

25.06.2009

Speech - Deputy Prime Minister of Slovakia Mr. Dušan Čaplovič - Decade of Roma Inclusion - Belgrade

Dear Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia, Assembled Participants, Friends,

Roma, a nation, a proud nation which was deprived of its identity in many countries. Roma, who do not have their own state and who went on a pilgrimage in search of happiness through the ages, children of the wind, song and joy.

By signing the declaration in the Programme of the Decade of Roma Inclusion in Sophia in 2005, the Slovak Republic joined with other states, joined forces within the framework of Europe with the aim to resolve the critical situation of Roma in the contemporary world at the beginning of the 21st century. By doing so, we undertook to gradually create conditions to eliminate discrimination and the unacceptable differences between Roma and the majority society. We took a step forward on a long journey and we extended our hand to those in need. Because as the Hawaiian proverb says: Despite the fact that we are all different, we are all people.

Dear Assembled Participants,

The Slovak chairship has decided to distinctively bring its national experience to bear in the resolution of the inclusion of the Roma population within the framework of Europe. This is why we are here. I am convinced that the Slovak Republic can serve as a positive model for many states within the framework of the Decade of Roma Inclusion in many areas of resolving the situation of Roma. The positive evaluation within the framework of the Minority Languages Charter, the acknowledgement of the status of the Roma national minority, the codification and subsequent standardizing of the Roma language, the possibility of taking state examinations in the Roma language, establishing schools on the principle of coexistence, such as the secondary school of art and the grammar school, secondary vocational schools with complete secondary education, the only Roma theatre in Central Europe, departments of Roma Language and History at two public universities, the adoption of amendments to the Anti-discrimination Act and the initiative to strengthen Slovak legislation through the introduction of obligatory pre-school upbringing in the SR – for five year old children and for four year old children from socially disadvantaged environments, these are the deeds and decisions which should help to constitute our contribution to creating chances for everyone.

Dear Friends,

Allow me to also express at this forum, my opinion that the current destabilization and value disorientation of Roma, the constant conflict within the framework of the European Community, which is related to the de jure and de facto identity of Roma is a manifestation of the inability to search for and eventually adopt a joint standpoint towards the process of forming the general life of Roma. Within the framework of the Roma national minority itself, as well as within the environment of the majority society which leads towards the constant fragmentation and search for identity. And this is what motivates the Government of the Slovak Republic to open an international dialogue on the identity of Roma in Europe and the world. This motivates us not to be afraid to ask daring questions and not to look at the world only through rose coloured glasses. This is related to the failure of the inclusion of Roma in Slovak society but also in the societies of the other states where they live. Due to this reason, the concrete and persistent exclusion of Roma and the neo-liberal theories and social development in the European community deformed by experiments in particular, the Roma are systematically losing their intellectual elite which openly declare that they are Roma as

well. That is why I, as the national coordinator of the Slovak chairship, would like to strengthen the emancipation process inside the Roma national minority itself and gradually eliminate the aversion of the majority society towards the Roma national minority. This requires welcoming steps from both parties. In particular, in the area of the global financial and economic crisis where the current developments call for responsible people, frequently among various minorities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Slovak Republic Government also perceives the issues related to special schools as long-term and topical issues. They are frequently and sometimes even legitimately connected with the segregation of the Roma national minority. We are also aware of the growing extremism and the survival of stereotypes, one of the sources of discrimination. That is why in striving to eliminate discrimination in the European community, the Slovak Republic has decided to support the ideas of combating extremism and clearly promoting its zero tolerance policy towards any racial or xenophobic manifestations. The Government of the Slovak Republic considers it equally necessary to strengthen the activities of the struggle for human rights as to promote the initiatives of asserting tolerance and solidarity through the Action Plan for Combating All Forms of Intolerance. The Government of the Slovak Republic has decided to open an international dialogue on this topic within the framework of its chairship in the Programme of the Decade of Roma Inclusion through a high level international conference entitled: "The Threat of Extremism – Where Do We Go From Here?". I will be pleased if a discussion were opened in the year of our chairship, a dialogue on the causes, consequences and solutions to the growing extremism but also on the continuing segregation of Roma in the European society. However, we want to discuss not only rights but also obligations, responsibility. We will be pleased if the experts and competent representatives who represent individual states on the national level in the Programme of the Decade of Roma Inclusion come with concrete positive models of solutions. We want to take into consideration the conditions and needs of the Slovak society and subsequently implement new examples, successful projects and models also on the territory of the Slovak Republic.

Dear Attending Participants,

In order to fulfil the difficult and long-term objective of improving the living conditions of Roma, we will try to use the sources of the European Union Funds in addition to the funds of the national budget. We know that this is a long distance run. But we are the only EU state where Roma live which has decided to take this road. We want to serve as an example of the comprehensive use of financial sources and march towards synergy.

In the current programme period (2007 – 2013) we have strengthened the financing by taking into consideration the needs of Roma within the framework of the drawing of European Union Funds. The funds of the European Social Fund, the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund are drawn within the framework of 11 operation programmes in the Slovak Republic. These programmes have defined 4 horizontal priorities. Marginalized Roma communities constitute one of them! Special priorities targeted exclusively on the needs of the marginalized Roma communities are defined within the framework of the operation programmes. The projects submitted within the framework of these measures resolve the issues of our Roma citizens; they are closely targeted on a specific area. If their living standards are to be enhanced, it is necessary to simultaneously resolve issues affecting several areas such as housing, education, healthcare, employment and the environment. As a result, we are currently testing the pilot implementation of the so-called Comprehensive Approach which includes 6 of the 11 operation programmes. 200 million Euro within the

framework of the Structural Funds in addition to public sources and sources of regional self-governments, municipal and local self-governments where Roma live – especially in the regions of Prešov, Košice and Banská Bystrica – are allocated to the joint project: Cesta (The Road) for this purpose.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to lead the chairship of the community of states involved in the issues of resolving Roma inclusion in the modern society of the 21st century. In cooperation with the entire representation of the Decade member states and its secretariat, I will try to create an active, living and beneficial chairship 2009 – 2010. Exemplary, inspirational, human and with solidarity for those on the edge of the society. Slovakia's door is open, we are all in the same boat, we can only do more together. To listen to each other, to perceive, to implement positive examples. For those who are in the greatest need.

Thank you for your attention. I wish you a successful event.