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Ref. CG-PR025(2012)

Implementation plans for European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion achieve international support at Strasbourg Meeting

Strasbourg, 26.09.2012 - Representatives of European cities and regions, EU institutions, international Roma networks and NGOs gathered on 25 September at the Council of Europe Headquarters in Strasbourg for a consultation meeting to discuss the role and action of the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion.

After the foundation stone for the construction of this Alliance was laid in September 2011 during the Summit of Mayors on Roma, a further step was made on Tuesday towards the launch of the project. Opening the consultation meeting, the Secretary General of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, Andreas Kiefer, emphasized the crucial role of local government, pointing out that "there is a need for a pan-European framework to pursue cooperation between municipalities and regions in support of Roma inclusion."

The consultation meeting provided the participants with the opportunity to exchange experiences and practices from the field, discuss proposals for cooperation and ways to increase Roma participation in the processes. Some successful models of inclusive Roma policies at local level in different European countries were presented, such as, amongst others, an innovative project in the field of employment from the Austrian city of Graz, resettlement and housing practices in the Italian city of Turin and the Spanish region of Madrid, or projects in Lyon where the focus was put on access to school.

"All these individual policies at the local level are now to be connected with each other - in an intelligent way. Our common goal is to raise capacity and help improve the situation at the grassroots", stressed the Congress Secretary General.

"Access to health and social services and decent living conditions are a right of every citizen, including Roma, and promoting specific actions for this vulnerable population can in no way be considered a privilege. Local authorities have a fundamental role to play in getting the Roma out of the margins and into mainstream society. The work of the Alliance will build on the Council of Europe's experience in mobilising action at local levels, notably through our Roma mediators training programme," stressed the Special Representative of the Council of Europe Secretary General on Roma issues, Jeroen Schokkenbroek.

The participants concluded that the Alliance should be a collaborative and flexible space where exchanges, training and mutual learning can take place, where programmes and situations can be evaluated, where projects can be built and where the cities and regions can increase their capacities, especially for project implementation and for presenting integrated projects to European Union funds and other sources.

The Alliance will now draw up its programme of forthcoming activities based on the outcome of the meeting and taking into account the expectations, needs and priorities expressed, as well as the resources available. It will in particular seek cooperation with the existing initiatives and programmes and ensure that its action will make a real difference for the improvement of the situation of Roma.

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