



Digital High-level Conference launching the new “EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation” until 2030

12 October 2020

Conference report

Introduction

The Commission recently proposed a follow-up initiative to the ‘EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020’, following requests from civil society organisations, the Council and the European Parliament.

The initiative, entitled **‘EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation’ 2020-2030** was launched during an online high-level conference, held on 12 October 2020.

The event, organised by the German EU Presidency and the European Commission, brought together speakers and participants from a variety of backgrounds, with Roma fully involved. Institutions represented included relevant national authorities from the EU Member States, enlargement countries, international organisations, EU and national NGO networks.

The event featured in-depth discussions of the new Strategic Framework, as well as the key issues surrounding the fight for equality, inclusion and participation. The event was organised around four expert panels, which sought to convey different perspectives on the topics through short statements.

Keynote

State Secretary at the Federal Minister of the Interior, Building and Community, Germany, **Dr. Markus Kerber**, provided the keynote speech. He expressed hope that this event would reinforce anti-discrimination measures at the European level and lead to the adoption of a Council Recommendation.

Kerber noted that the German government has set up a special cabinet committee to fight extremism. This committee meets with civil society representatives to come up with measures to tackle issues such as hatred on the internet and civil education.

Kerber also discussed the launch of an independent expert commission to evaluate the root causes of antigypsyism and its impact on German society, which will come up with recommendations in 2021 to feed into policy.

[Launch of the new 'EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation' until 2030](#)

EU Commissioner for Equality Helena Dalli, presented the new Strategic Framework. The initiative will define policies in this area for the coming decade, focusing on equality, inclusion, participation, education, employment, health, and housing. Stronger efforts will be made to promote participation through empowerment and trust.

Dalli noted that marginalised communities have been among the hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, in part due to crowded housing, lack of access to clean water and medical services, and lack of access to distant learning. Inequalities that existed before had been exacerbated. All Roma can be subjected to various forms of prejudice, even if they do not face socioeconomic exclusion.

Addressing these challenges will involve many stakeholders, but must involve Roma, she underlined. The EU must also look beyond its borders and cooperate with neighbourhood countries as well as international organisations. These contributions will be essential for the successful implementation of the strategic framework.

The new initiative targets society as a whole, with a stronger focus on diversity. The intersectional approach will ensure that tailored measures are taken for different groups, such as women, children and youth. Dalli urged participants to work together to turn the new strategic framework into a success.

[The voice of the Civil Society: Q&A with Commissioner for Equality Helena Dalli](#)

During the Q&A session with civil society, Dalli highlighted the importance of monitoring and enforcement in achieving equality, while noting that only 16 % of Roma believe that reporting a case of discrimination would be worthwhile. Improved data collection and monitoring is critical to enabling evidence-based policy. In this regard, the new initiative provides for a differentiated approach with a minimum core commitment for all Member States.

Gabriela Hrabanova, ERGO Network, discussed the importance of Roma participation in policy design, implementation and monitoring, questioning its advent in practice. Dalli noted that the new strategic framework emphasised the need for Roma involvement at all stages of policymaking, which called for capacity building of both Roma civil society and public authorities. The initiative also provides guidance on better use of EU funds, mainstreaming, capacity building and structural support.

In addition, the strategic framework expands its focus from marginalised people to include people who, while not marginalised can still be discriminated against. These people can be drivers for change.

Hrabanova brought into discussion the situation in neighbourhood countries where deprivation is common, wondering whether the Recovery Fund for Europe provided for measures to help the most disadvantaged

Dalli agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on the most marginalised in society, but highlighted the European Semester Package's change in focus to tackle the pandemic and protect the most vulnerable. Thus, large-scale support will ensure economies are more resilient, while enabling also synergies between the EU's Gender Equality Strategy and the Anti-racism Action Plan 2020-2025.

Panel 1: Fighting and preventing antigypsyism & discrimination

State Secretary at the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, Germany, Juliane Seifert, affirmed that prejudice and humiliation are still part of Roma's daily life. **The Federal Ministry is determined to fight this prejudice.** Seifert discussed measures taken to fight antigypsyism, while affirming the ministry's support for awareness-raising projects through partnerships with local authorities. Strengthening civil society organisations is a priority.

Federal Minister for Women and Integration at the Federal Chancellery, Austria, Dr. Susanne Raab, agreed that this event comes at a crucial time, with the surge of both the pandemic and anti-Roma rhetoric. **Antigypsyism is a structural driver of exclusion.** These issues need to be addressed at the European level and the new Strategic Framework sends a clear European message against antigypsyism. According to her, fighting discrimination requires a comprehensive approach, a renewed commitment from all stakeholders, and the involvement of Roma.

Romani Rose, Chairman of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma, said that the Strategic Framework was essential to overcome centuries-old anti-Gypsyism, and called for a Council Recommendation as early as possible. He noted that the Holocaust Remembrance Alliance had issued a definition of antigypsyism, and called on Member States to take it up. He added that the lack of political will is one of the reasons for the failure of good intentions.

Panel statements

Romeo Franz, Member of the European Parliament, said that Roma and Sinti were still treated as third-class citizens, which had led to a denial of access to human rights and even killings. Franz discussed the Parliament Resolution, which called for a new strategy centred on antigypsyism and drawn up with the participation of Roma stakeholders. The Resolution also called for clear and binding targets.

A key question, however, is how rhetoric can be turned into reality. According to Mr Franz, Member States need to be more accountable, which is why he had called for a legislative text in 2021. Essentially, it all comes down to treating Roma as equals.

Dan Pavel Doghi, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, OSCE, noted that extremism is often expressed through political discourse. He regretted that hate crimes often go unpunished and perpetrators often enjoy impunity. Doghi said that we should not shy away from using the term ‘racism’. He called for better use of state budgets and an end to impunity for hate crimes. Without sanction, no amount of money will ever work to tackle centuries-old hatred.

Timea Junghaus, Executive Director ERIAC, noted that culture is essential to tackle discrimination. Counternarratives are needed to fight prejudice and Roma should feel proud and empowered by their culture. Roma history is also European history. Roma institutions are needed to ensure Roma participation with their own heritage and self-representation, while stories of hope and accomplishment can help to fight stigmatisation.

Silas Kropf, Member of the Independent Commission Anti-Gypsyism, Germany, said that structural discrimination can be seen in labour, housing, healthcare, education and political participation, a situation which cannot be remedied through isolated support. Kropf explained that the Independent Commission, made up of experts from the field, addresses

political stakeholders and NGOs in the aim of raising awareness and encouraging participation. He agreed that it was important to foster liability for hate crimes and ensure that the measures contained in the Strategic Framework are implemented.

Q&A session

- Asked *what ERIAC expects from the Commission*, Junghaus replied that ERIAC, which participated in the drafting process, appreciated being perceived as a strong organisation capable of providing input, adding that support in fighting structural discrimination was now needed.
- Doghi reiterated that *ending impunity* should be a priority in view of the irrefutable evidence that many racially motivated crimes go unpunished.
- In terms of *investing in culture*, Junghaus added that policy makers need to connect with the community, since Roma representation has tended to be dominated by non-Roma. A key achievement of ERIAC has been to give a voice to Roma.
- Franz said that the Strategic Framework *does not duplicate the Antiracism Action plan*, adding that Roma cannot wait for another decade with no action taken. Their situation can improve only when they are equal partners.

Panel 2: Promoting participation by empowerment and trust in the EU and beyond

Introductory statement

Deputy Director-General for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations at the European Commission, Katarína Mathernová, said Roma inclusion needs to start with education. Intergenerational discrimination will not go away through general inclusion policies but require smart policies that target but do not exclude others. Progress in tackling Roma discrimination has been modest. While communications and strategies are good, what really matters is progress on the ground. Mathernová discussed linkages with the recently adopted Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans. She added that governments often made policy based on views, rather than evidence, in this area, which was a priority to overcome. She also underlined that the empowerment and participation of Roma women will be critical for success.

Panel statements

Livia Járóka, Vice-President of the European Parliament, noted that Roma are too often excluded from decision-making, thus making the encouraging of participation an important aspect of the new agenda. Securing equal access to education is also critical, and Járóka welcomed the focus on education in the new Strategic Framework. She noted that the pandemic has fostered a degree of solidarity and expressed hope that, in years to come, there will be more Roma MEPs and that national governments would begin to realise the potential of their Roma communities. She concluded that participation begins in education, is rooted in acceptance and ensures success.

Zita Bružaitė, Vice-Minister of Culture, Lithuania, discussed measures taken by Lithuania to tackle Roma discrimination. By working with local authorities, the focus has been on promoting mutual trust, which helped to increase public tolerance, integration in education and labour market access. Roma platforms have been established in five municipalities with the largest Roma communities. Illegal settlements were closed and a new integration programme launched. She also spoke of greater cultural awareness and an understanding of Roma history in the country's collective memory.

Theresa Schopper, State Minister of Federal State Baden-Württemberg, Germany, discussed the legally binding treaty signed between the Roma community and the state, which established a high-level partnership, a representative panel, and put funding into law. The contract has changed the dialogue, fostering trust between policy makers and the community. Schopper also noted that Germany has a historic responsibility never to forget its past.

Daniel Strauß, Chairman of the State Association of German Sinti & Roma in Baden-Württemberg, said that it was of great importance that organisations representing Roma were heard. Recognition of antigypsyism as a specific problem has led to the establishment of the first European institute focused on the research of this problem, at the University of Heidelberg. Strauß said that this model could be replicated elsewhere.

Marietta Herfort, Phiren Amenca, said that unexpected situations, like the current COVID-19 pandemic, can be transformational, but added that positive change required the equal participation of all groups. Herfort regretted that good ideas do not translate into meaningful change. She insisted that change had to occur in the planning and monitoring of

programmes, too often done without Roma participation. Moreover, real participation would mean giving youth a role at all levels of decision-making.

Nesime Salioska, Founder of Roma S.O.S., Winner of the 2019 EU award for Roma Integration in the Western Balkans and Turkey, North Macedonia, said that all Roma can experience discrimination, with negative social attitudes representing a long-lasting barrier to mutual trust. Salioska also discussed of equality of access to education. She added that enlargement countries need to show accountability and commitment, as NGOs cannot bear the entire burden. Salioska also welcomed the human rights-based approach and investment in Roma women.

Q&A session

- On the issue of *breaking discriminatory practices against women in the Roma community*, Salioska said it was essential to provide space for them to show their abilities. Experience has shown that Roma women working with the community take a more inclusive approach, since they have a unique perspective of the challenges and problems faced by the community.
- Mathernová said that an intense dialogue was needed on the issue of *better targeted and mainstreamed funding*. With regard to access to the labour market, she pointed out that it was in everyone's interests to tap into the potential of the Roma community.
- On the *conditions needed for equal participation*, Salioska said it was vital to see Roma at all levels, since they are rarely part of political parties or government authorities. This was the only way to push forward empowerment.
- On *respecting Roma culture*, Strauß noted that Baden-Württemberg's state treaty gives the Roma minority a key responsibility for promoting culture. Courses in Romani are already online.
- Mathernová discussed *the inclusion of elements* of the Strategic Framework in enlargement negotiations. She noted that anti-discrimination is already in negotiation chapters 23 and 24 on fundamental rights, but admitted that dealing with concrete assistance was more critical than negotiating chapters. She referred as well to the concrete commitments in the Economic and Investment Plan related to Roma.

Summary and conclusion

State Secretary at the Federal Minister of the Interior, Building and Community, Germany, **Dr. Markus Kerber**, agreed that progress has been modest but stressed the importance of taking into account the national context, since each country has a different story of inclusion. The case of Baden-Württemberg shows how progress can be achieved through regional arrangements and underlines the importance of trust. Kerber noted that the documentation centre in Heidelberg shows the long history of Roma in Germany, which the Nazi regime attempted to annihilate. The Roma/Sinti community has contributed to our culture for centuries and will continue to do so. He added that the conference had also shown the essential role of women, as they are key agents of change.

Statement

Minister for Culture and Democracy, Sweden, **Amanda Lind**, welcomed the Strategic Framework, launched in uncertain times. She started by pointing to participation as key factor in any strategy for. This is the foundation of the Swedish strategy. Meetings with the Roma community are held regularly to identify topics for focus. Thus, long-term relationships between the community and the government are crucial if the strategy is to work. Lind discussed the role of Roma mediators, who provide a link between the Roma and public administrations at the municipal level and advanced that students could also be supported by mediators. She also highlighted a recent EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) report, which revealed the difficult living conditions many Roma live in. Lind found these findings deeply concerning and insisted that implementing the Strategic Framework will be key to tackling these problems.

Panel 3: Monitoring and reporting to enable policy learning

Introductory statement

Director of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, **Michael O'Flaherty**, regretted that tackling Roma discrimination has been a story of historic underachievement. He welcomed the tone of the Strategic Framework, which provides a reminder that this not a technocratic exercise but a serious effort to improve lives. O'Flaherty committed FRA to supporting all relevant aspects of the Strategic Framework, especially in capacity building and data gathering. He stressed that monitoring is not a one-off event but rather an accompaniment, as one needs to stay with the story as it changes over time. Monitoring is also national and each Member State must take responsibility on monitoring. Monitoring can also go local where relevant, to capture nuance and diversity. O'Flaherty stressed that without indicators, monitoring

is an empty exercise. A commitment of resources is also required and, although monitoring was not cheap, but it was worth it. Moreover, monitoring is not an exercise of one group on another but a participatory process of communities working together. Finally, O’Flaherty stressed that a participatory approach is also a gendered approach.

Panel statements

Peter Pollak, Member of the European Parliament, hoped that the next decade would be more successful than the previous in addressing Roma discrimination, as this is a unique chance to learn from past failures. Pollak noted that ambition is not enough. Situations for many Roma have worsened, with children missing education and high unemployment, which represents untapped potential. Roma also need to enter the labour market. Pollak regretted the lack of political will in recent years. More monitoring at the EU and national level is needed, with measurable indicators, such as access to water and sewage systems. He added that the misuse of funds should not occur. Pollak called for rigorously enforced legislation, as non-compliance should have consequences. Everyone deserves the opportunity to succeed and Roma should be not a burden but a source of untapped potential. The EU must demonstrate that it is inclusive and responsible.

Birgit Van Hout, Regional Representative for Europe Regional Representative for Europe of the UN Human Rights Office, welcomed the fact that the Strategic Framework is participatory and transparent, adding that involvement of Roma at the local level was critical. Van Hout also welcomed the fact that the Framework places responsibility on states to remove barriers and the acceptance that things cannot change unless antigypsyism is tackled. The use of human rights indicators with clear targets also strengthens the initiative. Effective monitoring provides hard data to back up accountability and helps to create international synergies. Van Hout noted that Member States have committed to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, in which leaving no one behind is a central principle. Reports on national Roma strategic frameworks, expected every two years, should be made public and discussed in parliaments. Van Hout stressed the importance of independent monitoring and the independence of equality bodies.

Sarita Friman, NRCP Finland, discussed the development of indicators, noting differences in national legislation on the collection of ethnic data. She stressed the need to build trust with communities at a time of rising inequality and hatred.

Friman spoke on the importance of monitoring progress and the participation of Roma in this effort. She noted that Finnish Roma NGOs have been involved in monitoring and in the development of the Strategic Framework too.

László Ulicska, NRCP Hungary, discussed Hungarian experiences of monitoring. The upcoming 2021 census would provide an opportunity to map Roma populations and assess poverty levels. These maps can then form the basis for setting targets.

Bernard Rorke, policy and advocacy manager, European Roma Rights Centre, welcomed the Commission's support for local monitoring but noted that governments do not always welcome civil society intervention. Closer oversight of EU funding is needed.

Rainer Stocker, Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency, Germany, said that strong national bodies are needed to fight discrimination,. Assessing progress requires good data collection. Stocker noted that in Germany, Roma are often sceptical of data collection due to the events of the Nazi era, a fact to be considered. Stocker said that establishing national monitoring systems leads to more awareness about the necessary action. Civil society organisations should be encouraged to register cases, give advice and pass on data. While surveys on the experience of discrimination are useful, safeguards need to be put in place to avoid reproducing stereotypes. Self-representation is one way forward. Stocker identified an initiative involving people of African origin in Germany, which could be used as a template for the Roma community.

Panel 4: Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Roma

Introductory statement

Acting Director-General for Justice and Consumers, European Commission, Salla Saastamoinen, said that governments must tackle the disproportional impact of COVID-19 on Roma communities. The pandemic threatens to undo many of the achieved gains. COVID-19 has shone a light on structural inequalities, with Roma populations vulnerable due to lack of access to healthcare and overcrowded conditions. Those living in poor, remote areas have limited access to remote learning.

Saastamoinen noted that the Commission had sent letters to relevant ministers calling for specific measures to protect vulnerable groups, drawing attention to the dedicated available

funds. Regretting that some Member States had portrayed Roma as a public health threat, she labelled this reaction as unacceptable.

Saastamoinen hoped that the current hardships present an opportunity to learn. The Strategic Framework provides guidance on issues such as promoting access to drinking water and collecting socioeconomic data, with the final goal of mitigating the effects of crisis as we move forward.

Panel statements

Sebastian Simion, advisor to the Călin-Ioan Bota, State Secretary in Ministry of European Funds, Romania, said that vulnerable communities often do not have the resources to react to emergencies. He pointed to online learning as a key challenge, because communities do not have the necessary equipment. Simion explained how NGOs are helping, with the support of EU funding, to deliver IT and sanitary equipment to schools. He added that allowing flexibility between operational funding programmes helps to reallocate money more efficiently.

Jeroen Schokkenbroek, Director for Anti-Discrimination, Council of Europe, said that the Strategic Framework complements the Council of Europe's Strategic Action Plan. Both will enhance and boost opportunities for Roma and help to fight discrimination. Studies have shown how the pandemic has increased the level of discrimination. Schokkenbroek highlighted hate speech from public officials and added that the Council of Europe had reminded Member States to respect the rule of law during the pandemic. Schokkenbroek detailed how the Council of Europe has worked with the Commission to turn policy into practice. Small grants have been disbursed to Roma communities to ensure healthcare and to boost inclusive education, since inclusion is a valuable crisis management tool.

Andrej Belak, Health Conditions Development Manager and Researcher of Healthy Regions, Slovakia, worried that a second COVID-19 wave could cause huge problems. Many issues remain unresolved, with a continued lack of healthcare capacity in certain regions, as well as tracking and testing. He failed to see a plan regarding Roma settlements.

Tjaša Herman, NRCP Slovenia, agreed that vulnerable groups are more exposed to health and economic challenges. Herman noted the importance of counselling support for Roma children and families and the provision of health guidelines in Romanes. Ahead

of a second wave, close cooperation will be crucial, especially at the local level. Mutual solidarity is of greater importance than ever.

Miranda Vuolasranta, president of the European Roma and Travellers Forum, regretted that Roma have often been seen as lepers during this pandemic, as they have historically been outcasts. Millions of poor Roma are now facing a humanitarian disaster. Vuolasranta called on international bodies such as the UN, the Commission and the Council of Europe to address this situation, compelling Member States to pay more attention. Such action could be fuelled by EU funding with the involvement of Roma NGOs. Strong legal action is necessary to support the implementation of the Strategic Framework.

Rafael Saavedra, Fundación Secretariado Gitano, Spain, called for highlighting the essential role of NGOs. A key lesson of the crisis has been that NGOs are critical when governments are not able to serve the entire population. Saavedra noted that the pandemic has increased inequality. Data collection will be critical in order to assess the extent of the health crisis and to adapt interventions, in addition to sufficient economic funds. Saavedra called the Strategic Framework an ambitious document, which will require national strategies to be adapted to particular contexts. Eliminating poverty and discrimination is a way of achieving equality among the general population.

Adriatik Hasantari, Roma Active Albania, Vice-chair ERGO Network, said that Roma have been deeply affected in all areas of life, including housing, basic needs, education and freedom from discrimination. The pandemic has also had a dramatic impact on Roma art and culture. Many Roma working abroad have lost their jobs but are unable to return home. It is often NGOs that step in and help. Hasantari called for governments to react preventively and not reactively. Investment packages need to be set aside for vulnerable groups.

Merita Xhafaj, General Director, General Directory of Social Policies, Ministry of Health and Social Protection, NRCP Albania, said that it was now crucial to step up a gear. Policies must be integrated in a clear and specific way to prevent discrimination in the Western Balkan region. Xhafaj outlined the support Albania provided the Roma community, which included economic aid. While integration in the region remains a challenge, the support from EU Member States is crucial. Xhafaj welcomed the new Strategic Framework as a commitment to enhanced inclusion and equality.

Q&A session

- In response to a question on *distance learning*, Saavedra noted that the key was ensuring that all families have access, as lack of internet access is one of main challenges facing Roma children. A strategic focus on this digital gap is needed.
- On *measures taken to address antigypsyism in a COVID-19 context*, Schokkenbroek noted that general measures have been applied but need to be intensified and continued.
- On *best practices in terms of accessing healthcare*, Belak said that when people shape their own policies, the outcomes are much better, which makes Roma participation is key. He added that capacities in the field were not used efficiently enough.

Summary & conclusion

Director for Equality and Union citizenship, DG Justice and Consumers, European Commission, Irena Moozova, thanked participants for their powerful stories. She welcomed the fact that organisations have worked together to mitigate the impact of pandemic and added that the most vulnerable should not carry the burden of the pandemic. Moozova pointed out that Roma people lived in substandard housing and in isolated settlements prior to the pandemic and faced limited access to water and healthcare, making the pandemic easier to spread. She labelled this as unacceptable. Roma children should not miss school just because they are poor. Moozova reiterated that the Commission condemns all forms of scapegoating and is committed to add hate speech crimes to legislation, not allowing Roma to be portrayed as a health threat. Discrimination has no room in our democracies. Moozova said that it was clear that the participation of all actors crucial to addressing challenges, thus ensuring a better preparation. . Finally, she recalled the need for targeted policies and guidance on the best tools to use to make society free from hate speech.

Closing Remarks and the way forward

Prospects for the TRIO Presidency

German Federal Government Commissioner for Matters Related to Ethnic German Resettlers and National Minorities, Dr. Bernd Fabritius, affirmed that a society that values diversity couldn't tolerate discrimination and exclusion. He agreed that the fight against antigypsyism requires the active participation of the community. It is critical that

minorities are recognised for their history and have a place in our society. Social cohesion requires openness and respect and the protection of identities, adding that this was the guiding principle of Germany's minority policy. Fabritius noted that the importance of civil society had been well underlined during the day. He expressed gratitude that the succeeding EU Presidencies have shown a commitment to carry this agenda forward. Fighting exclusion is critical for ensuring a secure and peaceful Europe, with the Strategic Framework to be implemented in the Member States over the next ten years.

Portuguese High Commissioner for Migration, High Commission for Migration, Sónia Pereira, said that the experience of COVID-19 had shown that structural challenges still need to be addressed, including insufficient housing, precarious employment and persistent discrimination. Pereira also called for a gender-sensitive approach to target disadvantaged Roma girls and women. She reaffirmed Portugal's commitment to fundamental rights for all.

Acting Director of the Office for National Minorities of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia, Stanko Baluh, said that the results of monitoring clearly show that stakeholder engagement is critical to put an end to exclusion. He noted that Roma are already involved in the preparation of strategic documents in Slovenia and will continue to be involved during implementation. Baluh emphasised the need for continuous dialogue and long-term commitment to reach the goals set.

Closing statements

Vice-President of the European Commission, Věra Jourová, said the event had been the first opportunity for feedback from people on the ground. She agreed that progress to date has been slow and that more is needed. She hoped that enhanced actions would bring better results. This is critical for all of us, as a lack of inclusion is a scar on Europe's conscience. Jourová noted that the Strategic Framework includes measurable goals. She called on Member States to adopt national frameworks promptly in 2021, taking into account the thematic conditions of the European Social Fund. She added the Commission's desire for Member States to come with country-specific measures, as situations are not the same. Solutions must come from the national and local level, to be linked to overall EU targets. The Commissioner also called for a strengthening of national Roma contact points.

Finally, Jourová urged Member States to use funds and instruments to mainstream policies and develop targeted actions. Robust mechanisms for reporting are needed, together with community participation, which is frequently highlighted as a prerequisite for progress.

Minister of State for Europe at the Federal Foreign Office, Germany, Michael Roth, agreed that social exclusion and discrimination is still a reality for Europe's largest ethnic minority. Children still go to bed hungry and Roma have a lower life expectancy than average, realities on which we cannot close our eyes. Antigypsyism is a concern for us all. Roth regretted the lack of progress over the last ten years and hoped that the Strategic Framework would provide the basis for concrete progress, especially in view of the vulnerability of Roma communities, which became scapegoats for spreading disease.

Roth welcomed the working definition of antigypsyism, to which 34 Council of Europe Member States have agreed upon. He added this was a tool to help us understand what antigypsyism means. Roth also called for more Roma MEPs (presently only two) and more Roma women in business as well as political leaders. He underlined the importance of cultural institutes that present Roma not as victims but as a contributing minority group, an enriching attitude. Roth added that more is needed for a diverse, cosmopolitan Europe and welcomed the upcoming work of the Portuguese and Slovenian EU Presidencies.