

ERiac Statement

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

12 October 2020

Dear Commissioner Dalli, Dear Minister Seehofer, Distinguished participants, Dear colleagues,

We applaud the Commission for continuing to fight the discrimination against Roma. We applaud the Commission for continuing to fight discrimination against Roma. We must complement the Framework`s attempts to mainstream equality across policies (such as socio-economic inclusion, artificial intelligence, the European Green Deal, digital inclusion and the fight against hate speech). We seek further information on how these policies connect to the budgetary instruments of the EU.

Much to our regret, the current Framework Strategy is not sufficiently articulated - relegating culture secondary into the guidelines section: into ANNEX 1 of the document where it provides instructions to the member states on how to develop their national strategies, on how to tackle antigypsyism through history and role models, and how to promote awareness of Roma arts, history and culture.

Combatting antigypsyism - the horizontal priority - gives us only a definition of the problem. The proven experience of the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture is that we cannot combat antigypsyism without a rich cultural munition: a positive vision, where an effective counter-narrative and a strong counter-representation is a must.

What is happening to Roma in the form of discrimination, exclusion, antigypsyism is just a proxy of the cultural war, that is taking place in Europe. The cultural war that Orban, Salvini, le Pen and others wage against Europe, plays out in all areas of our lives.

The moment of history that we are in, is to answer the question, what are the values of Europe? The Roma Framework resides in this context.

The Strategy begins with the statement by President von der Leyen, Vice-President Jourová and Commissioner Dalli „We must promote diversity as a wonderful gift that makes Europe strong and resilient.”

This calling for diversity as Europe`s gift and core strength acknowledges the fundamentally cultural quality of this significant moment in history. Changing of attitudes (as Commissioner Dalli said earlier today) is a cultural uptaking.

The true combatting of antigypsyism is the recognition of the power, potential and pride contained in the concept of being a Roma. The counter-culture that combats racism and anti-gypsyism is accepting that Roma are qualified and eager to take the leading role in

shaping their own future. The counter-representation disseminates the highest-quality standards in arts and culture, it demonstrates the Roma respect for diversity in our communities. These principles are the founding principles of ERIAC, they stand in front of you as the pillars of a potent strategy for diversity and prosperity.

To take up the fight against antigypsyism means to give forms to positive, empowering, genuine visions about Roma. This is indispensable for the nurturing of a next generation of not only Roma but of Europeans, who are aware of our inter-dependencies, mutual contributions, connected histories and our inseparable futures.

Unless the prejudiced concept of Roma among the majority society is challenged, socio-economic progress will be slow or I dare say, impossible. Prejudice and ignorance about Roma needs to be diminished proactively through measures which contribute to changing public perceptions on Roma and educating majority societies.

Robust investment into Roma arts, culture, history and identity can maximize the impact of other policy efforts in other areas. Without this approach, galvanizing public support and political will for the needed investment into Roma inclusion will continue to remain absent.

Let me be clear – investment in the field of Roma culture is not of value only in and of itself. It needs to be understood as a strategy that enables all other efforts in the remaining priority areas to have impact.

European level and state-level cultural policies fail to specifically target the issues that Roma face in the cultural field, and without targeted policies and actions Roma identity, culture and heritage is on the path to be completely demolished.

The Framework strategy needs to aim at durable solutions, such as:

- a. Recommend cultural policies and financial support specifically targeting the challenges Roma cultural heritage faces;
- b. Initiate programs for Roma recognition in the majority cultural spaces,
- c. Establish permanent Roma cultural institutions;
- d. Ensure access to Roma cultural heritage
- e. Ensure adequate mechanisms of Roma self-representation, participation and monitoring;

The Framework strategy calls on member states to use existing efforts on culture and heritage, for Roma cultural inclusion, for example: cultural policy frameworks (New European Agenda for Culture, European framework for action on cultural heritage and EU strategy for international cultural relations) and the Council's 2019-2022 Work Plan for Culture). These efforts actually inhibit Roma self-representation and Roma leadership, by setting criteria and expectations that only a consortium of primarily majority institutions with public funding are able to access. None of these EU culture funding mechanisms had a Roma lead partner to date...but hundreds of applicants.

ERiac through its international network of organisations, and its membership of 143 entities is ready to consult, support and make efforts for the vision of the Framework strategy.

As ERiac Chairman, Zeljko Jovanovic stated: „The European Commission needs to innovate and spread the message of possibility in European societies, so that stigmatization and racism is confronted by stories of accomplishment, possibility and hope - so that what governments need to do is not in vain“.