

Press Release

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Italy: "Serious problems remain, but constructive talks are a promising first step" says Thomas Hammarberg concluding his visit to Rome

Strasbourg, 16.01.2009 - "The situation of Roma and immigration policy are still a matter of concern. But the commitments now made by the authorities to improve the situation are a positive step." Thomas Hammarberg, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, concluded yesterday with these words a two-day visit to Rome, where he followed up on the recommendations made in a memorandum published in July 2008.

"The conditions in Roma camps are still unacceptable," he said after visiting Casilino 900 and four other settlements in the capital. "In spite of the harsh living conditions, Roma people struggle for integration. In many cases, their children go to school and are already part of society. No measures should be taken which would stop the integration process."

Underlining the need to design policies in consultation with the Roma, the Commissioner welcomed the commitment given by Undersecretary of the Interior Mantovano and Mayor of Rome Alemanno to receive Roma representatives and further the dialogue. "This is a good decision. Consultation and mutual understanding are fundamental to finding effective solutions and meeting human rights requirements." Commissioner Hammarberg also recommended that Italian citizenship be given to Roma children who were born in Italy and have no identity documents.

On migrants, the Commissioner expressed concern about a recent government statement on shortened procedures the consequence of which might reduce the guarantees granted to asylum seekers. "It is absolutely necessary to protect the right to seek asylum and adopt a migration policy based on human rights," said the Commissioner. Therefore, he welcomed the pledge by Undersecretary Mantovano that the guarantees will not be reduced. Commissioner Hammarberg also supported the idea of coordination and stronger cooperation between European countries to handle migration flows in a coherent and humanitarian way.

Finally, the Commissioner reiterated that Italy should fully respect the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, and in particular its requests to suspend expulsions of foreign nationals who could face a risk of torture in their country. "The Court is a pillar of the European system of human rights protection. Italy should not disregard any binding request of the Court." The findings of the visit will be published in a report due in the spring.

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