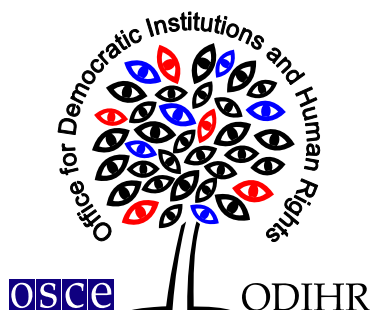


**JOINT FRA – CoE – OSCE HCNM – ODIHR
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ROMA MIGRATION
AND FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT**

Vienna 9-10 November 2009

Neuer Saal, Hofburg Palace



Opening remarks by

Ambassador Janez Lenarčič

Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The focus of this conference – migration and freedom of movement – is an issue that is of utmost relevance in today's globalized world. Worldwide, there are an estimated 200 million migrants. Let us remember that migration has always offered a way out for those who seek refuge from persecution, war or discrimination, but also for those who face economic and social deprivation.

Migration, in a word, has become one of the **defining features** of our time. The enlargement of the European Union, and with it the expansion of the EU's free movement regime, has had a particularly profound impact on migration patterns. But while for many this means that it is much easier to move today than perhaps ever in history, others face more – and in some cases **new barriers** in finding a place to go and integrate in their new countries of residence.

The migration of Roma has to be seen in the context of these **much broader migration patterns**. But it is also true that the migration of Roma has very distinct features. It is rooted in **centuries of discrimination and persecution**. The effects of this – continued

exclusion and mutual distrust – have been recognized as an issue of concern for quite a while. But they have arguably never been subject to more attention than since the historical moment of the European Union's **eastern enlargement** and the new political, cultural and social dimensions the situation of Roma has acquired in the contemporary world undergoing rapid globalization.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

The cross-border migration of Roma is a reality. It is up to the receiving communities and the relevant authorities to make use of the potential the migrants present and provide an environment in which they are **able to integrate, rather than remain excluded** and viewed with suspicion by their neighbours. Roma migrants – as other migrants – can be a positive and reinvigorating force, if they are allowed, without discrimination, to get access to the labour market and public services, and find their place in society.

Of course there are serious challenges: migrants of Roma origin in particular are often viewed as a burden by local communities, and are often used as scapegoats for ills they are not be responsible for. In times of economic crisis, we see **racist views** resurfacing with force in the public discourse, used by reckless politicians playing on age-old fears or stereotypes. In such a climate, individual incidents can easily

turn into veritable threats to social cohesion and security. I hope that this conference will result in new ideas on how to better deal with these challenges by making headway when it comes to integration.

While there is a clear need for increased efforts in destination countries to promote the integration of Roma migrants, it is essential to tackle also the **push factors** that make Roma leave their homes and home countries in the first place. We are conscious about the complexities involved in the decision of individuals to move to another country. But I will be very frank: It is **not acceptable** in today's Europe that there are entire communities who feel compelled to leave their homes because they face discrimination, hatred, racism, and, in some cases, violence.

Governments have adopted far-reaching commitments to improve the situation of Roma and Sinti in their countries, including – within the OSCE framework – a comprehensive Action Plan adopted in 2003. But very little has happened in **improving the integration** of Roma and Sinti communities. A **status report** published by our office, the ODIHR, last year found that too often integrative efforts fail because of a lack of political will at the national level, and because of a failure to implement policies at the local level.

Let me conclude with a single thought. The decision to migrate is never an easy one. Governments and authorities must do more to **create conditions** in which communities and individuals are not compelled to make such a choice. We are aware that the reality – unfortunately – is different.

The OSCE/ODIHR, through our Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues, will continue to assist governments to live up to their commitments to protect the rights of Roma, including that of Roma migrants, and to create conditions allowing Roma communities to live in their home countries in safety and without discrimination.

I wish us all a fruitful discussion.