from the Structural Funds. Through these Funds the EU can facilitate access to quality education, training and jobs, and can improve the neighbourhoods where marginalised communities live.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The European Union will not shy away from the problems faced by the Roma people.

The Communication we adopted the day before yesterday sets out an ambitious programme, building on the progress achieved at European and national level over the last two years.

We will make sure that Roma issue stays on the political agenda and we will provide political leadership. As an integral part of the inclusive growth of the Europe2020 strategy, Roma communities will be supported in their efforts to achieve full equality and opportunity in the home states.

We will continue to enforce EU legislation, coordinate national policies and foster dialogue to ensure Roma issues are addressed in all relevant policy areas.

We will work to make our policies more effective — both in process and in substance — through the Structural Funds, the Open Method of Coordination, the Europe 2020 flagship initiatives and the enlargement policy.

In particular we will work to develop a set of strategic model approaches to integration, enabling Member States to choose the best mix of instruments for designing appropriate to the needs and circumstances of particular Roma communities.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We need to act right now, and not just for moral and social reasons. This is the only right political and economic choice.

The inclusion of Roma is therefore a must. It will not only enrich our society culturally, it will also create wealth.

Overcoming the legacy of centuries of Roma marginalisation will take a long time, and will certainly not be easy.

But we can be confident that it is possible.

On behalf of the European Commission, I want to say how much we appreciate your efforts and I give our pledge that we will work towards that shared goal.

Thank you!