

Report on: *Summit of Mayors on Roma*

Organised by: *The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities*

Council of Europe, Strasbourg, France, 22 September 2011



Article 12 in Scotland and Gypsy Council (September 2011)

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Background, aim and specific objectives

Roma have faced a long history of social exclusion and marginalisation within European society, exclusion which is compounded by severe disadvantage across a number of inter-related fields: lack of education, unemployment, poverty, poor access to healthcare, poor housing and residential segregation, etc. Recent events are proof that this marginalisation and severe discrimination are on-going.

In 2010, Thorbjørn Jagland, Council of Europe Secretary General, called a high-level meeting to discuss the challenges related to the rights and obligations of Roma throughout Europe and the concrete action needed to improve their inclusion.

The resulting Strasbourg Declaration recognised that responsibility for promoting Roma inclusion lies not only with the governments of the Council of Europe member states but especially with local and regional authorities.

With this in mind, the *Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe* decided to organise this *Summit of Mayors*, the aim of which is to discuss action to which local and regional elected representatives and Roma can commit in order to overcome obstacles to Roma access to social rights at local level and to promote mutual understanding within communities thus achieving the social inclusion of Roma.

The specific objectives were to:

- examine which obstacles to Roma inclusion exist and discuss how to remove them through local actions to improve integration through education, and ensure equal access to housing, health care and employment;
- explore how to bring about the shifts in mindsets that are required in all parties concerned to fight prejudice and contribute to the acceptance of diversity;
- clarify the sharing of responsibilities between local/regional, national and European levels and decide on guiding principles for future local and regional action;
- reflect on how best to make use of the available sources of funding for activities promoting Roma inclusion;
- agree to establish a co-operation framework which would serve as a platform for coordinating local and regional action, pooling resources and sharing good practices.
- adopt a declaration calling on local and regional authorities to reaffirm their political commitment to improve the situation of Roma and to set up national networks in countries where they do not exist.²

¹ The term "Roma" used at the Council of Europe refers to Roma, Sinti, Kale and related groups in Europe, including Travellers and the Eastern groups (Dom and Lom), and covers the wide diversity of the groups concerned, including persons who identify themselves as "Gypsies".

² Extract from the *Summit of Mayors on Roma* programme of order of business for the day.

Participants

Over 300 people attended the summit. Local and regional politicians, civil servants, representatives of Gypsy/Roma/Traveller organisations and civil society, the *United Nations* and the *Council of Europe* were represented. Disappointingly, with the exception of the three UK speakers and rapporteurs, there was no other public sector or political representative present from the UK. Despite this, the representatives from *Article 12 in Scotland* and *Gypsy Council* managed to raise a number of issues relative to the situation in the UK, much of which was included in the plenary feedback.

Programme

The programme began, in the *Council of Europe* Assembly Chamber, with a series of presentations by a panel of 'experts' followed by a panel discussion which was then opened up to other participants of the Summit. Speakers included: Sir Alan Meale, *UK Parliament*, Thomas Hammarberg, *Commissioner for Human Rights, Council of Europe*, Jeroen Schokkenbroek, *Special Representative of the Council of Europe Secretary General on Roma Issues*, Rudko Kawczynski, *President of the European Roma and Travellers Forum* and Keith Whitmore, *Manchester City Council* and *President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe*. A number of the key note speakers made mention of the situation at *Dale Farm*, focusing on the violation of human rights arising from the eviction.

This was followed by a series of workshops where participants were given the opportunity to share their views and opinions on three topics: *Equal Right to Education, Equal access to Housing, Health care and Employment* and *Fighting Prejudice, Managing Diversity* – the representatives from *Article 12 in Scotland* and *Gypsy Council* attended this workshop – outcomes of these workshops were fed back to all participants later in the day at a plenary session held in the Assembly Chamber. Following a final discussion on these outcomes and an opportunity to hear of funding streams available for Roma Inclusion Projects a formal declaration of the Summit was read out and formally adopted by the acclamation of the participants (a copy of the *Final Declaration* is appended to this report).

In addition, there were opportunities, throughout the day, to visit a 'market place' of information relating to trans-national projects and support structures for Gypsies/Roma/Travellers. This included Roma Women's Associations and ROMED, the European Training Programme for Roma Mediators.³

Key outcomes of presentations and discussions in the Assembly Chamber

- Concern regarding the increasing discrimination towards and isolation of Gypsies/Roma/Travellers.
- A need for a sustainable local/regional/trans-national framework [which must start at the grass roots level] as a first step to building an alliance working towards establishing trust and respect for the community and between Gypsies/Roma/Travellers and the settled community.

³ The representatives from *Article 12 in Scotland* and *Gypsy Council* raised concerns with ROMED that the Mediators Training was not being rolled out in Western European Countries – citing that, relatively, the situation for Gypsy/Travellers in the UK was as difficult as they were for Roma in Eastern Europe and consequently there was a need for trained mediators there. *Article 12 in Scotland* offered to support any roll out in the UK by providing the services of their two qualified mediators at no cost to the programme. The ROMED representative agreed to put this proposal to his manager. N.B.: A lack of equity in support and provision for Gypsy/Roma/Travellers [between East and West Europe] was a recurring theme at the workshops and informal discussions at break times.

- All forces must work together to fight the deep rooted [negative] stereotyping of the community. Politicians have a key role to play in this as there is evidence that they themselves [some, not all] have used ‘the fear factor’ to gain electoral support.
- The Gypsy/Roma/Traveller communities must be empowered to participate in democratic processes.
- There needs to be a new ‘social contract’ with excluded groups.
- Human Rights and Equalities should be enshrined in all member states’ domestic law, policy and practice.
- Even in these difficult economic times; support [financial] is required to enable cross community relationships – bridge building via cultural awareness raising and identification of the needs and responsibilities of both communities.

A recurring theme in the presentations and the plenary discussions was the proposed eviction at *Dale Farm*. A number of the contributors referenced the *Dale Farm* eviction as an example of why we need to act now for attitudinal change [in the settled community] towards Gypsies/Roma/Travellers.

[As mentioned in *footnote 3*, the situation for Gypsies/Roma/Travellers in the UK is often not viewed, by many key decision makers, to be as acute as the situation for Gypsies/Roma/Travellers in Eastern Europe. For too long, UK elected representatives at the local, national and international level have remained silent (and therefore complicit) regarding the discrimination and prejudice faced by the country’s Gypsy/Roma/Traveller communities on a daily basis. It is, then, a sad indictment that it has taken proposals for a brutal eviction of a group of 400 Irish Travellers from their own land to place UK Gypsy/Roma/Traveller issues on the international agenda. – Report Authors’ opinion.]

Key outcomes of thematic workshops

As mentioned earlier, the representatives of *Article 12 in Scotland* and *Gypsy Council* attended the workshop on *Fighting Prejudice, Managing Diversity*. Recognising this, and the absence of an official transcript of the Summit (this will be made available by the *Council of Europe* at a later date), what follows are the key comments delivered at the final plenary session by the workshop rapporteurs and a summary of the discussions and outcomes of the *Fighting Prejudice, Managing Diversity* workshop.

Equal Right to Education workshop

Reporting for the education workshop, Despoina Siggelaki (Deputy Mayor of Heraklion, Greece) pointed to the important role of trained mediators in encouraging and supporting Gypsies/Roma/Travellers to engage in formal education.

Equal access to Housing, Health care and Employment

For the health, housing and employment issues, rapporteur Ivan Ivanov (Executive Director, European Roma Information Office) called for the elimination of the ghettos [and poor quality sites and encampments] that affect so many Gypsies/Roma/Travellers.

Fighting Prejudice, Managing Diversity

- Politicians need to be publicly stating that discrimination towards the community is not acceptable. Silence is complicity.
- It is essential for alliances to be formed between government and civil society organisations [such as *Gypsy Council* and *Article 12 in Scotland*] to act as bridge builders. No change will occur at 'local' level without this.
- Properly funded capacity building projects [across all 47 member states – there are concerns that funding and other types of support favour Eastern states -] so that Gypsies/Roma/Travellers are empowered to influence policy and practice.
- Whilst recognising the need to agree an 'official term' for the Gypsy/Roma/Traveller Community, international organisations [such as the *Council of Europe* and the *United Nations*] must also ensure that they are clear when using the term *Roma* that this encompasses Gypsies and Travellers, particularly for those that continue to maintain a nomadic culture and tradition [to ensure the diverse accommodation needs of the community are recognised and met].
- The provision of 'One Stop Shops' where the community can access information such as; formal and non formal learning, housing, sites, health etc.

As with the plenary, *Dale Farm* was a recurring topic of reference during the workshop. In summing up, the workshop rapporteur (John Warmish, Councillor, *Salford City Council*) said "*Basildon Council, where is your duty to protect?*"

Other outcomes

A group of participants, including representatives from six European cities and regions (Aubervilliers/France, Kavarna/Bulgaria, Malaga/Spain, Region of Madrid/Spain, Heraklion/Greece and the 5th district of Bucharest/Romania) agreed to take forward an initiative for a future *European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion* advocating full Gypsy/Roma/Traveller participation in a European democratic society.

Conclusion

This was a useful opportunity to raise issues affecting Gypsies/Roma/Travellers in the UK; not least the proposed eviction at *Dale Farm* and how, if it goes ahead, this eviction will impact on the wider community of Gypsies/Roma/Travellers in this country. Undeniably, the fact that *Dale Farm* was referenced by so many participants as a negative example of how to work for and with the community brings shame on the UK as does the absence of local and national UK decision makers at the summit; however, that said, we can but hope that such a public 'shaming' at the international level may go some way to ensuring that a positive solution can be reached for the residents of *Dale Farm*⁴ and in the near future our local and national governments will establish, and enforce, law, policy and practice that ensures that Gypsies/Roma/Travellers resident in the UK can enjoy the human rights that members of the settled community take as a given.

Lynne Tammi, *Article 12 in Scotland*

Jo Crowley, *Gypsy Council*

⁴ At the time of writing (29 September 2011) the residents of *Dale Farm* were pursuing a further injunction which, inter alia, argues that the eviction would be a violation of the children and young people's human rights.

FINAL DECLARATION

We, elected representatives of municipalities and regions of Europe, meeting in Strasbourg, France, on 22 September 2011 for the Summit of Mayors on Roma, together with representatives of local and regional administrations, Roma organisations and other civil society actors, European institutional partners, experts and academics, solemnly declare that:

1. We are fully aware and deeply concerned about the persistent exclusion and discrimination of Roma in local and regional communities across Europe, made evident by their continued marginalisation and lack of access to education, housing, healthcare and employment, and fuelled by prejudice, mistrust and even hate speech. This situation is worsening and needs to be urgently addressed;

2. We share the conviction that in order to move past this situation that can and must be changed for the better, all actors and stakeholders in Roma inclusion must join forces;

3. We reaffirm that as local and regional elected representatives we are responsible for ensuring the well-being and upholding the basic rights of all who live in our communities irrespective of their origin or background; we stress our determination to lead by example in condemning anti-Roma discourse and our commitment to ensuring the respect of the rights of Roma that are guaranteed to everyone in Europe under the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Social Charter;

4. We are convinced that the active participation and inclusion of Roma is of major benefit for each community as a whole, and that the way forward is by building mutual trust at the grassroots level and combining the mainstreaming of Roma issues into general local and regional action and policy making with complementary, targeted measures designed to compensate disadvantages and foster equality;

5. We are aware of the manifold challenges that local and regional authorities are confronted with on a daily basis in situations that are very different from one community to another, and we welcome in this regard the numerous initiatives for Roma inclusion that are being carried out by municipalities and regions, their national and European networks as well as civil society organisations, and that set examples for others to follow; we also acknowledge and appreciate the important work in support of Roma inclusion undertaken by European institutions – the Council of Europe and its Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the European Union, its Committee of the Regions and its Fundamental Rights Agency;

6. We call on local and regional authorities to set up networks at national level for action on Roma in countries where they do not yet exist;

7. Convinced of the usefulness of mediation between local and regional authorities and Roma communities, we also call on municipalities and regions to employ mediators on a sustained basis, support their work and make full use of the Council of Europe ROMED training programme for Roma mediators in the fields of education, health care and employment, carried out by the Special Representative of the Council of Europe Secretary General for Roma issues;

8. We thank the organisers of the Summit of Mayors on Roma for this opportunity to share our difficulties, concerns and our vision for future action. We thank, in particular, the City of Strasbourg for its hospitality and its determination to work in favour of Roma, as evidenced by the work it has already done in the framework of its Strasbourg Club. We are inspired by the initiatives and policies presented during the Summit, in particular with reference to political participation, fighting prejudice, promoting employment opportunities and providing equal access to education, healthcare, housing and other public services;

9. We recognise the need to pursue cooperation between municipalities and regions in Europe and we are determined to take sustained further action to build on this Summit. To this end, we support the proposal to establish a European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion, to be set up as a framework for co-operation, sharing of good practices, strengthening local and regional capacities for action, identifying specific problems and proposing solutions, and helping to ensure funding for Roma activities at the grassroots level. We welcome in this regard the statements by several municipalities and regions declaring their commitment to form a core group to build this Alliance, and call on the municipalities and regions of Europe to join in this co-operation framework;

10. We are convinced that the Council of Europe, covering its 47 member states, represents an excellent platform for pan-European co-operation towards Roma inclusion, and ask the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Special Representative of the Council of Europe Secretary General for Roma Issues to work with this core group in taking steps for setting up such an Alliance;

11. We invite the European Union to join and support this initiative, in line with the priority given to Roma inclusion by the EU, as we are convinced that it will help achieve the EU's objectives in this field;

12. We call on members of the future Alliance to work with other municipalities and regions on ways of implementing the recommendations of the Strasbourg Declaration of 20 October 2010, adopted by the High-Level Meeting of Council of Europe member states; the resolution and recommendation on the situation of Roma: a challenge for local and regional authorities, to be adopted by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe in October 2011; as well as the relevant recommendations of various other institutions and bodies of the Council of Europe, including its Committee of Ministers, Parliamentary Assembly, Commissioner for Human Rights and European Commission against Racism and Intolerance;

13. We reiterate our firm belief that the future of European democratic society requires the inclusion and participation of all Europeans, including Roma, in democracy-building and the full life of their communities with all the rights and responsibilities this entails.