

“The Implementation of Policies and Action Plans
for Roma, Sinti and Travellers,
and Measures Against the Anti-Gypsyism Phenomenon
in Europe.”

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Opening remarks

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Conference organizers and in particular on behalf of the ODIHR I would like to welcome you all here in Warsaw, at this Conference devoted to discussing the “Implementation of Policies and Action Plans for Roma, Sinti and Travellers, and Measures Against the Anti-Gypsyism Phenomenon in Europe.”

I would like to thank all the organizations that contributed to making this meeting possible, which, in itself, is a collaborative effort of a number of organizations which share the same goals in this regard. I would like to list

the Organizations which have jointly organized this conference with us, in particular our Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues:

- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Slovenia, holding the current Chairmanship of the OSCE
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland, again hosting us here today and having held until recently the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers in the Council of Europe
- The Ministry of Interior and Administration of Poland
- The Council of Europe
- The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) of the European Union

In fact, we have been able to gather a large number of participants here, and I already want to thank you all for having come to make this discussion relevant and constructive. We have about 170 registered participants to this meeting from a rather diverse background. According to our data available at the moment, participants include:

- 85 participants representing **government** offices, as well as local authorities from various countries, dealing specifically with Roma, Sinti and Travellers issues and/or with mainstreaming social policy issues;
- A group of 20 **officers and experts** from intergovernmental organizations, including the OSCE field missions;

- 63 participants from the large and diverse groups of **NGOs** - in particular 40 who are representing Roma, Sinti and Travellers.

One of the most impressive achievements of the last decade concerning Roma and policy making has been the growing number of Roma, Sinti and Travellers elected or appointed to all levels of government throughout OSCE Participating States. I am therefore also very glad to welcome all those of you who have been democratically elected to supranational, national or regional parliaments, or local assemblies or local government.

Why Warsaw as the conference location?

I would like to say that it is no coincidence that we are meeting here in Warsaw today. As many of you know, we have just had, in this same venue, the tenth Human Dimension Implementation Meeting of the OSCE, which is an annual event allowing the 55 participating States of the OSCE to review the implementation of their human dimension commitments.

This year we had a record number of 430 NGO participants and 60 informative side events. When we now focus, for two days, on issues relating to Roma and Sinti, and Travellers, we do so in the same spirit. Namely that it is not the written texts, the Conventions, Action Plans and commitments that matter, but the implementation of these promises on the ground.

The year 2005 marks the 30th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, an event which has evoked not only celebrations, but also a thorough, self-

critical analysis of the current workings of the OSCE. This year is also the 15th anniversary of the adoption of the Charter of Paris for a New Europe and the Copenhagen Document on the Human Dimension.

Signifying truly historic changes, this groundbreaking document was the first international agreement to recognize explicitly the human rights problems confronting Roma people: In Copenhagen the participating States clearly and unequivocally condemned “*racial and ethnic hatred, anti-Semitism, xenophobia and discrimination against anyone as well as persecution on religious and ideological grounds.*” In this context, they also recognized “*the particular problems of Roma (gypsies)*”.

If we measure the distance Roma and Sinti have come since the Copenhagen Document we can make a simple, but effective, quantitative assessment. Here we can examine the 1990 Copenhagen Document and the 2003 Ministerial Council Decision taken in Maastricht:

- There are *12 words* related to Roma in the Copenhagen Document
- There are *5792 words* in the Maastricht Decision to adopt the OSCE Action Plan on Roma and Sinti (December 2003).
- Although this seems to be quite a simplistic yardstick to measure an “improvement” in the everyday reality of life for Roma and Sinti communities, it nevertheless gives an idea about the progress made in *awareness raising* to the particular constraints faced by

this social group among the participating States to the OSCE, and for international organisations.

In Warsaw, in April 1994, soon after the adoption of the Copenhagen Document, the first Human Dimension Seminar on Roma and Sinti took place - this was jointly organized by the Council of Europe and the ODIHR (one of the first actions jointly organised by these two organizations).

The 1994 Seminar still marks a significant achievement for Roma and Sinti affairs, as it created an effective cooperation among intergovernmental organizations that still exists today and it laid the groundwork for the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti at the ODIHR, which continues to operate more than a decade later.

The Warsaw meeting was also quite creative in generating recommendations for policy making on Roma over the past decade, both for the OSCE and the Council of Europe.

It is our hope that Warsaw, with its genuine *genius loci*, may stimulate further debates that may generate a vision to continue the policy making process on Roma for the next decade.

In this sense, I would like to wish you a successful two days together in Warsaw; fruitful, open and frank debates; however guided by a spirit of cooperation and a constructive, forward-looking approach, as is the established practice of our Organization.

Thank you.