

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
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To:

President of the European Commission
European Commissioner for Home Affairs
European Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship
European Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs and Inclusion
European Commissioner for Inter-institutional Relations and Administration
European Commissioner for Regional Policy
European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development
Permanent Representatives of EU Member States and (pre-) Accession Countries
Members of European Parliament

Concern: Roma inclusion policy in the EU

Brussels, 6 September 2010

Your Excellencies,

Following the recent measures taken by the French government, such as forced evictions of Roma and Travellers from unauthorized settlements and the expulsion of many families to their countries of origin (Bulgaria and Romania), the ERPC is deeply concerned with the discrimination pursued against the Roma population by some Member States. Similar cases have been reported since last year in Germany, Italy and earlier this year in Denmark.

Every person involved in criminal activity should face legal actions. However, the statements of some prominent European politicians relating the Roma community in its entirety directly to illegal settlements, human trafficking and exploitation of children constitute discrimination on ethnic grounds as well as reinforce existing prejudices against the largest ethnic minority in Europe.

The current anti-Roma rhetoric and events risk encouraging racism across Europe and they may contribute to a climate of impunity regarding anti-Gypsyism and violent attacks. Therefore, we urge the Commission to fulfill its task as a guardian of the Treaty and strongly criticize the current developments in France and other Member States, if necessary by initiating legal proceedings for infringements to the legislation on free movement and to the Charter of Fundamental Rights, in particular non-discrimination.

The current situation also shows that the discrimination against and lack of opportunities for Roma in their countries of origin does not just stay where it is; *social exclusion travels* and will continue to do so unless effective action is taken. A summit such as the one taking place in France on 6 September, where only selected Member

States have been invited is no alternative to discussing an issue, which affects all EU member states and touches on the founding principles of European cooperation, in an EU framework. Bilateral pressure is, in our view, a welcome – and even refreshing – complement to EU-level debate and policy frameworks. But to effectively deal with Roma exclusion and its consequences, the Union as whole has to take steps towards a comprehensive EU Framework Strategy on Roma Inclusion.

The European Council in 2008 invited Member States and the Union to use all means to improve the inclusion of Roma; since that time the Council has renewed that call in two subsequent Conclusions. The upcoming Justice and Home Affairs Council and the 28/29 October European Council need to further the past declarations of the European Council and explicitly call on the Commission to present an EU Framework Strategy on Roma Inclusion. Such a Framework Strategy should include concrete targets, responsibilities and resources, using all means available to the Union and Member States. It should highlight on the one hand the responsibility for and commitment of national governments to non-discrimination, equal citizenship and equal opportunities, and on the other the guiding and enabling role of Community policies, funding programmes and legislation in guaranteeing these rights for all citizens.

A working group under the joint responsibility of all relevant Commissioners should be established in the shortest time possible to formulate proposals. Furthermore, the next meeting of the EU Roma Platform should be announced shortly dealing specifically with the issue of intra-EU migration and Roma.

In 2008 and 2010 the European Parliament called on the European Commission to develop and adopt a Framework Strategy on Roma Inclusion. The ERPC believes there is still huge potential to achieve this and close the gap between the means available – to both Member States and the European Union – and actual policies today. In view of the ever-growing urgency, it is no longer time to be complacent. The inevitable alternative is the repetition of the social and political tensions within and between EU members that are manifest today. In this respect, the ERPC welcomes the European Parliament's latest initiative for adopting a resolution against Roma expulsions from France and its constant support towards the adoption of a European Roma Strategy.

The ERPC remains committed to supporting the process for the adoption of a European Framework Strategy on Roma, while it calls on the European institutions to respond effectively to violations of human rights standards and European values.

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