EU strategy on Roma inclusion

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The Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Lívia Járóka (EPP, HU) on the EU strategy on Roma inclusion.

It calls for an EU Strategy on Roma Inclusion (?the Strategy?) as an EU-wide, indicative, inclusive and multilevel action plan, which will be prepared and implemented at all political and administrative level and can evolve as needed. The Strategy must build on the fundamental values of equality, access to rights, non-discrimination and gender equality and be based on the tasks, objectives, principles and instruments defined by the Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights. The report notes that a large proportion of Europe's 10-12 million Roma ? most of whom are EU citizens ? have suffered systematic discrimination and therefore are struggling against an intolerable degree of social, cultural and economic exclusion as well as human rights violations. It asserts that the inclusion of the Roma population is both the responsibility of all the Member States and the EU institutions, and calls on Member States to cooperate with the EU and representatives of the Roma population in setting up integrated policies, making use of all the EU financial resources available under the EU funds, and in particular under the ERDF, ESF and EAFRD, to promote Roma inclusion. It calls on the Commission to:

- adopt priority areas for the Strategy, above all fundamental rights, education, culture, employment, housing, healthcare, and participation of Roma in civil society;
- present in the Strategy a roadmap for introducing binding minimum standards at EU level for the priority areas of education, employment, housing and healthcare;
- define the objectives of the Strategy linked to the priority areas, inter alia by strengthening effective anti-discrimination legislation and ensuring access to quality education and access to the labour market.

The Commission and Member States are asked to address the particular needs of Roma women and girls by applying a gender perspective in all policies for Roma inclusion, and to provide protection for especially vulnerable subgroups.

Members highlight the fact that the social exclusion of the Roma has a very strong territorial dimension of poverty and marginalisation which is concentrated in underdeveloped micro-regions that severely lack the financial resources required to make their own contribution to the Community funding for which they are eligible. These micro-regions generally lack the administrative capacity and human resources to make good use of the funding. The report emphasises the need for specific efforts to be focussed on these micro-regions that are often peripheral intra-regional areas and for the substantial simplification of bureaucratic red tape so that the maximum possible allocation of resources can be achieved under the umbrella of the Cohesion Policy.

The committee calls on Member States to develop cross-sectoral poverty reduction strategies that take into consideration the often sensitive issue of the coexistence of the Roma community and the majority community. It highlights the importance of incentive measures that provide visible benefits to encourage the poor to enter the labour market rather than live off social benefits and perhaps work on the black market. Programmes promoting mutual understanding and tolerance towards each other are of utmost importance.

Members highlight the need for the objectives of the Strategy to be subjected to checking and measurement with regard to the degree of attainment so as to introduce award criteria in favour of compliant Member States and penalties for non-compliance. They call on the Commission to:

- take the leading role in strategic coordination regarding progress in the priority areas and the fulfilment of the objectives relating to the Strategy, in partnership with the Member States and in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity:
- establish the Roma task force as a permanent body to take responsibility for supervision, coordination, monitoring, reporting, evaluation, and follow up, there by meeting the need for an independent, multi sector body serving as an?external facilitator? which can assess and balance the various national and sectoral interests in a manner acceptable to all;
- report on the implementation and progress of the Strategy and the national action plans, with an evaluation of results including benchmarks and indicators, and keep the Council and Parliament informed on an annual basis, noting that policy effectiveness and ex post evaluation should become a criterion for providing prolonged support,
- incorporate an enlargement dimension into the Strategy by developing pilot projects in candidate countries and potential candidates which guarantee the development of national action plans in line with the EU Strategy;
- adopt the augmented and detailed components of the Laeken indicators in measuring social and territorial exclusion as well as to evaluate progress;
- draw up a European crisis map which identifies, measures and surveys those micro-regions within the EU where the inhabitants are hardest hit by poverty, social exclusion and discrimination, at least on the basis of certain attributes such as accessibility of workplaces, high rate of unemployment, lack of proper infrastructure and low income;
- bring specific support, including financial support, to micro-regions and directly develop pilot projects that include the participation of mediators in line with the Council of Europe programme and a specific follow-up of the evolution of the implementation of the Strategy;
- allocate dedicated funding in the Cohesion Policy within the next Multiannual Financial Framework explicitly to support the Strategy by creating a performance reserve for the EU Strategy on Roma. This would have the effect of allocating funds on a competitive basis, defined by the criterion how the proposed project or intervention supports and implements the Objectives of the Strategy and could provide vital resources and decisive incentives for the implementation of the Strategy.