Roma in an Expanding Europe

CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

A SUMMARY OF POLICY DISCUSSIONS AND CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

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Roma in an Expanding Europe:

Challenges for the Future

A Summary
of
Policy Discussions
and
Conference Proceedings
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PART I

A SUMMARY
OF POLICY DISCUSSIONS
“This is an epochal event that will make a lasting difference in the lives of Roma people. And of course it is easy to be cynical, it is easy to say, well, what is different. What is different is all of you in this audience.”

James Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank

Several journalists asked me today why I am so involved in the Roma issue. And my answer to that is: How can I not be involved in the Roma issue? This is one of the greatest social inequities that still prevail in this region so it is natural that we must address it.”

George Soros, Chairman of the Open Society Institute

“We will only succeed when Roma issues are being treated, not just with specific programs and actions—important and necessary as they are—but also as part of the general framework of European and national policies.”

Anna Diamantopoulou, Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs, EU

“The community of European Roma will be unable to join the Europe of the 21st Century unless the majority societies—governments, intergovernmental organizations and the civil world—voluntarily share a community with the Roma, unless they do more for them than over the past generations. Because there can be no progress for the Roma without solidarity and a true equality of opportunities.”

Peter Medgyessy, Prime Minister of Hungary

“In the recent past there has been an increasing recognition in the countries of Europe and the region that gestures are no longer sufficient and that active measures must also be taken for the sake of the integration of Roma.”

Laszlo Teleki, State Secretary of Roma Affairs, Hungary
The regional conference: *Roma in an Expanding Europe: Challenges for the Future* was held in Budapest, Hungary from June 29-July 1 2003, hosted by the Government of Hungary. The World Bank, Open Society Institute (OSI) and European Commission co-financed the Conference with support from UNDP, the Council of Europe Development Bank and the Governments of Finland and Sweden. The event was designed to raise public awareness about the unique economic development challenges facing Roma in the Central and Eastern Europe and to identify policies and programs that can effectively address poverty and discrimination. A central part of the Conference was contributions by Roma organizations. The event discussed what kinds of policy innovations are needed to address Roma issues, as well as how to incorporate lessons from existing projects into future policies.

More specifically, the objectives of the Conference were:

- **Raising awareness** of policies to address poverty and other human development outcomes;
- **Garnering long-term commitment** by governments and international organizations to improve Roma education and employment opportunities as well as living conditions, pre- and post-EU accession;
- **Discussing strategies** that national governments, Roma organizations, NGOs and others can take to reduce poverty and improve welfare outcomes, including education, labor market status, housing and health;
- **Exchanging experience** of projects and programs targeting Roma over the past decade, as well as lessons learned by new institutions charged with addressing Roma and ethnicity issues.
- **Involving Roma leaders** in the economic development process. Providing networking opportunities for Roma leaders and space for them to interact with policy makers.

The primary outcome of the Conference is the formulation of *actionable policy recommendations*. The panel sessions generated concrete policy recommendations which were presented during a plenary session. These recommendations are summarized and discussed here.

A World Bank publication, “*Roma in an Expanding Europe: Breaking the Poverty Cycle*” was launched at the Conference.¹

**PARTICIPANTS**

The event focused on eight participating countries from the region which have large Roma populations: Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic, Serbia and Montenegro, FYR Macedonia and Croatia. Other countries from the region addressing Roma issues were invited as observers, including: Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Poland, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Roma from Kosovo attended the Conference.

The main audience was national policy makers from the region—both those directly involved in Roma issues (e.g. heads of Roma offices), as well as government officials involved in sectoral policies which affect Roma at the technical level (e.g. from Ministries of Education, Health, Social Affairs), Roma leaders, and partner organizations. The discussion was targeted at key stake-
holders involved in Roma issues at the local level, including local government officials, NGO officials (Roma and non-Roma), and Roma community leaders. Donors and international organizations were also involved.

Roma were well-represented and had a significant voice at the Conference, both in the plenary and the panel sessions. At least 125 Roma NGO leaders attended and a Roma delegation represented each of the countries mentioned above. These delegations comprised mostly young and emerging leaders who were selected through local competitive processes and demonstrated an even gender balance. Each delegation consulted with the larger Roma community in its country to ensure that a range of views and concerns were taken into consideration.

Overall, more than 500 participants from over 30 countries participated in the Conference, notably:

- Ministers (from a dozen countries, including five Prime Ministers and two Deputy Prime Ministers),
- Government officials and mayors,
- Roma (at least 125) and non-Roma NGO leaders (200 NGOs were represented),
- Representatives of international organizations (including the EU Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs),
- Resource persons from New Zealand (Maori) and Canada (First Nations).

More than 200 representatives of the media attended.

CONFERENCE PROGRAM

The three day event started with a Women’s Forum on June 29, which brought together Roma women leaders to discuss their specific issues and to have a dialogue with policy-makers. A separate volume has been produced on this Forum. The report is available at www.worldbank.org/romaconference.

The Women’s Forum was followed by two days of plenary and panel sessions focusing on policy issues covering key areas including education, health, local government services, discrimination, statistics, policy coordination, active labor market and social assistance, employment opportunities, and community development.

A “Marketplace” took place at the Conference, where around 65 organizations (NGOs, Civil Society organizations, government offices, donors) exhibited their Roma-related activities. Of particular note is that the half day session with the heads of delegations on the afternoon of July 1 took place in the Upper Chamber of the Hungarian Parliament as a symbol of the openness of the Hungarian government to Roma.

The Conference was highly successful and reached consensus on the need to reduce Roma poverty and exclusion over the longer term. More specifically, the Conference agreed to follow up on two outcomes: (a) the launching of a Decade of Roma Inclusion, 2005-2015, during which countries would agree to reduce disparities in key economic and human development outcomes; and (b) the establishment of a Roma Education Fund, to support projects and programs to improve educational outcomes.

The Decade of Roma Inclusion

At the Conference, government leaders, led by the Hungarian Prime Minister, Péter Medgyessy, committed to launching a Decade of Roma Inclusion to run from 2005 to 2015. During this decade, within the broader context of inclusive national economic and social policies, countries would design and implement policies promoting Roma inclusion to break the vicious cycle of poverty and exclusion. The objective of the proposed Decade of Roma Inclusion is to accelerate progress in improving the economic status and social inclusion of Roma by creating an action framework comprising three activities:

(a) The setting of clear, quantitative national targets for improvements in economic status and social inclusion of the Roma population, and the establishment of the necessary information base to measure progress toward these targets,
(b) The development and implementation of national action plans to achieve those targets, and
(c) Regular monitoring of progress against agreed targets, and adjusting action plans as necessary over the Decade.

During 2004, the governments, with the involvement of Roma and other stakeholders, will work on reaching consensus on goals for the Decade and quantifiable targets for monitoring at both the country and cross-country levels; identifying data requirements and monitoring mechanisms; and developing country level plans for reaching the targets, including necessary policies and programs and estimates of resources needed.

The Roma Education Fund

The Conference agreed to set up a cross-country Roma Education Fund—to be launched alongside the Decade in 2005—that would improve educational outcomes for Roma by supporting the scaling up of pilot initiatives and projects, and strengthening partnerships between NGOs and governments. The objective of the proposed Roma Education Fund is to improve the sustainability of initiatives to improve the educational status and performance of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe by providing additional financing for programs to reduce the gap in access to quality education between Roma and non-Roma.
Poverty among Roma remains one of the most pressing issues for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Roma are Europe’s largest minority and also its most vulnerable. The 2003 Budapest Conference “Roma in an Expanding Europe: Challenges for the Future” was convened to focus attention on the urgent need to address Roma poverty and social exclusion through long-term systemic policy interventions.

The Conference brought together senior policy-makers from across Europe, Roma leaders from government and civil society, donors, and international organizations. The agenda included panel discussions on key issues, including education, health, employment, policy coordination, the role of local governments, community development programs, and discrimination. Because of the upcoming accession of eight countries to the European Union (EU) in May 2004, the Conference emphasized the European dimension of the Roma issue, drawing in examples from existing EU member states and developing recommendations that are relevant across countries.

This document summarizes the conclusions of the policy discussions at the Conference. The transcripts of presentations from the plenary sessions follow in Part II. This summary pulls together the separate policy discussions from the panels into an integrated policy framework for addressing Roma poverty and social exclusion. It also draws on materials which were prepared for the Conference, including the World Bank report: Roma in an Expanding Europe: Breaking the Poverty Cycle. A number of important points are important at the outset:

• First, the presentations and discussions at the Conference were wide ranging and rich in content. It is not possible to summarize them in full. This document pulls together key issues and themes identified by the presenters and rapporteurs who summarized the panel sessions at the conclusion of the Conference.

• Second, because of the complexity of the issues, there were healthy debates and disagreements which emerged during the Conference and continue today. This document draws policy recommendations and conclusions where possible, but also notes areas where there are diverse views.

• Third, there are no easy answers. There is no single road to improving Roma living conditions and opportunities, there are many. Approaches need to be tailored to national and local contexts. The Conference was not able to address the full range of issues and approaches. This document is intended to contribute to an on-going discussion.

This summary compiles the policy discussions of the Conference into a three-pronged strategy for improving Roma living conditions, including (a) overcoming existing poverty, discrimination and other barriers, (b) improving the capacity and opportunity for Roma to participate in economic and social life, and (c) providing long-term opportunities for Roma integration. It is necessary to focus upfront on the setting in which policies will be implemented. This context is characterized by:

• the multisectoral nature of Roma poverty;
• the diversity of Roma;
• the long-term nature and extent of social exclusion and discrimination against Roma;
• the limited Roma participation in public affairs in the past; and
• European accession.

THE NATURE OF ROMA POVERTY

Roma poverty is strikingly high in Central and Eastern Europe, reaching as much as ten times that of non-Roma.² Poverty among Roma is highest among the poorly educated, the unemployed, and larger families with three or more children. These characteristics are also common to poor non-Roma households. However, even accounting for differences in education, age and level of employment Roma are more likely to be poor. The conclusion is clear: Roma poverty is partly related to education, labor market factors, and large family size, but it also stems from exclusion, discrimination and other factors.

“It is our shared task to overcome the problems that Roma people are faced with, which are part of a vicious circle. The uneducated are poor, and those who are poor cannot afford education.”

Simeon Saxe Coburg, Prime Minister of Bulgaria

The causes of Roma poverty are frequently interrelated, for example, poor access to health care and inadequate housing conditions in Roma neighborhoods which both influence health status. Roma poverty extends far beyond relative income deprivation, as it relates to a complex set of phenomena including poor access to labor markets—especially given the escalation of long-term unemployment since the start of transition—low education status, inadequate housing, a lack of access to social and public services, especially in remote settlements, and a long history of discrimination and limited communication with the majority population.

A large share of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe live in settlements, where marginalization is closely linked to poverty. The more isolated and cut-off a community is from economic and social networks, the poorer it is likely to be. The multidimensionality of Roma exclusion and poverty suggests that it cannot be addressed by focusing only on one area. Rather, tackling Roma poverty requires a multisectoral policy approach.

ROMA DIVERSITY

In addition to the complex nature of Roma poverty, Roma diversity needs to be considered in policy design. Roma in the many communities and countries are not all alike; nor are their social conditions. Indeed, the enormous diversity based on history, religion, language, occupations, and culture is striking. The share of Roma who speak some form of the Roma language differs greatly from country to country, as does the share of those who live in cities, integrated neighborhoods, or segregated rural settlements. These differences affect welfare and need careful consideration in policy design. The situations of vastly different communities and individuals cannot be addressed with a single, simple set of answers.

SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND DISCRIMINATION

Roma poverty is linked to social exclusion and discrimination, based on centuries of poor social relations between Roma and non-Roma. Therefore, any attempt to improve Roma welfare will have to tackle discrimination. A central policy goal should be the multifaceted inclusion of Roma into institutions and mechanisms that create economic and social opportunities.

“Although Roma are the largest European minority— not only are they deprived of their basic human entitlements to jobs or education, but they are also exposed to racial mistreatment, segregation and ghettoization. It is time for this story to end.”

Branko Crvenkovski, Prime Minister of FYR Macedonia

Only policies that allow Roma to fully participate in national and European labor and housing markets, education and health systems, and social and political networks will contribute to reducing poverty over the long term. Moreover, policy design may benefit from the policy experiences of other countries and regions. While all ethnic groups have unique features, minority-
majority relations share important similarities everywhere, and much can be learned from the policy experience of countries that have confronted these issues in the past and continue to face them today.

An inclusive policy approach is needed to overcome divisions between Roma and non-Roma. For example, Roma assistant teachers who can bridge between Roma parents and teachers. Such policies build trust and can help overcome exclusion. Inclusive policies should also benefit poor communities as a whole, rather than just Roma. Approaches including multicultural curricula and the inclusion of Roma and minority history and culture in schools can help defeat prejudices within society.

ROMA PARTICIPATION

The experience of programs designed explicitly for Roma shows that including Roma in the design, implementation, and evaluation of such programs is essential for success. Since 1989 there has been progress in developing Roma civil society and increasing channels for Roma participation. Across the region, post-Soviet political liberalization created a proliferation of civil society organizations, including NGOs, political parties, religious organizations, and community associations. Many groups have been formed to address ethnic issues, including a wide range of Roma organizations, many of which have been financed by international donors.

“One of the most urgent tasks faced by the countries of Central and Eastern Europe as they approach membership in the European Union is an improvement in the quality of life of Roma and a strengthening of their social cohesion.”

Laszlo Teleki, Secretary of State for Roma Affairs, Hungary

Similarly, many countries have established institutions for including Roma participation in policymaking, or have established broad-based national consultative bodies that shape policymaking. Monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs also must involve Roma to avoid biases in assessing the effectiveness of public programs. Parliamentary commissions and the establishment of ombudsman positions can also help to provide oversight.

THE EUROPEAN DIMENSION

Policies and institutions for addressing Roma poverty and exclusion need to be considered in the context of EU integration. The post-enlargement population of Roma in the EU will reach 10–12 million people, the largest minority in Europe. While attention to Roma has been raised during the accession process through the Copenhagen criteria, this marks only the beginning. Roma poverty will need to be addressed in the context of each country’s long-term economic and social development programs.

“In the rush to EU expansion... the Roma are very often being left behind in the minds of policy-makers and journalists and many others... If you forget Roma our future in Europe will not be as successful as it might otherwise be.”

Miroslav Beblavy, State Secretary for Labor, Social Affairs and Family, Slovak Republic

The main channel for supporting Roma in EU candidate countries has been the PHARE program, which will continue to be active in Romania and Bulgaria until their expected accession later this decade. Following accession, funding for member countries for Roma programs will be available under social inclusion programs supported through structural funds, such as the European Social Fund.

THE CASE FOR AN INCLUSIVE POLICY APPROACH

In sum, Roma poverty and exclusion can be best addressed through an inclusive approach—which involves government, civil society, and other partners to address multiple dimensions of poverty and exclusion simultaneously. The dominant approach in Central and Eastern Europe since 1989 has tended to rely on fragmented ad hoc projects, often delivered by local NGOs and
with limited assistance from the state and without the support of a policy framework.

“Roma do not want to be marionettes—with others pulling the strings. They need to be fully involved as real partners, interlocutors and policy designers—and implementers of the initiatives which affect them.”
Dena Ringold, Senior Economist, World Bank

The inclusive approach requires a strong focus on policy reform, involving a package of integrated policies that offers suitable instruments to tackle all aspects of Roma poverty and exclusion. Any impediment to launching a comprehensive policy package should not compromise policy initiatives in specific sectors. There was consensus at the Budapest Conference that Roma education deserves top priority in every country and this needs to be reflected in policy development.

Development of a national policy response to Roma poverty must be complemented with provisions for implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. There is a proper role in the full policy cycle from design through evaluation for all key players, including national and local governments, Roma, civil society and the international community.

“We want to have broad-based Roma and Roma NGO representation in all matters of local and national governments which affect us. We want to be at the table making decisions about our future.”
Rumyan Russinov, Roma Delegation, Bulgaria

The road to reduce Roma poverty will be long. There will be synergies between scaled up government interventions on behalf of Roma and work towards the goals of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015 (Box 1). For the challenging tasks ahead, the policy agenda presented below will be a useful guide for national and local governments, Roma, civil society, as well as the international community.

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**Box 1: The Decade of Roma Inclusion and the Roma Education Fund**

Government leaders at the Conference agreed to launch the Decade of Roma Inclusion, spanning from 2005 to 2015 to create a coordinated framework to improve the economic opportunities and social inclusion of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe. This proposed framework consists of three activities:

1. Setting clear, quantitative national targets for improvements in economic status and social inclusion of the Roma, and setting up an information base to measure progress toward these targets,
2. Development and implementation of national action plans to achieve those targets, and
3. Regular monitoring of progress against agreed targets and adjusting action plans as necessary during the Decade.

The Decade would be linked closely to the Millennium Development Goals and the EU’s Social Inclusion Policy.

The Conference also agreed on the establishment of a Roma Education Fund to be launched in 2005 which would improve the sustainability of initiatives to improve educational outcomes of Roma by supporting programs to overcome inequities between Roma and non-Roma in access to quality education.

*Concept notes including full descriptions of both initiatives are at the end of this volume*
ADDRESSING POVERTY AND EXCLUSION

Factors contributing to Roma poverty and exclusion include (a) discrimination; (b) a dependency cycle which makes it difficult for Roma to break out of poverty; (c) obstacles to accessing essential public services. In addition, Roma women suffer the consequences of double discrimination, as they face barriers related both to gender and ethnicity, compromising their ability to alleviate poverty at the level of family and community. A separate report by the organizers of the Women’s Forum held in Budapest just prior to the Roma Conference, summarizes the conclusions on gender issues.4

Lack of quality and reliable data about the situation of Roma is another serious impediment to policy formulation and implementation. Unless inequities and conditions are addressed, it is unlikely that adequate policies can be designed or implemented for reducing Roma poverty and ending social exclusion. Therefore, a number of measures are proposed, which are pre-conditions for improving the living conditions and future opportunities of Roma.

OVERCOMING DISCRIMINATION

“We are also working against discrimination because this is part of whatever you do in Roma issues, you have to fight against discrimination.”

Refika Mustafic, Roma Delegation, Serbia and Montenegro

Discrimination against Roma in society is widespread. It permeates all aspects of daily life, including education, employment, housing, health care, and the judicial system. Tackling discrimination is a priority for reasons of social justice, but also for social welfare considerations to ensure that public services reach and benefit Roma.

Key Findings

The most frequently observed forms of discrimination include:

In education: (a) placing Roma children in special classes or special schools for the mentally disabled; (b) maintaining Roma-only classes in mainstream schools; and (c) running Roma or ghetto schools, as a result of residential segregation.

In employment: (a) job advertisements that explicitly ban Roma applicants; and (b) indirect discrimination by employers who refuse to hire Roma.

In housing: (a) local officials refusing to issue property titles to Roma in informal settlements; (b) landlords refusing to sell or rent flats/houses to Roma; (c) biased allocation of social housing among competing Roma and non-Roma applicants; (d) forced evictions of Roma; (e) residential segregation by local governments and communities with a significant Roma population; and (f) local officials refusing to provide basic services in Roma neighborhoods (water, electricity, heating).

In health: (a) health personnel refusing to treat Roma patients and demonstrating hostility and prejudice towards Roma; (b) segregation in hospital wards; and (c) health personnel undertaking medical procedures without informed consent.

In the judicial system: (a) failure to conduct prompt and impartial investigations of cases involving Roma; (b) failure to prosecute non-
Roma perpetrators of crimes committed against Roma; (c) refusal to investigate complaints from Roma victims; (d) uneven prosecution of Roma and non-Roma for the same crimes; and (e) a failure to facilitate access by Roma to free legal aid.

Proposed Actions

Current discrimination against Roma is often the result of the absence of—or failure to implement—appropriate legal and regulatory provisions to halt discrimination and the existence of widespread prejudice against Roma. Once appropriate anti-discrimination laws and regulations are passed, enforcement is a priority. Successful enforcement to ensure equality and protection for Roma will be important for reducing prejudices against Roma. National and local governments and civil society will need to confront prejudices against Roma. Approaches can include:

• Adopt and implement comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation in line with the Race Equality Directive 43/2000/EC and ECRI General Policy Recommendation No. 7;
• Sign and ratify Protocol No. 12 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms;
• Adopt and implement policies aimed at promoting equality inherent in:
  – comprehensive desegregation programs in education, while providing choices for Roma parents to ensure that access is not affected;
  – national programs to legalize informal settlements;
  – legal aid programs to help Roma obtain ownership rights;
  – educational programs for Roma on various health care options; and
  – training for service providers working in a multicultural environment to acquire sensitivity to Roma culture.
• Public information campaigns to educate the population on the existence and substance of anti-discrimination legislation and tolerance more broadly within society.

BREAKING THE DEPENDENCY CYCLE: THE NEED FOR AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

Roma poverty is rooted in their disadvantaged position at the outset of transition. Low education levels and overrepresentation among low-skilled jobs have led to disadvantages on the labor market, which have been compounded by discrimination and low expectation of employers. Roma were hard hit by unemployment after the closure of inefficient and non-viable state owned enterprises. Given low education and skill levels, Roma had more difficulty re-entering the labor market than other groups, and have become caught in a vicious circle of impoverishment. Additional barriers include a lack of access to credit, the absence of clear property ownership, and difficult/limited access to social services. These factors, combined with long-standing social exclusion and overdependence on welfare benefits, create a vicious circle that precludes Roma from breaking out of poverty.

The main causes and characteristics of the dependency cycle vary from country to country and even from region to region, as, for instance, there are noticeable differences between Central Europe and Southeastern Europe. It is essential that national and local governments and policy makers recognize the existence of the dependency cycle and the need for an integrated approach to assist Roma living in poverty.

Active labor market policies have been applied in Central and Eastern European countries since transition. In the case of Roma, the success of these policies may be greatly compromised by the fact that many Roma live in marginalized regions without much potential for rapid economic growth. That fact only emphasizes the “double marginalization” of Roma.
Moreover, active labor market policies may remain ineffective unless complemented by comprehensive anti-discrimination provisions that are enforced at the local government and community level.

To lift Roma out of the “poverty trap” three objectives will need to be addressed simultaneously:

- Increasing economic opportunities by expanding employment in the national and regional economies and providing micro-finance and other support for those with sufficient capacity and initiatives for self-employment;
- Building human capital through better education and training programs and health services; and
- Strengthening social capital and community development through increased empowerment and participation of Roma—which will necessarily involve parallel anti-discrimination interventions through legal means and improved social awareness.

To achieve these multiple objectives simultaneously, social protection systems need to be strengthened to serve as a safety net and provide sufficient incentives for beneficiaries to reenter the labor market. Experience shows that a two-pronged approach will be the most effective, involving: (a) mainstreaming Roma under a national assistance system, and (b) targeting the Roma population as and when necessary to ensure that all Roma in poverty receive adequate assistance and incentives for work.

“Included people make an economic contribution and excluded people do not. Please do not let short-term investment stand in the way of the long-term benefit.”

Elvis Ali, Roma Delegation, FYR Macedonia

**MAKING SERVICES WORK FOR ROMA**

The Budapest Conference included participants from other ethnic groups which face similar conditions of poverty, exclusion, and gaps in service delivery, including a Maori woman from New Zealand and a First Nations man from Canada. These participants highlighted common issues faced by minorities and indigenous peoples in accessing services such as health care and education.

“We need to ensure that our public services, across the board, are alive to the needs of the Roma communities and provide them with the same level of service and care as all other members of society.”

Anna Diamantopoulou, Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs, EU

**Key Findings**

A key conclusion of the discussions on service delivery was that Roma participation in the design and delivery of services is essential. Without such involvement, poor communication between beneficiaries and service providers limits the quality and availability of services and confidence between authorities and minorities remains low. Moreover, the effectiveness of local government and community level programs are limited without strong links to national programs that generally have higher visibility and more reliable oversight.

**Proposed Actions**

There are cross-cutting issues that can be confronted to ensure that services work for Roma:

- Anti-discrimination laws must be in place and enforced, and comprehensive enough to deal with public services delivery;
- Involvement of Roma is essential in all stages of program development, delivery and monitoring;
- It is desirable to design services for the population at large, in order to ensure economies of scale and to avoid singling Roma out into separate programs and increasing separation between Roma and non-Roma;
- Personnel involved in service delivery need to be culturally sensitive and respect the beneficiaries. Training programs can help;
• Roma need to be trained, supported and hired as service providers;
• Strong monitoring and evaluation systems need to be put in place and made to work.

WHO ARE ROMA? HOW MANY ARE POOR AND UNEMPLOYED?

Data on Roma are scarce and frequently unreliable, making policy formulation and resource allocation difficult. While the need for better data is generally accepted by Roma and non-Roma, there are serious impediments to data collection and quality. In some countries, collection of data on ethnicity cannot be mandatory because of privacy legislation. Even when data are collected, identifying Roma is especially difficult. Some Roma may choose not to declare themselves Roma on surveys because they do not consider themselves Roma, or because of mistrust and a lack of understanding of the potential benefits of having reliable data. Censuses and surveys may also not include unregistered Roma settlements or neighborhoods in their sample frames, essentially leaving Roma out of the surveys altogether.

EU practices in conducting surveys and censuses focus on the protection of human and minority rights and transparency and confidentiality. In Europe, the census is considered to be the most effective and reliable source of information on minority issues. Adoption of EU consistent safeguards should be helpful to dispel minority and Roma concerns, help governments to persuade Roma communities about the benefits of data collection and improve the quality of responses to ethnicity questions of the census.

“Resolving Roma issues (not only) in Slovakia is not a quick walk in the park. Despite all of our efforts, we are still only at the beginning of the process. We will have to work more in this area, work harder and in a more focused way.”

Rudolf Chmel, Minister of Culture, Slovak Republic

Governments should take a two-pronged approach: (a) in the short run, focus on surveys to fill information gaps on key social indicators (such baseline data will be needed to monitor progress for the Decade of Roma Inclusion); and (b) looking beyond 2005, improving the collection of data on ethnicity through national censuses. The next round of censuses in the region are expected between 2008-12. Well designed preparatory work can improve the ability of these surveys to collect useful and reliable data about Roma. The following recommendations were made:

“Data matters, numbers matter; so it is important to know for policy-making, it is important to know for anti-discrimination efforts of NGOs, Roma individuals, so for a variety of reasons, statistics are vital.”

Andrzej Mirga, Project on Ethnic Relations and Council of Europe

• Support baseline statistical studies for developing sector policies such as education and health;
• Ensure Roma participation in the design and implementation of studies by (a) undertaking public information campaigns to reach Roma and explain the effectiveness of laws and policies for the protection of confidentiality and full accountability over violations (with reference to specific examples); and (b) collaborating with Roma representatives to design and carry out surveys (with clear objectives, context and organization);
• Disseminate results of studies publicly, and reach out to Roma in particular, to enhance transparency and credibility, and to build understanding and ownership;
• Cooperate with National Statistical Offices to ensure EU consistent practices, regarding impartiality, reliability, confidentiality, relevance, cost/effectiveness and transparency of statistical work, including the national censuses. Follow UN/ECE-Eurostat recommendations for data gathering for demographic purposes;
• Provide long-term training and employment for Roma in National Statistical
Offices and the Census Office as surveyors, data processors and monitors; and

- Strengthen measures for identifying and eliminating unlawful, abusive data collection practices—and make public both cases of violation and legal remedies applied.

New initiatives for better identifying the Roma minority in Central and Eastern Europe can be supported by international organizations, including the European Commission, Council of Europe, the UN and others, through the following:

- Develop and make available information kits to governments and NGOs on data protection legislation, emphasizing good practices, and protection and compliance with the law;

- Develop a set of consistent indicators in the various sectors and policy areas, which can be used to measure progress across Europe over time;

- Support and finance baseline studies, and require meaningful Roma participation in the process; and

- Provide funding for long-term, intensive training for Roma in data collection techniques, statistical work and the national census.

Given the need for wider availability and better quality of statistics on Roma, on-going work on data and new initiatives will offer an opportunity for cooperation between governments, Roma and international organizations.
In order to participate in social and economic life, Roma need to (a) have access to and conditions for completing quality education; (b) benefit from adequate health services; and (c) expand employment opportunities. Policies to enable Roma to make use of opportunities and reduce poverty and social exclusion constitute the core agenda.

**ROMA EDUCATION: ACHIEVING ACCESS, CHOICE, AND QUALITY**

There was widespread consensus at the Conference among stakeholders that education is the most important entry point for improving the living conditions of Roma. A survey of Roma participants prior to the Budapest Conference indicated that education is on top of the list of Roma priorities. Not surprisingly, the education panels were among the best attended and contributed important findings.

**Key Findings**

- The best way to strive for quality education for Roma is to raise expectations of Roma and non-Roma and assume that Roma can succeed;
- Experience with minority education and social exclusion in Europe and other regions suggests that the best outcomes can be achieved through an intercultural approach, where both mainstream and minority educational goals are pursued in parallel—striving for the best of both mainstream and Roma education;
- The best outcomes have been observed where Roma are full partners in the education of their children; where Roma parents and communities are substantially involved in policy development, implementation, and school affairs, building trust and capacity between parents and school officials;
- Education should take a lifelong learning approach—involving the whole cycle from pre-school through higher and second chance adult education. Pre-school education is essential to ensure that Roma start school on an equal footing. Similarly, adult education and training can bring Roma with low and obsolete skills back into the labor market.
- Reform measures for Roma education require comprehensive information and data to ensure accountability within the education system, monitor and measure gains for results, and provide feedback to education professionals and policy makers for continual policy adjustment.

**Proposed Actions**

Projects and specific programs—no matter how relevant—are not adequate instruments for addressing sector wide shortcomings in education. Policy measures to underpin improvements in Roma education outcomes include:

- Design policies to improve the quality and relevance of Roma education, includ-
Box 2: Demand and Supply Side Interventions for Improving Roma Education

Demand-side interventions encourage Roma participation in education.
• Provide child allowances and school feeding programs to overcome economic barriers to school attendance for poor households;
• Ensure that Roma children and parents have a voice in school governance through full participation;
• Promote community involvement in education including Roma assistant teachers, appointment of community mediators, and launching adult education programs;
• Increase sensitivity to Roma issues in schools through programs to improve the quality of interactions between students and school personnel—monitor progress and provide assistance at local government level;
• Promote Roma role models among teachers, community and political leaders and high achievers in the community and beyond;
• Provide scholarships for financial support to Roma students; and
• Ensure that curriculum and the educational content are relevant to the labor market and to economic opportunities in the country.

Supply side interventions refer to actions to be carried out by entities/officials responsible for providing education.
• Devolve decision making concerning the implementation of education policy to the local government level in the context of deepening decentralization of state administration;
• Allocate adequate resources to finance policy initiatives directed at Roma;
• Improve physical access to schools for Roma, especially in rural settings and distant small settlements, where provision of transportation is necessary; assess the potential of distance education and use it where it will ensure access to education at low cost;
• Pursue quality of Roma education as a principal objective of education sector policy; promote Roma teacher training programs and curriculum reforms;
• Give visibility to Roma history, language and culture in the curriculum; and
• Emphasize accountability—not only over supply side interventions, but about achievement of Roma educational goals in general. Roma should be involved in on-going monitoring and measurement of outcomes.
tary based participation by Roma parents? Third, how should governments tackle barriers to education outcomes which lie outside the education system, such as housing, health and labor markets? And finally, how can governments help young educated Roma to retain family and community ties, which provide powerful feedback and incentives for education?

As governments undertake reforms, it will be essential to put in place continuous monitoring arrangements. Sound evaluations are needed to make policy adjustments.

HEALTH STATUS
Health status is an essential element of welfare. While health data on Roma are scarce and fragmented, the data that are available show significant gaps in health indicators between Roma and non-Roma, including the incidence of communicable disease, and the risks associated with poor nutrition and housing and unhealthy lifestyle. Life expectancy for Roma is estimated to be 10 to 15 years less than for non-Roma. The health status of Roma women is of particular concern.

Key Findings
The main causes of poor health status among Roma are thought to be: (a) the lack of access to basic health services; (b) demand and supply barriers to accessing health care, including poor quality of services in rural areas and Roma settlements; and (c) poor communication between Roma patients and non-Roma health service providers.

Proposed Actions
• Improve the database on basic health indicators of Roma through surveys and national censuses;
• Analyze laws, policies, regulations and related institutional arrangements to assess how they affect access to health care by Roma, examine the potential of multi-sectoral plans to alleviate Roma health problems;
• Designate a Roma coordinator in the Ministry of Health to oversee the above review and to participate in evaluation of the effectiveness of measures to improve Roma access to health services;
• Identify good performers in the administration and support programs at the local government and community levels, in order to suggest changes in existing administrative and health care practices and to monitor progress in overcoming barriers to access;
• Appoint health mediators (trained Roma from the community to help address issues arising from cultural differences) to address the different aspects of low confidence in modern medical treatment and monitoring; and
• Improve communication through training and information campaigns to increase communications between health care employees and Roma patients and to develop an understanding of the consequences of social exclusion.

EXPANDING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES
The difficulty that Roma face in accessing and re-entering the labor market is a main contributor to poverty. Long-term unemployment, in addition to leaving people in poverty, leads to a psychology of dependence on social benefits, which makes reentry into the labor market even more difficult. Another reason for widespread unemployment is that many Roma have obsolete skills which are no longer needed in the labor market. Hence training and adult education will play a central role.

“A developing an inclusive labor market and promoting employment as a right and opportunity for all is the key way out of poverty and social exclusion.”
Peter Pollak, Roma Delegation, Slovak Republic

A mix of passive unemployment benefits and active measures to influence the demand and supply of employment are needed. Experience in the region suggests that some unemployed individuals are able to take advantage of measures
promoting entrepreneurship and facilitating access to training and ultimately employment. The approach and the context in which such assistance programs are designed and implemented is crucial.

**Key Findings**

Based on the lessons of experience reported at the Conference, the following aspects require special attention in the design of measures to expand Roma employment:

- Flexibility is needed to respond to the varying needs, capacities and resources of individuals. Given the diversity of Roma, specific approaches are necessary for different groups;
- Synergies between local, regional, national, and ultimately European levels need to be promoted to widen opportunities for funding and support and to widen the targeted beneficiary groups;
- Continuous monitoring and evaluation of the combined impact of credit and training programs, as well as the supportive institutional framework, with a view to adjusting the method of approach as needed.

**Proposed Actions**

- Open access to credit for individual and family business initiatives, complemented by mainstream training programs and development services to create conditions for success—establish micro finance funds or transform existing facilities;
- Review regulatory obstacles to the development of income-generating activities and mobility of Roma, and recommend action for national and local governments to remove obstacles;
- Support the establishment of centers for small-scale businesses in rural areas, and provide information on access to credit, training and professional business advice;
- Increase access for Roma, including, in particular, those in rural settlements, to vocational training and subsequent work placement assistance and to employment through both traditional means and alternative methods. (e.g. the ACCEDER program in Spain which facilitates access to on-the-job training);
- Launch a Europe-wide information campaign to combat discrimination and exclusion—this may be undertaken most effectively in the context of preparatory work for and implementation of the Decade for Roma Inclusion 2005-2015. Many Roma are engaged in the informal sector and it may be that the micro-finance and support programs recommended above will also generate economic activity in the informal sector. Governments in Central and Eastern Europe will need to develop a strategy for the formal recognition of informal economic activity in a manner that will not jeopardize the source of livelihood for the beneficiaries of targeted programs.
The integrated policy approach recommended here can be carried out successfully only if complementary arrangements are in place to promote Roma integration in a broader sense, in both the public sector and civil society. To make this multi-dimensional policy approach successful and to achieve its objectives over the medium and long-term, governments and civil society will also need to coordinate and implement public policy with appropriate Roma participation at all levels; increase involvement of local governments in implementing and monitoring Roma policies and programs; and empower Roma by fully involving the local community and Roma beneficiaries in the design and delivery of public and social services.

“**We cannot make progress without each other—this is the most important thing I have learnt in the past decades.**”

Peter Medgyessy, Prime Minister of Hungary

**COORDINATING AND IMPLEMENTING POLICY WITH ROMA PARTICIPATION**

The need for stepped-up Roma participation is a recurrent theme throughout this document. It is a pre-condition for enhancing the effectiveness of policy and program design, development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. It is also evident after thirteen years of transition that isolated programs and projects cannot achieve the desired improvement in the poverty and social status of Roma.

While significant progress has been made in formulating Roma policies since the start of transition, more needs to be done. The **Decade of Roma Inclusion** agreed at the Budapest Conference will increase the urgency of action, since adoption of social indicators and targets will involve both technical work and policy considerations. To date, Roma issues have not been incorporated adequately in national strategies in such important policy areas as social inclusion, poverty reduction and social assistance. In other words, Roma issues have not been mainstreamed.

Also, Roma policies are often not yet widely accepted or seen as necessary by the majority populations, by many public servants and local government officials, or even by different professional groups. This not only reflects the survival of long standing prejudices in society and discrimination against Roma, but also creates an obstacle making it difficult to implement specially designed Roma policy packages. An important conclusion for Roma policies in Central and Eastern Europe is that they need to be based on a wide political consensus, which in general needs yet to be put in place.

“I hope that what will be achieved is the participation of Roma, the empowerment of Roma to be a part of the policy-making, the decision-making, implementation and monitoring the policies.”

Delia Grigore, Roma Delegation, Romania

**Proposed Actions**

*Promote Roma Participation*

- Allocate resources in the business plan of all Roma projects and programs to secure quality participation of Roma in all stages, including design and evaluation;
• Donors and governments must assure that financing packages include strict conditions for genuine Roma participation as an eligibility requirement;
• Community empowerment chapters should be included in all Roma strategies.

Mainstream Roma Policies
• Every attempt needs to be made to develop comprehensive sectoral, regional and municipal policies, which give guidelines for concrete action plans. Where relevant, policies, and plans need to address politically sensitive issues such as internally displaced persons and refugees;
• Broad communication strategies need to be developed by national governments to reach out to mainstream society and raise awareness about the importance of discrimination against Roma and the requirements of legislation;
• Incorporate specific actions for a public information campaign about modern anti-discrimination laws and the usefulness of policies specifically directed at Roma within national Roma programs.

Raise Public Awareness about Roma Issues
• To secure maximum leverage and accountability for implementing Roma policies, it is recommended that policies should be based on law and not on governmental decrees or regulations, in order to secure stability and continuity;
• The suggested legal framework, together with the public communication campaign mentioned above, needs to be used to build public consensus behind the new approach to Roma policies.

Build Political Consensus
• If a good program is developed, local governments have to implement it... Without us, no pragmatic real program can be developed, neither in the field of housing, education and so on.”

“A MAJOR ROLE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS
The roles of local governments in Central and Eastern Europe have been undergoing profound transformations since the collapse of communism. These changes offer new opportunities to address public policy issues in multiethnic communities, including for Roma. The aspirations of Roma are being expressed with a stronger voice and increasing clarity. Those aspirations can be the basis of valuable partnerships between Roma and mainstream society for strengthening and broadening local government functions.

The Budapest Conference benefited much from the presence of a number of mayors in the region, including the mayor of Budapest, and produced a lively debate on the subject, as it is seen through the eyes of administrators and political leaders of cities with large Roma populations.

Key Findings
Municipalities with large Roma communities often face deep poverty, housing problems, including illegal housing, high unemployment, lack of education, and other social problems. Local officials need to address these problems, in addition to other urgent matters facing the entire local community. During the Budapest Conference several models were discussed on how to involve representatives of the Roma minority in the search for solutions. The working relations between Roma leaders and local authorities took a different form at the various cities that were represented at the Conference. For example, in Budapest, the municipal authorities work hand in hand with elected Roma representatives of the...
minority self-governments. In Suto Orizari in FYR Macedonia, a municipality in Skopje, Roma themselves are in charge of most of local affairs, in cooperation with municipal authorities. In Belgrade, the municipality deals directly with Roma issues in close cooperation with Roma NGOs.

Proposed Actions

- National policies should be adapted to local realities, while safeguarding the mandate of the law: policies on education, housing and job creation should all be matters of local concern and remain in the purview of local government;
- Local authorities are often faced with serious resource constraints, as there is a mismatch between expenditures of devolved responsibilities and mandated sources of funding. More fiscal autonomy at the municipal level could provide additional resources to tackle problems in Roma neighborhoods, though overall fiscal viability and accountability need to be safeguarded in whatever financing arrangements are chosen;
- There is a need for developing competent and responsible local governments, which work under full transparency;
- A network of successful municipalities could serve as examples for building effective working relations between the Roma community and local authorities and for sound local government practices—such networks should be promoted by national governments and international donors;
- Partnerships should be strengthened between local authorities and Roma, building trust and rolling back prejudices on all sides—the social capital that can be created in the process will contribute to further conciliation and more effective integration and social inclusion;
- With solid progress in capacity building for Roma, they will be in a position to take on more responsibilities in municipalities. To this end, priority should be given to providing education and training;
- In post-conflict situations, as for instance in the cities of the former Yugoslavia, mayors need to be encouraged "to build bridges" between the authorities and the post-conflict communities, and among the various ethnic minorities. The mayor of Budapest agreed to play the role of mediator if requested to support such an initiative.
- The return of Roma refugees to post-conflict localities raises several issues, for which the following guidance emerged at the Conference. Refugees should not be forced to return and those refugees who do return need to be supported through special assistance programs for integration, which could include: (a) housing reconstruction, (b) affirmative action on the labor market to help access to employment, (c) provision of public security, and (d) resources for education;
- In general, enlightened government policies are needed to encourage the adoption and enforcement of anti-discrimination laws. The political will of authorities at the national and local levels will be needed to address the problems faced by Roma, including in particular discrimination, deep poverty and a lack of access to social and public services.

One important challenge is how to assist Roma in finding ways to share responsibilities at the local government level. Roma communities need to be represented in elected bodies and in the local administration, and their representatives need to be consulted on important community issues. To achieve this, local authorities should encourage and facilitate the inclusion of Roma representatives in local decision-making structures. On the other hand, Roma need to realize that in a democratic society they not only have the opportunity but the obligation to organize and become active and responsible partners in local affairs affecting their community, including local politics.
EMPOWERING ROMA THROUGH COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Through participation in development and implementation of policies and programs, and close collaboration with local governments, Roma need to be empowered to take matters affecting them in their own hands. Several attempts have been made in Europe to reach Roma communities, including a successful NGO driven experiment in Hungary (Autonomia Foundation), a state sponsored support scheme in Romania (Romania Social Development Fund) and the top-down scheme of the European Commission, which involves a multi-country approach for social inclusion and substantial financial resources. The experience under each program was discussed at length at the Budapest Conference.

From Social Exclusion to Inclusion

Social exclusion in Roma communities is characterized by a pervasive sense of neglect, isolation and tangible evidence of exclusion from the opportunities of every day life. The deep poverty in many Roma communities only exacerbates the degree of social exclusion. A number of considerations need to be kept in mind while addressing this exclusion:

- Society and governments need to reach out to Roma in a proactive manner;
- Roma themselves need to take a proactive role and assume responsibility for solutions to their own problems and demonstrate willingness to cooperate with local officials, NGOs and civic groups;
- An essential pre-condition of success in social inclusion is how the work is carried out—as important as what is being done;
- When Roma are targeted through social assistance and other support schemes designed to alleviate deep poverty, care needs to be taken to ensure “bridging outreach” to non-Roma poor also, so as to minimize stigma and negative reactions from non-Roma that Roma are receiving special treatment; and
- Local governments can only be successful in tackling issues affecting Roma if they develop a sense that it is a shared problem.

“The key to success is the involvement of Roma themselves in whatever project or initiative is designed at international or national level.”
Adrian Nastase, Prime Minister of Romania

Ways to Empower Roma Communities

- Trust the community and the lessons of its experience and judgment. While there are significant risks involved, the pay-off in terms of sustainable development results can be very high;
- Build mutual trust with and within Roma communities, in order to create the social capital necessary for successful programs;
- Involve beneficiaries in the design and implementation of policies as well as programs to develop skills among communities in organization, procurement, and financial management;
- Conduct client responsive community training which empowers through skill enhancement;
- Assist Roma communities to have access to assets (including, in particular, housing), and public and social services; and
- Allocate resources through loans and grants for specific programs, thus contributing to capital accumulation in the Roma communities.
Proposed Actions

- Promote and facilitate community development with the assistance of NGOs, local governments, and by providing support and funding for social funds;
- Encourage “bottom-up” initiatives. Beneficiary communities need to be encouraged and invited to share their list of priorities with, and make proposals for specific programs to, local governments, NGOs and civic groups that have a mandate and resources for social inclusion programs;
- Disseminate information publicly as widely as possible about Roma issues, government initiatives, specific programs and the potential role of private citizens;
- Provide application forms for funding of programs and evaluation forms for measuring outcomes in all minority languages; procedures must be simple and fully transparent;
- Ensure open methods of coordination among key players, following practices by EU member states that set goals publicly at national level, and insist on public accountability for results; similar arrangements can be equally successful for Roma programs at the local government level.

Outcomes should be measured in terms of the actual level of participation of Roma, the increase in their negotiation skills and political participation, the improved understanding achieved between majority and minority social groups, and the growth in economic activity. Support for local civil society will also be a useful indicator, as will be the level and strength of partnerships between the national and local levels. The existence of partnerships between Roma and non-Roma will be a good indicator of the degree of cooperation within majority society and the Roma minority, although it must be recognized that such partnership initiatives can easily be taken over for political purposes or narrow group interests. Both risks need to be averted.

“The future of this depends on each of your contributions. The future of this depends on us going out of here changed, and optimistic, and prepared to work. Certainly, I can speak with conviction for my own organization, where our mission is to fight poverty with passion and we measure our success in terms of human results. For us this is a cause that we embrace warmly, a cause that is central to the human spirit, and a cause that we will succeed in addressing in this coming year and in the years ahead.”

James Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank

NOTES


2. The countries that participated in the Budapest Conference were: Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, FYR Macedonia, Romania, the Slovak Republic, Serbia and Montenegro. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Poland, Russia and Ukraine participated as observers.


5. A recently approved Anti-Discrimination Law in Bulgaria is the first of its kind and provides an encouraging example.

6. See the European Convention on Human Rights; European Charter on Fundamental Rights and the EC Directive on equal treatment of persons regardless of racial or ethnic origin—2000/43/EC.
PART II

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS
LÁSZLÓ TELEKI, Political State Secretary for Roma Affairs of the Prime Minister’s Office, Hungary

One of the most urgent tasks faced by the countries of Central and Eastern Europe as they approach membership of the European Union is an improvement in the quality of life of Roma and a strengthening of their social cohesion.

We are here today in order to analyze our experiences in an objective manner, to jointly define our goals and discover the path that may lead to the realization of such goals, which could represent a turning point in the social integration of Roma.

The significance of the Roma issue is well demonstrated by the fact that, in a manner unprecedented in Central and Eastern Europe, a broad and high level discussion is taking place at this Conference entitled “Roma in Europe: Challenges for the Future.”

I should like to express my thanks to the Government of the Republic of Hungary, the World Bank, the Open Society Institute, and the European Commission for the initiative and considerable support that they have offered towards the realization of this Conference entitled “Roma in Europe: Challenges for the Future.”

I believe that the efforts to date of the Government of the Republic of Hungary and in particular the governmental measures of the past year have contributed to Budapest’s playing host to this high-level Conference.

In the recent past there has been an increasing recognition in the countries of Europe and the region that gestures are no longer sufficient and that active measures must also be taken for the sake of the integration of Roma. Nevertheless, if—summing up the results so far—we ask ourselves the question: What is it like to be a Roma at the beginning of the 21st century? We cannot be satisfied. News programs tell of the failures of Roma at school, their high rates of unemployment, their poor health, and of discrimination against Roma. Roma face much prejudice, poverty, exclusion and many misconceptions. When examining the situation of Roma, it is difficult and sometimes impossible to determine the historic, social and economic factors and explanations that have led to what may now be considered the general falling behind of Roma. We must act—not just for the sake of Roma but also for the sake of successfully realizing European integration as soon as possible.

One of the most important messages of this Conference is the development of a broadening recognition that these iniquitous circumstances cannot be sustained any longer!

We know that in many countries of the world there are governments, civil society organizations and people that are willing and able to act for the sake of the true integration of Roma. In the recent past, Roma communities have demonstrated on several occasions that they are willing and able to take steps for the sake of their own advancement, that is, for the sake of a common Europe.

The European integration of the accession countries will be incomplete without the successful integration of Roma. If we acknowledge this, we can say that we see the goal that we wish to reach together. Our task is to determine jointly the path on which we must now proceed.

The integration of the Roma must reflect the responses to the challenges faced by the countries of the region and of Europe in the 21st century. For this is the only means of ensuring that Euro-
pean societies will continue to develop in the spirit of human dignity and freedom.

Let us not be faint-hearted! We cannot afford to make concessions, because we are responsible for Europe, for ourselves, for all Roma, and for all our friends who—through this Conference—are indicating to us: It is important to Europe that Roma should be successful.

Our common task—the task of Roma and non-Roma, of governments and civil organizations, of communities and private individuals—is to promote and realize the measures that will create and guarantee a free life, human dignity and security for all Europeans. In addition to the responsibility of governments, Roma leaders must also consider responsibly their own tasks. The challenges of the 21st century must be met with 21st century responses—and this is also true for Roma integration.

It is my wish that these thoughts guide you in the work of the following days, and then we shall be able to say that it was fruitful to debate the issues of Roma integration and that it is worth continuing the dialogue begun in Budapest.

Finally, let me express my thanks that, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Hungary, I may formally open the Conference. Wishing everyone a successful Conference, I now ask Dr. Péter Medgyessy, Prime Minister of the Republic of Hungary, to make his opening speech.
PÉTER MEDGYESSY, Prime Minister, Hungary

As the Prime Minister of the Republic of Hungary I have the honor to welcome you to the Conference “Roma in an Expanding Europe: Challenges for the Future” here in Budapest, the heart of Europe.

Thank you for accepting the invitation of the Hungarian Government and the World Bank. Your presence not only elevates the Conference to its proper rank but also encourages us that the results of this discussion will indeed become integrated into the national strategies, and there will be sufficient political will and power to finally see deeds follow words.

Let me extend a very special welcome to Mr. James Wolfensohn and Mr. George Soros. Let me also thank the World Bank, the Soros Foundation, the Open Society Institute, the European Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs and UNDP for the help they contributed to the organization of this Conference. I truly believe that this professional meeting will be the proper forum to link parallel initiatives that sometimes are not even aware of each other, and to establish a working cooperation to ensure that the integration of the Roma people is successful.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I read a beautiful but painfully true statement in a report published recently by the World Bank. The experts write: “The Roma constitute the largest ethnic minority in terms of the number of people and the most vulnerable one in Europe.”

The quality of life, the size of communities of the Roma varies from one country of Europe to another: there are fewer Roma living somewhat better in the Europe of the Fifteen; however, more live in Central and Eastern Europe under much more difficult circumstances. Nevertheless, there is one point where there is no difference: in Europe, all majority societies in Europe are indebted to the Roma people.

It takes a program overarching several generations to pay off this debt. We, however, cannot delay in implementing it as human lives are at stake.

Distinguished Guests, the disadvantaged situation of the Roma citizens of Europe can be traced back to several reasons; their disadvantages accumulate, reinforce each other, and each problem leads to another. The majority of the Roma live under squalid conditions, exclusion is an everyday experience for them. The majority of the Roma cannot avail themselves of the right of knowledge, many of them lack education and are unemployed. The languages of the Roma, the most important carriers of the national culture, are threatened by extinction.

It is then easy to see, Ladies and Gentlemen, that the community of European Roma will be unable to join the Europe of the 21st Century unless the majority societies—governments, intergovernmental organizations and the civil world—voluntarily share a community with the Roma, unless they do more for them than over the past generations. Because there can be no progress for the Roma without solidarity and a true equality of opportunities, and the same applies also to the success of the European Union or the success of the member states.

The integration of the Roma is not only a moral or legal obligation: it also in our reasonable interest. The social integration of our fellow Roma citizens is not an objective in itself, it is only the repayment of an old debt we owe to moral and justice. Also, the successful integration of the Roma is a merely a vehicle. The means to unfold social partnership and a sense of community. There can be no competitiveness or sustainable development without a community that is capable of co-operation. There can be no progress without these. And that is in our national interest, and the interest of the European community.

This is why I think that the approach that considers whether national or trans-national programs can do more to promote the situation of the Roma is wrong, mistaken from the very beginning. I am convinced that the interests of Europe and the member states are identical in this area: national and European measures for the integration of the Roma do not substitute but are complementary to each other.
I intend to discuss these issues with you at some more depth in my lecture this week. However, let me point out in advance that while the responsibility of governments exists beyond doubt, it is not at all exclusive.

In the lack of efficient, recognized civil organizations with good social networks government and state initiatives run the risk that action plans and integration programs, however promising, remain nothing more than political experiments isolated from real life. If citizens are not addressed and their interest is not made conscious, the state and governments are forced to use power to overcome existing prejudices and to ensure positive discrimination of the Roma. However, that reduces the social acceptance and thus the efficiency of the measures.

No major common issue can be solved without a national consensus. If we admit that there can be no complete Hungary and Europe of the 21st century without the Roma, then we also must recognize that there can be no successful integration of the Roma without an efficient cooperation between the government and the civil sector.

We cannot make progress without each other—this is the most important thing I have learnt in the past decades. And this is the idea that facilitated this international Conference, this highly recognized event.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Guests, thank you for being here, for bringing and sharing your experience with us; thank you for your preparedness to act jointly now and in the future for our common issue: the emergence of the European Roma community.

This Conference is another step towards thinking together about one of the most important issues of the new Europe together, sitting around one table. I am glad to see that there are so many experts, interested and committed politicians and Roma leaders around this table.

I firmly believe that important issues can only be solved through the joining of forces and concerted efforts, deep faith, willpower and audacity. I can see that perhaps now, in these two days, all of these will be around.

Please feel welcome and at home in Hungary, and I wish you successful and effective work.
ANNA DIAMANTOPOULOU, European Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs

Chair, Prime Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today’s Conference—bringing together representatives of the Roma communities, governments of the wider European region, and international organizations—is extremely important. For all the parties concerned, for all the countries concerned but especially, I believe, for the Roma people.

I congratulate James Wolfensohn and the World Bank, and George Soros and the Open Society Institute, for taking the initiative to organize this event. And I am happy that the Commission is a co-sponsor for what I hope will be a very successful Conference. As European Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs, I am very conscious of our responsibilities with respect to the Roma people.

The European Union has been extraordinarily successful, in social, political and economic terms, since its creation over half a century ago; expanding from 150 million people and six countries 40 years ago, to 325 million and 15 countries today. And now due to reach 450 million in the middle of next year, with the enlargement to 25 countries. With a further enlargement foreseen in the coming years, bringing millions more Roma people into our Union, making them the largest ethnic minority group in the EU.

Roma people joining the EU, as well as the million or more already living here, will be part of a European community which is united in its pursuit of a peaceful and prosperous partnership between countries, within borders, and with its neighbors. A community built on principles of equality, democracy, and the rule of law. But it is also a Union of diversity, in culture, language, and ethnic origin. A community which seeks to embrace all its peoples in its common goals.

Our short, but successful, history has been one of maintaining, and strengthening, this dual purpose:

• Pursuing effective economic integration—so that trade between our countries is today double the size of our trade with the rest of the world;
• While respecting, at the same time, the principle of equal opportunity between women and men, and the interests and concerns of all groups; all minorities, all local, regional and national identities, in our midst.

As a Union, we are united around our principles and around our common concerns. Our principles include the right of people, and peoples, to live their lives according to their own traditions while respecting the fundamental principles of justice and human rights. And our concerns include ensuring equal access to employment, education, health care and the other provisions of our European welfare systems; which reflect the overwhelming desire of our citizens, and which are the admiration of developing regions around the world. Which is why the poverty, exclusion and discrimination faced by the Roma people are such a challenge, and an issue of concern, for the European Community. Knowing that even where existing member states have developed policies and programs to support and integrate the Roma people already living in the Union, they do not always appear to have been as successful as we would have liked. And that we are now to face these challenges on a much, much, larger scale. Where the criteria of success—as seen by the Roma people or others—may change. Where many of the issues can be difficult for governments and social actors to address. And where both Roma communities and other sections of society will have to play an active role in efforts to build a more inclusive Europe.

Which is why I want to respond positively to the ideas tabled by the World Bank at this Conference—the establishment of an Education Fund and the launching of a Decade of Roma Inclusion. And why I am happy not only to confirm the Union’s interest in these plans but our commitment to ensuring the fullest possible compatibility between them and the policies, programs and projects of the European Union.

Bearing in mind that the European Union has supported actions to assist the Roma for more than a decade; through the pre-accession PHARE
program, which has contributed some 77 million Euro during the last three years alone and through the European Social Fund for those Roma already in the Union. What we want to do now, though, goes much further. And that is to ensure that all the governments, non-governmental organizations and other actors, in all member states and accession and candidate countries, mobilize all relevant European and national policies and funds in tackling Roma issues.

This could happen through financial support of course, but also through policy coordination and the exchange of good practice—as we do across the full range of employment and social policies, and also through the full application of the extensive legal framework that exists in the European Union, especially with respect to discrimination.

While recognizing the difficulty of the challenges ahead. Where—and here I speak to those who will be developing the ideas that have been put on the table today—we need to recognize that simply grouping sets of projects together, and calling them programs, will not automatically bring the success that we may have missed in the past. We will only succeed when Roma issues are being treated, not just with specific programs and actions—important and necessary as they are—but also as part of the general framework of European and national policies. At national level, efforts should be made to adapt public services, education systems, health care provision and other vital elements of the social fabric, to the needs of Roma communities; most especially in terms of employment and access to education, skills training, and the labor market so as to empower the Roma people, to increase their employability, and broaden their range of employment opportunities, as they enter the increasingly sophisticated world of work in the European Union and beyond.

We know also that people’s chances of competing in the labor market can be determined at a very early age. Choices made at the ages of five or six about which schools a child will attend can open up or close off opportunities later on. Which is why we must question the disproportionate number of Roma children who are placed in special schools, with limited curricula, effectively denying them a chance of successfully integrating into the labor market later on and why we should welcome and support initiatives to reach out to pre-school Roma children to overcome some of the disadvantages they face and to help them cope with mainstream schooling from the very beginning.

This is the sort of positive action that must become more and more common across Europe in the knowledge that the Roma people will have the full support of EU anti-discrimination legislation which was adopted in 2000. This is currently being transformed into national legislation and bans racial discrimination in employment, training, education, social security, health care, access to goods and services, housing.

Which is why we have encouraged the accession and candidate countries to develop broad, coherent, medium-to-long term strategies to promote the integration of Roma. Such as the Hungarian Government’s positive new program on ‘Promoting Equal Chances’ for Roma which recognizes the multiple challenges facing Roma: poverty, low employment rates, poor housing, unequal access to education, health care and public services, discrimination and stereotyping. And which we trust will be an example to others, given that all our funding programs—the European Social Fund, the EQUAL Community Initiative, and our education and training initiatives—are all developed by national governments in conjunction with the European Commission, and the parties most directly concerned.

In that respect, between now and next May—the date of enlargement—the Commission will be reviewing its existing programs and policies to see how we can address the specific problems faced by Roma in an enlarged EU more effectively. We will present the results in a specific study and how we can best combine the strengths of targeted approaches and of mainstream policies. In doing this, we all need to improve our understanding of the various problems faced by Roma across Europe and the effectiveness of the programs and policies that are trying to address them.

One of the main challenges facing us as policy-makers is the lack of reliable and compara-
ble data which makes it difficult to assess situations and to see whether policies are working. This is why I am pleased that one of the panels in this Conference will be looking specifically at data collection and statistics.

I have asked the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia in Vienna to take particular account of the situation of the Roma peoples in preparation for enlargement. The Centre has already, in cooperation with the OSCE and the Council of Europe, carried out a study on the health situation of Roma women in the EU and the accession countries, and has helped to create a Europe-wide network of Roma women. These initiatives must continue and deepen. We need to ensure that our public services, across the board, are alive to the needs of the Roma communities and provide them with the same level of service and care as all other members of society.

And, we need to be sure that we listen fully to those who have most at stake—the Roma themselves and their organizations. Such civil dialogue plays a key role in employment and social policy-making within Europe. We cannot allow decisions to be taken by policy-makers, or educationalists, or doctors, on behalf of Roma people, without their being closely involved in the decision-making process. Which is why I, for one, would welcome a much more structured dialogue with Roma organizations. For which we can offer support for training and capacity-building for Roma organizations and their representatives. Not least in order to help them to work effectively with EU funds and policy processes.

We need to approach Roma organizations, like the ones represented here today at this Conference, directly. We cannot simply wait for them to come to us.

Finally I would like to say to all Roma people, that you—in all your diversity and richness of life and tradition—can count on me, and my Commission colleagues to use all the political machinery, all the legal powers and all the financial means we have at our disposal to tackle and end the decades and centuries of violent abuse and discrimination that you have known; to help you empower yourselves—economically, socially and politically—for the new future that lies ahead, with support for education adapted to your needs, with support for training for the new employment opportunities that economic growth and technology offer and with support for the physical and social infrastructure that is essential to modern life.

But there will be changes too. If Roma ideals and principles are to develop hand-in-hand with European—indeed global—concepts of fundamental human rights. It is not easy, or comfortable, for me to stand before you and say this, but I will and I must. When fundamental human rights and certain past traditions or practices collide, then it is the traditions that must adapt, and the human rights principles that must prevail. And, at the beginning of the 21st Century, in one of the richest regions of the world, it will not be acceptable to find any cases of young girls being put up for sale for marriage, and denied their natural emotional and physical development. Any more than it will be acceptable to treat young boys and girls as adults, when they are still children, effectively denying them the education and training they will need in order to help build a better future for themselves, and for all other Roma people. There are many explanations as to why some such traditions and practices have survived so far in the modern age. But they will not survive in a future in which we are all working together to ensure that the Roma people achieve the respect and dignity they so richly deserve.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it was an excellent initiative to bring us together in this way. And my thanks again to the organizers and sponsors. We must use the opportunity to the full. We must listen to what is most needed. We must ensure that we all work closely together. And we must make a firm commitment to overcoming any obstacles that come in the way of achieving a better life, and future, for Roma people everywhere.
Katalin Léval, Minister for Equal Opportunities, Hungary

A social group will become a fully-fledged part of society if it becomes totally visible in a country’s society. I wonder how many countries there are in the whole world where Roma society is becoming represented. The sociological researches of the past few years, even decades, have shown that sporadically settled Roma populations are excluded and are poor.

I hope this get-together is a hopeful start, a starting point along a path pointing to the future. We have high-ranking professionals here all representing a minority which, I hope, will be a guarantee for practical policies to take shape in coming years or coming decades that will lead to the full integration of Roma.

Roma communities spread across Europe are still characterized by poverty and exclusion. That is what is common to all of them, unfortunately. This is a fact even if they live in various, what we call, welfare societies which may have the funds to launch programs to combat poverty and exclusion.

The Roma issue is not necessarily and not only a monetary or financial issue, it is also an issue of attitude towards Roma. So if we wish to change the present situation, we have to think simultaneously in terms of money, policy, politics and attitude.

For Europe it is of key importance, including the accession countries, to bring about a rapid EU integration. But EU integration and Roma integration cannot be dealt with separately; that is, Roma integration must be viewed within the perspective of EU enlargement, so sustainable development cannot happen without the integration of Roma communities.

In Central and Eastern Europe, Hungary is the only country where a Government Office for Equal Opportunities has been created. As the EU Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs has just said, Hungary has for some years taken part in a crucially important EU program aimed at combating exclusion. Actually, the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs and Family Affairs, and the Labor and Employment Ministry have taken part in this program. And now a third partner, that is the Government Office for Equal Opportunities has joined this effort actually providing financial funds and helping with coordination.

It is one of our principal goals to create a network of equal opportunities with outreach to very small settlements, very small communities in the hope of providing Roma with opportunities to build bridges between minority and mainstream societies.

When minority rights exist only on paper, the majority should start thinking very seriously about what to do and who is responsible, because mainstream society has the major responsibility of the two. So we must ask ourselves what is our duty and what are our responsibilities if we wish to put a slogan into everyday practice. I believe we should set a timeframe for ourselves and that the period 2005 to 2015 should be viewed as the Decade of Roma and let us take program after program along this path.

I feel that in recent times political discourse has evolved in Hungary, vis-à-vis minorities, not just the Roma but other minorities. And there are partners in this process amongst non-governmental organizations and partners in the state administration, because we intend to send a clear government message that we wish to see programs guaranteeing equal treatment, equal respect for everybody. And we have collaborators, well-meaning people because we believe that the interests of the entire nation must be represented.

For this to happen, we need consensual policy, consensus. No one can actually claim a monopoly to wisdom, we need to apply collective wisdom to solve these problems. So I believe that with an audience where there is an array of trained, sophisticated minds, experts, we will be able to tackle the subjects on hand in a fruitful manner. May I wish you every success with this Conference.
According to the 2001 census results in Bulgaria, the number of Roma in the country is 370,908 or 4.7 percent of the population. Various sources, however, estimate the real number of Roma to be between 600,000–800,000 or 8–10 percent of the population.

As everywhere else in Central and Eastern Europe, Roma in Bulgaria are also faced with progressing exclusion. Romani exclusion today is the outcome of several decades of inadequate or non-existent government policies and pervasive discrimination in all spheres of social life. The most egregious problem affecting Roma today is segregation in education. The inferior education received in segregated all-Romani schools and schools for the mentally handicapped has deprived and continues to deprive dozens of thousands of Roma from equal chances to participate in social life.

Dismantling the segregated school system for the Roma and integrating Roma in the mainstream schools should be the key objective of the government’s Romani education policy. Several initiatives for desegregation of Romani education in Bulgaria led by grass-roots Romani organizations have proven the viability of the desegregation policy as a solution to the educational problems facing Roma. These initiatives are successfully integrating an increasing number of Romani children in the mainstream schools who used to study in the ghetto schools based in the Romani neighborhoods.

Building on the experience of these pilot initiatives, the government should develop and implement a comprehensive desegregation policy. This policy should specifically target the segregated all-Romani schools and pre-school facilities in the Romani neighborhoods; the schools and pre-school facilities where Roma constitute the majority of the student body and their number progressively increases; the special schools for the mentally handicapped children where Roma also constitute the majority of the student body; and the segregated Romani classes in the regular schools. At a minimum the government’s desegregation policy should include the following elements:

- Establishment of a fund for Romani education which should prioritize support for initiatives of Romani organizations and educational institutions aimed at the desegregation of Romani education. In particular, the fund should support initiatives for transferring Romani children from the segregated schools to mainstream schools and for support of the Romani children in the more competitive environment of the mainstream schools until they reach the educational achievements of the non-Romani children;
- Provision of financial and other stimuli for schools which integrate Roma;
- Provision of social support for disadvantaged Romani families whose children attend school;
- Immediate measures to cease the practice of sending Romani children to special schools for the mentally handicapped children.

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1Delegations of young Roma leaders participated in the Conference. Each delegation selected a speaker who presented on behalf of the whole group.
Inferior education conditions the poor competitiveness of Roma in the labor market which has resulted in massive unemployment, reaching 100 percent in some communities. This problem is further exacerbated by racial discrimination of Roma in the labor market. While the government should make sure that the root causes for Roma unemployment are adequately addressed by ensuring equal educational opportunities for Roma and fighting discrimination through anti-discrimination law and policy; there should be immediate measures to relieve the high unemployment rate among Roma. Policies in this respect should include but not be limited to:

- Establishment of a state fund for support of businesses which employ Roma. Romani individuals should be involved in the management of the fund;
- Support for small family businesses of Roma. The target group of this initiative should be long-term unemployed young Roma with high or higher education who want to start a small family business. In order to support the small family business of Roma, the government should ensure access of Roma to low-interest credit;
- Implementation of a program for the employment of young Roma with low education and qualifications. The program should include upgrading the qualifications of Roma and teaching Roma skills which are adequate to the demands of the labor market. In addition, the program should set up a labor bureau which provides in-house and per-hour work for Roma;
- Establishment of agricultural business consultative centers to support the realization of agricultural business initiatives of unemployed Roma.

The prevailing part of Roma society in Bulgaria today live in substandard conditions, lacking basic facilities like electricity, running water and communications. One of the major obstacles for access to adequate living conditions stems from the fact that Roma live in illegal houses built outside the municipal boundaries and without proper authorization. To eliminate the problem of illegal housing and to ensure adequate living conditions for Roma the government should:

- Legalize houses belonging to Roma and provide the owners with ownership documents;
- Implement projects for improving the infrastructure of the Romani neighborhoods.

Romani housing should be improved not so much by building new houses but by providing financial support to the Roma who want to improve their housing situation.

By way of conclusion, I would like to point out that many of the recommendations contained in our presentation today were formulated already four years ago, in 1999, when the then Bulgarian Government adopted the Framework Program for Equal Integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society. Although the Framework Program remains the main policy document of the Bulgarian Government with respect to Roma to date, the commitments which are contained in it remain largely unimplemented. In other words, Bulgaria has a good Roma policy. What has been missing is the good political will to implement Romani policy. I believe that this meeting is an occasion indicating that the politicians of Central and Eastern Europe will depart from the policy of pretending to be working on the Romani problems and will start tackling the Romani issues with the seriousness and commitment it calls for.

At this point of time, almost 13 years after the democratic changes in our countries, due to government inaction or inadequate action with respect to Roma, the problems facing Roma now are grave and their solution requires substantial resources. If this inaction continues, in five years’ time the resources that will have to be spent to deal with the Romani problems will double, and in ten years’ time no resources would be sufficient. The states should mobilize efforts at all levels to meet these challenges. Roma platforms need to be developed by all political parties in all countries. I would like to call on all the Prime Ministers to start by making sure that such platforms are included in the parties in all the ruling coalitions. The Decade of
Roma Inclusion will be a critical step toward closing the gaps, righting the wrongs and making citizenship equal and the Bulgarian delegation fully endorses this initiative.

During the last decade the governments in the region treated Roma as a problem for society. This vision of Roma is disruptive and has created serious tensions in society. I would like to believe that this Conference will give a start to a new positive vision about Roma. It is high time the governments appreciated the fact that Roma are an integral part of the national social capital, and a people whose potential, if given the chance to develop, will be a benefit for the whole society.
Gabriela Hrabaňová, Czech Republic

According to the official figures from the 2001 Census, there are less than 12,000 Roma in the Czech Republic out of a total population of about 10.25 million. However, more realistic estimates put the number at between 150,000 and 300,000—as much as 2.9 percent of the total population. Unlike most other countries in the region, Czech Roma are concentrated in urban and industrial areas.

Discrimination is a regular feature of daily life for Czech Roma. Roma are denied equal access to quality education. Roma face discrimination in employment, housing and health care. Roma face the daily humiliation of exclusion from restaurants, sports and leisure facilities and other public places. Roma in the Czech Republic are poorer than their fellow citizens, much more likely to be unemployed, and more often fully dependent on welfare benefits. The combination of poverty, exclusion and general antipathy feeds majority prejudices that the Roma are “poor, stupid, thieves and liars.”

We believe Roma and non-Roma can and must live together in a climate of mutual respect. In a democracy no minority should have to abandon their culture or forget their language. The integration of Roma in the expanding Europe requires political will and commitment on behalf of the government and European structures. There are three crucial areas policy makers need to address: education, employment and housing.

The current situation in education is unacceptable—especially at primary level. Most of the Roma children are still placed in remedial special schools for the mentally disabled. Children who complete such special schools have little opportunity to go on to secondary education, and less opportunity to compete in the labor market. This system of education reproduces inequality.

In the area of education we recommend the following:

- In preparation for the integration of large numbers of Romani children into an open, mainstream and child-friendly system of education, the Czech Government should identify pupils for support during the transition period from the present traumatizing system and provide such support. We need to make sure that they are not moved into segregated classrooms in the mainstream schools;
- The government should expand the national action plan;
- Regional Roma Information Centers should be established to promote awareness among Roma and non-Roma, to provide a link between the communities, the local authorities and the educational institutions;
- The position of classroom assistant should be professionally upgraded and clearly defined. The number of teaching assistants needs to be increased. They should be placed in other kinds of educational institutions such as kindergartens and high schools—whenever possible;
- The role of street workers must be strengthened. They have a crucial role as the connection between the school and the family. The number of street workers needs to be increased. They should have more decision-making powers in their day-to-day work.

In the area of employment Roma face much discrimination. Roma are refused when they apply for a job. Many are told the vacancy no longer exists when the employer discovers that the applicant is a Rom. In the small business and trade sector, because of anti-Roma sentiment, most Roma cannot access the necessary capital to invest or market their goods, or expand their enterprises. The results are huge unemployment, welfare dependency and continued exclusion. The standard of living among Roma is getting worse and Roma are being pushed to the margins of society more than ever before.

In the area of employment we recommend that:

- The government provide extensive job training programs for Roma. We recommend that in all future government construction tenders 20 percent of the workforce be Roma and some percentage of
such tenders be set aside for Roma companies;

- Currently an initiative exists to form a national network of Roma businessmen. They need support. The Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Economics must play a key role to support this effort. Successful Roma enterprises would create new employment opportunities putting Roma in work and off social welfare.

In the area of housing Roma are subject to decisions that the state bureaucracy makes. They are placed in substandard apartments on the edge of the city or even in neighboring villages. In many cases such housing lacks running water, electricity or toilets. Large families are often crowded into small apartments. Children’s health suffers in such tiny apartments without basic facilities. For school-going children there is no place to do their homework.

The social affairs departments in these communities fail to work together to solve these issues. They do not look for any solutions. As a consequence Roma families often end up homeless and on the streets.

With regards to housing issues, central and local governments should:

- Evaluate and oversee the social department offices dealing with Roma to identify their weaknesses. These departments urgently need to become more efficient. They need to become more proactive in addressing the social needs of Roma communities;
- Build more low cost social housing. Find ways to ease the requirements for housing loans for young couples and people in need. There is a need to end the relocation of Roma people from town centers to the peripheries and outlying villages;
- Develop support programs in Roma community centers to address housing needs.

In addition, the government should undertake public information campaigns firstly to promote tolerance and challenge popular prejudices and negative images of Roma in the media. Secondly, public education campaigns should be directed at the Roma to inform them of their rights and to clarify what the terms “citizen” and “nation” mean.

The crucial role in the objectivity of the Roma picture in majority media can and should be played by Roma alone, especially the Roma journalists. A space should be given to them for TV broadcasting in their own language. A law permitting such broadcasting exists already today but it should be more concrete as concerns the frequency and length of Roma programs. It is necessary to secure its application.

In the case of Roma press there is need for another source of funding besides the government in order to ensure the independence and stability of the Roma press.

We also recommend more involvement of Roma journalists and media people in the campaigns, with the aim to break the stereotypes.

In conclusion, we call for an end to segregation in schooling and discriminatory practices in housing and employment. We call on the governments to accept our recommendations and to adopt the necessary policies to integrate the Roma as full citizens.

We recommend the creation of Roma information and resource centers in each region. These centers would serve the Roma community, help them access information and clarify the procedures of education, health and welfare institutions. These centers could act as partners in implementing reform of minority education, employment and housing policies. Non-profit and technology consultants should have a place to strengthen the work of local NGOs. These institutions should be adequately funded with governmental support.

Such centers could actively engage the participation of Roma in the decisions that affect their daily lives, strengthen their communities and their sense of belonging and inclusion in the wider society.
GYULA VÁMOSI, Hungary

Our delegation is a group of ten enthusiastic young Roma people from all over Hungary that worked hard for two months to compose policy recommendations for the Hungarian Government. I feel honored to present our recommendations to the distinguished participants of this Conference today.

In our delegation we are some of the few out of 500,000 to 1 million Roma people in Hungary who made it through education. The vision of the youth can always give hope for a better future. And I really mean this. For example our policy recommendations can also help my 20 year old sister Ilona, her husband and their two lovely daughters to escape from assimilation and to integrate to the society. She lives in a single room with the parents and brothers of her husband, with no water, electricity, with no job, no education, with absolutely no chance in their lives. All Roma people in the community share the same destiny. Their political awareness is equal to zero and the only chance for them to have their voice heard now is through the advocacy of NGOs.

The Hungarian Government, as said by many yesterday at the Women’s Forum, has nice goals for Roma, however the realization of those is problematic.

Your results would be more positive and concrete if you knew the real needs of the grassroots before implementing a given program, for example in the field of education, unemployment or housing. You should consult grassroots and national NGOs on a regular basis; fund the establishment of formal mutual communication channels of dialogue between grassroots and national NGOs, international NGOs and the government; organize meetings at the local and national levels, motivate NGOs to discuss issues both on and offline, and consider their recommendations when making policy. Set up rules of communication where you get the opinion of Roma NGOs in all fields on a regular basis; this can ensure a continuous dialogue between the sphere of NGOs and politicians in all areas on a systemic basis and this also responds to EU principles and will increase the grassroots’ support of your decisions. Why couldn’t our government also fund NGOs to make reports analyzing the living conditions, political participation or employment situation of Roma just like international NGOs do? The government information is neither more nor less valuable than the NGO information.

Reports of international organizations like the European Union, the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe clearly demonstrate that Roma grassroots people cannot benefit from the EU and government money meant for them. You yourself exclude them from your extremely complicated structures. You don’t consider their low capacities. You should set your structures and criteria to the capacities of the Roma NGOs.

Your lead organization models of application result in fights between Roma NGOs and institutions instead of real partnerships. Thus it happens often that Roma become marionettes, official signatories of contracts but they have no real purpose or contribution to the projects.

Therefore we propose to plan the texts of the calls for proposals with Roma experts speaking English and trained in the EU and paid by an organization that is independent from the government to ensure the realization of real EU principles and professionalism and independence.

Roma experts should monitor whom you give the grant to prior to your decisions and should also monitor during the implementation and evaluation phases of the projects; reports from the Roma experts should be available to all, including the Roma grassroots.

You should announce special calls for proposals that specifically target cooperation and networking between multiple Roma NGOs.

Your helping mechanisms are very impersonal, you give out money without seeing to whom and where you give the money. Make the structure of EU Roma related funds transparent for Roma grassroots NGOs and all individuals; announce publicly, whom you give the grant to, how much, and also what concrete results were achieved.

You need the good will of work of the Roma grassroots organizations and activists. However their existence is instable and cannot proceed without institutionalization.
We recommend that you provide program based normative support for Roma community centers with the installation of a monitoring and quality assurance system, allocate funds to organize field visits for and train the staff within each center with three years of financial and moral support to cover their general expenses so that Roma Community Centers can become autonomous afterwards.

Several organizations are established at the grassroots and wish to work for their people however they have no skills to influence policy at local levels, to get the relevant information and to realize their rights.

Therefore we propose to establish non-profit development agencies in areas highly concentrated by Roma to train Romani activists—both organizations and individuals committed to the grassroots—to strengthen already existing and establish new local autonomies. The evaluation of the efficiency of the agency should be measured both by a system of quality assurance with independent Roma experts and by the local grassroots. The agency should hire non-profit consultants to provide training and on-site services for the individual needs of the organizations like project and technology planning, networking, fundraising, management, organizational development, project implementation, training and other ongoing support.

Yesterday it was demonstrated in the presentations again how positive results can be achieved through parental involvement. Roma parents have no information about what their children can get as a result of the state subsidies program and have no feedback from the school on what concrete programs they do for Roma students with this extra money.

Hence we recommend to launch a media campaign to instigate more intensive contact between Roma and non-Roma parents and parents and schools generally, and also to make Roma parents contribute to the success of their children in school.

Besides providing stipends and financial support for Roma students, we also recommend to show more Roma role models in the form of documentaries on the national television channel, in schools, local clubs etc. to stimulate children to get educated and understand the preservation of their culture.

An average Hungarian citizen knows more about the history and the culture of the Mongolians than about that of his/her Romani neighbor’s. Teachers’ stereotypes are passed on to the next Hungarian generation nurtured by them. Therefore Romani history and culture should be integrated into the national curriculum in elementary and secondary schools and in universities and colleges so that all Hungarian citizens from the postman to the minister will have a basic knowledge about Roma. The quality of education given to Romani children mostly lags significantly behind the quality given to the majority students. Schools should be motivated to introduce a system of quality assurance.

We are deeply convinced that training Roma grassroots people to enhance their political participation at the local, regional and national levels is an indispensable method to ensure the political participation of Roma.

Our recommendations briefly go as follows:

- Establish formal mutual communication channels between NGOs and the government; our delegation is committed to help you;
- Provide program based normative support for Roma community centers;
- Establish non-profit development agencies in areas highly concentrated by Roma;
- Train English speaking Roma experts in the EU and get them paid by an independent body who can design and monitor the implementation and evaluation of Roma related programs funded by the EU and governments;
- Make the structure of EU Roma related funds transparent for Roma grassroots NGOs and all individuals: announce publicly to whom you give the grant, how much, and also what concrete results were achieved;
- Launch a media campaign on education targeting Roma parents;
- Integrate Roma cultural and historic studies into national curricula.
Thanks to the Conference organizers the Roma grassroots and national NGOs could take the first steps of communication with the government and our delegation. I hope that this is the beginning of a continuous and regular communication between NGOs and the government, where all NGOs will have the chance to formulate their policy recommendations to the legislators in all fields of life.

I really hope that our government listens to the words of the grassroots we brought here today and will make concrete follow-ups to realize the very simple desires of Roma: to be active Hungarian citizens of Romani ethnicity, with no difference in their fundamental human rights.
ELVIS ALI, FYR Macedonia

Official data say that about 8 percent of the population is Roma in Macedonia. Unemployment—I would just like to state one figure: according to the state statistical office in 2002, 25 percent of the overall population lived below the official poverty line.

Social status and health of Roma: about 90 percent of Roma who are recipients of social support are without professional skills which means that in the long term this generates structural unemployment among Roma.

Civil society: there are about one hundred NGOs from which about 20 percent are humanitarian organizations.

Political representation of Roma: one Roma mayor, three Roma registered political parties, one Roma Member of Parliament.

Education: only one piece of information—in the school year 2001–2002 from about 8,000 pupils in the elementary school only about 6 percent of Roma students enrolled in education finished.

Discrimination: besides examples of discrimination we have heard these two days, I would like to point out the attention that the government or the overall society of Macedonia that put towards one minority, Albanian, and the other minorities including Roma are forgotten in these past two years.

Since the governments are not willing to put up the money that tackle deep-settled problems and also that programs that are being developed tend to address the results of social exclusion rather than causes we would like point out that we would like to have programs that accurately target action and are appropriate investment in remedial action.

So what are the recommendations of the Macedonian non-governmental delegation here?

The first is to set up a Commission for Roma Affairs which will be an independent state body under the leadership of the Prime Minister which will have the following power:

- Concentrate and provide policy development;
- Advise the government on legislative and other political issues;
- Create and implement national strategy;
- Set priorities when the government discusses development and assistance programs with different bilateral, international and other donors;
- Establish consultation and information sharing processes between the line ministries and the Roma civil society sector.

The government should also create a new law in which the setting up, creation, activities, operation, obligations and funding for this body will be defined.

An Agency for Roma Affairs would support the Commission as its constitutive part. The Agency would be a policy development research and undertake research and policy work and provide policy recommendations to the Commission. An early task of the Agency would be to develop the first national strategy on the improvement of the Roma situation. As we already said the Agency would need to conduct a neat analysis to establish in detail the nature and the scale of problems leading to exclusion. It should review conduct and disseminate detailed analysis. The Agency would need to coordinate, cooperate with and assist other line ministers, ministries and possibly in future establish a Roma department in different governmental structures.

The government will finance by setting a budget aside for the administrative and operational costs of the Commission for Roma Affairs. The government should also provide funding for the most urgent priority actions from the national strategy. It is envisaged that the members of the Commission would be Roma and non-Roma academics who would be elected at a wide national level. The employees of the Agency, which would be a constitutive part of the Commission, about 3-5 people, staffed with Roma, would be selected in an open announcement. It is requested that technical assistance be engaged in the creation of the above-mentioned structure and to ensure input from other countries with experiences in this model.

That is the first point. The second point is the creation of the national strategy. The several components that we would like to have in this national strategy are the following:
• Education;
• Employment;
• Social Welfare;
• Roma Women;
• Health;
• Housing;
• Culture and Media;
• Access of Roma to public services;
• Implementation of Ohrid Framework Agreement.

The third component is also very important. Government and Roma stakeholders and the international donor community need to define clear mechanisms of transparent monitoring, assessment, evaluation and reporting on effectiveness of the implemented strategies and program.

My last point—we had a suggestion we would like to make as Roma young leaders to the governments—which is that we are here to help you and to use our free-of-charge services. Let’s make Roma contribute to the national wealth rather than constant consumers of the national wealth. Included people make an economic contribution and excluded people do not. Please do not let short-term investment stand in the way of the long-term benefit. Thank you very much.
It is our privilege to welcome the World Bank’s, Open Society Institute’s and European Commission’s initiative of bringing again the issue of the 10 million strong Roma community, Europe’s most significant ethno-cultural minority, to the attention of states and international bodies and of inviting us to take an active part in developing and hopefully implementing and evaluating pro-Roma public policies in the next ten years.

In spite of many noteworthy attempts to put an enabling legal and social framework in place, the Roma, as a “common European challenge,” continue to be the prevalent victims of racially motivated violence, social exclusion and ethnic discrimination policies.

In the case of Romania, the current poor social status of Roma is closely linked to a history of social exclusion ranging from more than five centuries of slavery to the Holocaust and forced assimilation, which have perpetuated the social and economic gap between Roma and the majority population.

As part of the effort to fulfill the political criteria for EU accession, the *Romanian Government Strategy for the Roma Condition’s Improvement* was elaborated in equal and active partnership with the Roma, but its implementation has to date been a failure because of lack of political will, because an absence of public funding, and especially because the broad-based Roma involvement in the Strategy was replaced by exclusive cooperation with the Roma party, a political organization which is a part of the current government coalition.

Therefore, we, as representatives of Roma civil society in Romania, take this opportunity to state our concern regarding:

- Racially motivated violence against Roma perpetrated by law-enforcement authorities and non-state actors;
- Impunity for racially motivated crimes and selective application of justice;
- Racial and ethnic discrimination against Roma in every area of public life, including institutional discrimination at all levels of national and local government;
- Severely limited access to quality formal education for Roma children; forced segregation of Roma children in schools; ethnic and racial discrimination in education institutions;
- Severely limited access of Roma to the labor market, leading to widespread long-term unemployment and severe poverty;
- Discrimination in the field of housing, including forced eviction and segregation in several localities and discrimination in the allocation of public housing;
- Discrimination in access to social services, including discriminatory allocation of public funding for municipal services and basic infrastructure, including water supplies, electricity, sanitation;
- Limited access of Roma to public health care services, leading to the poor health of Roma, as demonstrated by high infant death rates, morbidity with a prevalence of endemic and communicable diseases and a life expectancy fifteen years shorter than the national average;
- Systematic use of biased and prejudiced language in the media, which perpetuates racist stereotypes and attitudes;
- The stigma attached to Roma identity coming from a mono-cultural education and the absence of Roma cultural institutions.

With a view to stimulating the process of setting up priorities to deal with the broad range of issues affecting Roma in the coming ten years on a European level, we, the representatives of Roma civil society in Romania, delegated by the Working Group of Roma Associations, propose the following directions for action:

- Human rights: First of all, states and intergovernmental bodies should abide by their legal and international human rights commitments with respect to the human rights of Roma;
- Empowerment: Secondly, states and intergovernmental bodies should provide an optimal framework for the equal and active participation of Roma in decision-making processes at all levels, with a view...
to applying the right of veto, especially with respect to the drafting, implementing, monitoring and evaluation of policies affecting Roma; states and intergovernmental bodies should engage in active partnership with Roma civil society representatives;

• Capacity building: Finally, states, intergovernmental bodies and public and private donors should invest in the development of the Roma social capital by building the capacity of Roma civil society at local, national and international levels.

More specifically, with a view to implementing the above listed principles, we call upon governments and intergovernmental organizations and donors to adopt the following policy recommendations:

• Prevent and combat ethnic and racial discrimination against Roma;
• Halt excessive use of force, arbitrary use of firearms against Roma and abusive police raids on Roma neighborhoods;
• Ensure that impartial investigations into all allegations of racially motivated crime and abuse perpetrated by law enforcement against Roma are carried out promptly and that all those responsible are brought to justice; ensure that Roma victims are adequately protected against ill-treatment or harassment as a consequence of their complaints;
• Bring domestic anti-discrimination legislation in line with the provisions of the European Council Directive 43/2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin, so as to provide indirect discrimination, victimization, harassment, instructions to discriminate, the reversal of the burden of proof; in what concerns the National Council for Combating Discrimination, the Romanian anti-discrimination body, the inclusion of independent assistance to victims among its functions, the extension of measures for sanctioning discrimination beyond fines to other effective and dissuasive measures, the provision of effective appeal mechanisms on the merits of cases rejected by the National Council, ensure its independence and transparency of work and methodology, establishment of regional offices for an increased accessibility and efficiency, intensification of sanctioning and training of key actors in Romanian society, and provision of adequate funding for this body;
• Establish a working group of Roma experts delegated by Roma civil society, which should participate in the elaboration of the National Council for Combating Discrimination’s policies, concerning prevention and combating discrimination against Roma;
• Formally recognize the Roma Slavery and Holocaust by the Romanian state through public apologies with the urgent adoption of a package of reparatory measures and compensation for victims;
• Ensure the social inclusion and empowerment of Roma by equal access to public services (education, employment, health care, housing, social protection and assistance) and economic development;
• Improve the application process of domestic legislation concerning social protection and poverty alleviation;
• Adjust legal measures, allocate specific funds, develop structures for the inclusion of Roma in the labor market, including providing vocational training for Roma and establishing labor inclusion centers;
• Provide tax incentives for employers who hire Roma, in order to bring the unemployment rate among Roma in line with the national average;
• Stimulate the positive legal migration of Roma by way of bilateral and/or multilateral agreements on labor exchange;
• Adopt and implement a comprehensive school desegregation policy and promote equal access to quality education and inclusive school curricula;
• Develop the existing health care mediators’ network, in order to facilitate communica-
tion and build trust between Roma and health care professionals and structures;

- Provide free of charge services for obtaining identity documents, building and property acquisition permits to Roma and other vulnerable groups;

- Allocate subsidies for Roma low income households to expand access to utilities such as sanitation, heating, lighting;

- Develop public works programs for the improvement of basic infrastructure and services in Roma communities;

- Enact public information campaigns addressing discrimination in the provision of public services;

- Create an adequate framework for ensuring Roma cultural autonomy by setting up Roma identity promotion institutions;

- Enact affirmative action policies for Roma at all levels of public and private education, implement mentoring programs and extracurricular activities that provide tutoring and supplementary educational activities, in order to facilitate access to education for Roma;

- Train and include school mediators in the educational institutional structures, and involve Roma parents directly in decision-making in schools, so as to follow for better communication and confidence-building in the relationship between Roma families, communities and school;

- Initiate and develop alternative education (mobile school, school pass, distance learning, short-term intensive programs, remedial/rehabilitation education programs), in order to facilitate access to school for children coming from nomad/half-nomad families and for children who dropped out of the formal education process;

- Include information on Roma in the mainstream compulsory curriculum, provide initial and ongoing intercultural training for teachers and school managers, and develop programs aimed at de-stigmatizing Roma identity and enhancing Roma self-awareness;

- Provide alternative vocational re-training and recognition for Roma traditional crafts and trades, by adopting explicit provisions for free movement and temporary settlement of persons who practice itinerant crafts, by supporting the adjustment of crafts to market demand, and the development of a distribution network;

- Support the strengthening of the Roma identity through the establishment of education policy and resource centers, schools specialized in Romani language, history and culture, as well as cultural centers, museums, and gradual education in Romani language at all levels.

In this respect, as young Roma, we are fully engaged in this mission and we are here to serve, with all our power and knowledge, the Roma nation.
REFIKA MUSTAFIĆ, Serbia and Montenegro

I welcome you all and I have to say that I am very, very happy that I have an opportunity to represent the work of our delegation from Serbia and Montenegro and to share with you how we see the breaking of our Roma poverty in Serbia and Montenegro.

For the beginning, here are the facts that we really have to fight against:

- 79 percent of Roma did not finish elementary school;
- 81 percent of Roma have never had legal employment; and
- 61 percent of Roma live without sanitation.

So, according to this, we as a group decided on what would be our priorities, but also I have to say that these priorities are the result of a survey done amongst Roma people last year which means that we asked Roma people what they thought were their priorities and what you can see are the priorities. So, it is education, it is poverty reduction and it is decent housing.

What do we need in education? We need obligatory pre-school education for all Roma children, for all our Roma children, and we need vocational educational curricula which means that we want our children to be taught real skills. We think that it is very important to have a Roma assistant in every pre-school class and in lower grades of primary schools. We need an increasing number of Roma teaching staff and, of course, affirmative action in the next ten years. Five percent enrolment quota in high schools and universities with scholarship support. We also need a national department in the ministry to overhaul Roma education including desegregation officers.

Then we thought about poverty reduction and these are our priorities and our recommendations: Access to micro-finance in support of small and medium enterprises. We need training such as starting your own business because we would really like to enable Roma people to start their own small businesses. Special attention should be given to young Roma in training and re-training through employment institutions, craftsmanship workshops and, in kind and in equipment, support for household businesses. What do we need in poverty reduction? We need tax exemptions for a certain period of time, maybe for the next ten years, and affirmative action in employing Roma in civil services. And—we thought this was one of the most important things that we need—to monitor and evaluate because now if we are starting to do something we have to have a database and we have to have something with which we can measure what we have done or haven’t done. So, this last point that I made—monitor and evaluate—actually has meaning for each of the three priorities that I have mentioned.

What do we need in decent housing? We need registration of all illegal houses and Roma have a lot. And we need to improve some settlements to basic European standards. We need to involve municipalities in the urgent resolution of living conditions for Roma IDPs from Kosovo; to harmonize legislature dealing with forced resettlement from Western Europe and Kosovo with international standards—meaning without prior warning and making an attempt to settle people in the country of their origin. We need to pass legislature which will obligate the state to provide housing for refugees and IDPs.

You can see that the next slide is called “Keep our Identity.” We just wanted to give you a strong message to let us live in our own particular way and in that sense we wrote that we really need training of teachers in a multicultural context and to include Roma cultural material in the curriculum.

I would like to give a big thanks to our government and to say that I am very proud that I had an opportunity to be engaged in drafting a National Strategy for Roma Integration by the Ministry for National and Ethnic Communities, I hope that Mr. Ljajic is here, and the National Strategy for Roma Education done by the Ministry for Sport and Education. Also, if the governments are here, I have to mention that there is a Roma office that is working within the Ministry and guess what—there are no Roma working in this office. So I am asking governments to take attention of this issue.
So, as a young Roma delegation we are still visionaries and we are showing here one picture of where we want to be in the year 2015.

In education, we see ourselves as 0 percent illiteracy and 100 percent attending mainstream education from 0-8 grades or primary education or obligatory education and 50 percent, meaning half of that, attending secondary school, grades 9-12. And 10 percent of Roma students attending universities.

In poverty, how do we see ourselves? 40 percent of Roma people being employed, 60 percent with a regular income and 20 percent with private small and medium sized enterprises.

And once again, before finishing this presentation I would like to make two short announcements. In the hall, you can find at the marketplace, the place for the Fund for Open Society where you can find the film Kennedy is Coming Home, but you can also find, at the place of the Roma Education Center a wider document of anti-discrimination measures in education that we produced and which my colleagues just distributed to all of you.

Before finishing this once again I want to thank you all and to call dear governments and to call dear donors once again to really think about our priorities and to say that—we really need your help but you need our participation. Thank you.
PETER POLLAK, Slovak Republic

Firstly, I would like to express the gratitude of the Slovak delegation to the organizers of this Conference for the opportunity to express our concerns and recommendations regarding the situation of the Roma community in Slovakia.

The situation and the problems of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe are very well known and for this reason we will not repeat those issues in detail. We would like to point out two aspects which in our opinion are the main problems of Roma in Slovakia: the social aspect of education, housing and employment, and the issue of discrimination of Roma people in Slovak society.

In the field of education, the very high level of segregation of Roma children and children with special pedagogical needs is characteristic of our school system, which results in a net of special schools for all types and handicaps. The main objective of education is to provide children with the possibility to acquire knowledge and skills which they can apply in practical life. This experience is not obtained by Roma children, because of their very poor life conditions and the restraints of the integration process. These children do not have basic social and labor skills which are key to their successful education.

Regarding housing, as you already know, we have many settlements in Slovakia, most of them isolated, where Roma people are living in very bad conditions, without basic infrastructure—no water, no electricity, no access road—and the land where their shacks are is not legally solved.

Generally, unemployment is at a high rate in Slovakia, especially in Eastern Slovakia and the largest proportion of the unemployed population is Roma.

On the issue of discrimination, a lot of people and also some government representatives refuse to recognize the existence of discrimination and segregation of Roma in our society. It is very clear that Roma in Slovakia do not have the same chances as the majority of the population.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is not important now to analyze and criticize the past. This Conference also gives us the opportunity to analyze the present situation and to assume clear responsibilities and take into consideration the recommendations for the future.

In the field of education we recommend to the Government of Slovak Republic, Ministry of Education:

- To review the special pedagogical diagnosis for the placement of children into special schools and to create a functional system to avoid the misplacement of Roma children in those schools;
- To take immediate steps to reverse the segregation of Roma children in separate and inferior classes and schools;
- To start, as soon as possible, alternative programs of education in integrated classes.

Regarding the issue of housing, we recommend:

- To solve the legal framework of the land where the Roma settlements exist;
- To construct social housing for Roma settlements;
- To desegregate Roma localities;
- To address these urgent needs the Government of Slovak Republic must start the implementation of the infrastructure programs without delay.

Regarding the employment issue we have to take into consideration the development of our society as a future member of the European Union which also means an increasing demand for new skills and higher levels of education. This can create new job opportunities but also new barriers for those who are lacking the skills necessary to access such opportunities, thus creating more insecurity for those who are unable to adapt to the new demands. Developing an inclusive labor market and promoting employment as a right and opportunity for all is the key way out of poverty and social exclusion.

We recommend to the government:

- To promote education and training to employers to counter prejudices or discrimination against people from particular communities or particular backgrounds and to promote a regular review and monitoring of recruitment procedures and outcomes;
• To promote entrepreneurship amongst disadvantaged groups and communities and provide intensive support to local economic development initiatives;
• To focus on economic investment and employment development policies to deal with unemployment;
• Access to and inclusion in labor markets should be increased, including for those entering the labor market for the first time or after a period of unemployment or inactivity, and allow them to stay in the labor market;
• To provide work places in agricultural sector and to seize other opportunities in the labor market for low skilled and older people;
• Regarding women’s employment, to offer more opportunities for part-time and new forms of work which can lead to new flexibility in balancing home, child care and work responsibilities.

There is substantial political will among candidate countries to join the European Union. To demonstrate compliance with the political criteria, most have acceded to the key international standards for minority protection. But the policy implementation is not very coordinated and existing institutions are not ensuring that the law is enforced.

We consider that it is necessary to adopt an anti-discrimination law and to provide conditions for equal chances for all citizens, including Roma.

The government should be encouraged not only to pledge improvements but to establish the necessary institutions and to vest them with adequate powers, finances and compatibilities.

The Slovak Government should take into more consideration the experience and good practices of NGO’s and to ensure participation civil society organizations in the further elaboration, implementation and evaluation of the strategies and programs for Roma communities.
MAUD DE BOER-BUQUICCHIO, Deputy Secretary General, Council of Europe

Not a single day goes past without headlines concerning dramatic situations faced by Roma, Gypsies and Travelers in Europe. “Female teenage Roma forced into sex slavery in Bulgaria,” warned Sweden’s Ambassador on the Bulgarian News Network only a few days ago. Not a single day goes by without the Council of Europe receiving alarming reports on:

- Forced return of Roma asylum seekers with no guarantee for decent living conditions;
- Allegations of Roma women’s forced sterilisation;
- Segregation of Roma children enrolled in schools for disabled;
- Restrictions on Travelers’ free movement and encampment;
- Prevention of Roma migrants from crossing borders and confiscation of their personal documents;
- Ghettoization of Roma families, brutalized by skinhead attacks. And the list could go on.

As a pan-European human rights organization engaged in combating all forms of discrimination, the Council of Europe addresses these multiple issues on the basis of the principle of equal access of all European citizens—and particularly vulnerable groups—to basic human and social rights, and enjoyment of these rights. As the first organization to carry out normative work in the field of minorities, the Council of Europe continues to actively promote the development of national comprehensive strategies for Roma, Gypsies or Travelers.

Today’s Conference is timely as a number of important initiatives regarding Roma issues are on the European agenda: the OSCE Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti, the Finnish initiative to set-up a European Roma Forum, the recent creation of a European Roma Information Office (ERIO), and the second Joint European Commission/Council of Europe/OSCE-ODIHR Stability Pact Project on Roma in South East Europe.

This Conference by its timing and high level of participation seems to be the peak of a series of major events taking place this year in the field of Roma. It follows the Granada Conference on Policies towards Roma (19-20 May) financed and co-organized by the Council of Europe, as well as the European Colloquy on Roma Access to the Labor Market organized two weeks ago by the Greek EU Presidency. It also precedes two events to be held in Strasbourg in mid-September: the International Conference on Roma Women and Access to Health Care and a Seminar on Cultural Identities of Roma, Gypsies, Travelers and other related groups. This indeed proves that these communities have become a frequent object of discussion at European level between governments and/or international institutions. The next challenge is to ensure that they are becoming also the subject (i.e. actor) of these discussions.

There is indeed a mounting discontent amongst Roma over decisions being taken by non-Roma on their behalf. All our joint efforts risk being counter-productive if they are not undertaken jointly with those directly concerned.

Let me clarify what I mean by that. Full and effective participation does not just mean a place for consultation (through inter-governmental...
commissions, consultative bodies, Roma advisers, etc.). Participation requires an active involvement, implies negotiations, as well as the feeling to share the ownership of the final product. It should be understood as a partnership at local, national and European level.

At the European level, it is exactly that underlying thought which inspired President Halonen of Finland to launch the initiative to set up a European Forum for Roma and Travelers, currently being discussed by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. Indeed, advanced discussion about this forum has taken place at the level of the Committee of Ministers’ Deputies and a consensus was already reached among pan-European Roma organizations around the Finnish proposal. Should it be established, this forum could become a voice for Roma and Travelers enabling them to express their concerns, raise awareness about human rights violations, promote the interests of these communities and advise relevant structures of the Council of Europe and other international institutions. Furthermore, its composition should reflect the variety of groups, their religious, linguistic differences at the European level.

We are keenly interested to learn in the course of the coming days more about the regional structure referred to as the European Roma Decade Coalition—as presented in the concept note on the Decade of Roma Inclusion—and its modus operandi to make sure it converges with the European Roma Forum. Possibilities to promote the Roma Inclusion Decade in the work of a European Roma Forum should be carefully considered in due time, with a view to encouraging Central and Eastern European countries to pursue their already considerable efforts to comply with the criteria for accession fixed in Copenhagen. If we succeed to do so, this Forum could also serve as a watchdog to prevent stagnation or, as in many recent instances, the deterioration of the situation of Roma, Gypsies and Travelers both in Central-Eastern Europe and Western Europe, which is not only related to bad economic conditions.

Basic human and social rights of these populations are in danger as shown by the increase of cases related to Roma or Travelers before the European Court of Human Rights.

The jurisdiction of the ECHR is however based on the principle of subsidiarity: domestic solutions should prevail. It is for this reason that the Council of Europe works at four main levels:

- Standard-setting with the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the revised European Social Charter;
- Policy development with the recommendations concerning the effective improvement of their living conditions adopted by the Group of Specialists on Roma, Gypsies and Travelers or by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance;
- Monitoring through the work of independent committees of the aforementioned legal instruments and through contact and/or monitoring visits organized by ECRI, the Commissioner for Human Rights and from now on the Group of Specialists on Roma/Gypsies and Travelers (MG-S-ROM);
- Project development thanks to the role of the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB), which extends long term loans and guarantees to member states and local authorities for the financing of social projects, a number of them focusing on Roma projects, as Mr. Ners, Vice-Governor of the CEB, will probably mention in his presentation.

With this in mind, what can the Council of Europe concretely contribute to the Roma Inclusion Decade? Let me share with you a few examples.

As concerns standard-setting I would like to recall the Revised European Social Charter and the mechanism of collective complaints which should definitely be used by Roma NGOs and human rights defenders (a collective complaint submitted by the European Roma Rights Centre based in Budapest against Greece on Roma housing has just been declared admissible).

The Council of Europe is organizing, together with the European Roma Rights Center (ERRC),
trainings for young lawyers, including Roma, about the European Convention of Human Rights and the revised European Social Charter, and will continue to do so. In that respect, the use of the European Youth Centre based in Budapest, which already hosts seminars for minority/Roma young leaders, could be reinforced in the future. In the same way we are keen to continue the 3-month internship program for young Roma launched a year ago, and are grateful for the cooperation with the Open Society Institute (OSI) Soros Foundation, which has made this possible.

As concerns policy development and monitoring:

I would like to draw your attention to the long experience of the Council of Europe and the current work of the Directorate General of Social Cohesion concerning:

- The elaboration through the Group of Specialists on Roma/Gypsies and Travelers (MG-S-ROM) of a set of specific recommendations towards Roma. This work needs now to be completed with the adoption of new recommendations on the improvement of housing conditions of Roma/Gypsy communities and Travelers in Europe, on access to health care for Roma and Travelers, and on the free movement and encampment of Travelers;
- The development of social indicators for vulnerable groups. This focus is particularly relevant for Roma and Traveler communities. In respect of the initiative of the UN Millennium Development Goals and the EU Social Inclusion Policy, we would welcome a coordination and partnership between the Council of Europe and the World Bank, the European Commission, the United Nations—including UNDP—to identify common parameters and monitor developments on the basis of common indicators.

As concerns project development we are aware of the need to increase funding for Roma education. The Council of Europe Development Bank made only a few days ago an exceptional grant of $ 450,000 to finance a project aiming to improve access to formal and non-formal education for Roma children in “The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.” Meanwhile, investments are currently being financed in Central Europe by the CEB for the construction of schools for the Roma.

I hope that the World Bank’s efforts will strengthen and complement our efforts which date back to 1983 in the field of teacher training and school attendance programs for Roma/Gypsies children and is now receiving a strong impulse through our three-year project (2002-2005) in the education field.

As far as co-operation between international organizations is concerned, and on a more procedural note, I would hope that we can strengthen and upgrade the Informal Contact Group of International Organizations on Roma and Sinti issues, which meets every six-months under the chairmanship of the state having the presidency of the European Union.

I would also propose that we set up a crisis management structure within this Contact Group which could allow the international community to respond quickly and in a concerted manner to crisis situations, such as the one regarding Roma Kosovar refugees at the border between “The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” and Greece.

Roma is not only a “European,” but a national and local issue. Therefore, it is not for international organizations to take the place of governments and local authorities in member states. But it is the role of international organizations to coordinate and cooperate in order to provide a common and most synergic approach to improve the situation of Roma throughout Europe. The Council of Europe will assure the wide range of responsibilities it has assumed at all levels: international, national and local. We count on the same commitment from all actors concerned: international organizations, governments, local authorities and Roma leaders. It is only through this collaborative and participatory approach that we can make progress towards the goal of living all together within cohesive, sustainable societies, respectful of our identities, traditions and cultures.

I thank you for your attention.
KRZYSZTOF NERS, Vice Governor,  
Council of Europe Development Bank

Like the previous speakers, I would like to congratulate the World Bank, the Open Society Institute and the European Commission for their initiative and the organization of this high level Conference. I would also like to express our appreciation to the Hungarian Government for hosting this important meeting in Budapest.

The Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB) is honored to attend the Conference and our endeavor is to contribute to the improvement of the living conditions of Roma communities in Europe.

Thanks to the Finnish Government, the Bank made a financial contribution to the organization of the Conference—and I take this opportunity to thank the Finnish authorities for their political and financial involvement in favor of Roma minority in Central and Eastern Europe.

With the return to democracy and the structural reform, the international community realized the scope of the marginalization of Roma in the societies they live. Successful integration will be possible only if it’s a two-way process: it requires changes both from the majority population as well as from the Roma minority.

International organizations, bilateral donors, and governments have been engaged since the early nineties in adopting strategies and financing projects. New solutions are needed to integrate the Roma in the enlarged Europe. The Bank supports the idea of the Decade of Roma Inclusion: 2005-2015 as well as the Roma Education Fund, initiatives presented for discussion at the present Conference.

As you have just heard from Mrs. Boer-Buquicchio, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, the Council of Europe supports governments in the elaboration of their national strategies. The CEB extends long-term loans at favorable conditions for the implementation of sustainable projects in favor of Roma in sectors such as social housing, health, education, vocational training, and creation of jobs.

The Bank has a few ongoing projects in its portfolio, which can be considered as examples of “good practices”:

- Two projects in Bulgaria financed by a total amount of 9 million Euro concern the social housing sector and benefit 3,900 persons living near Sofia and Plovdiv;
- A project in Spain financed through a 4.2 million Euro loan via the Caixa de Madrid to the Fundacion Secretariado General Gitano (FSGG) for the implementation of a vocational training program intended for 20,000 young Roma, with the aim to facilitate job creation for 4,000 trainees, by 2006.

How do we see the role of international organizations?

In our view the role of international organizations is to support the governments and the local authorities to implement their priorities established in cooperation with the target population.

Our role is to provide complementary financing, advice, experience sharing and to ensure a rationalized use of the available financial resources.

There is a real need for a more efficient experience sharing; there is a need for ownership for the implementation of projects on behalf of actors at the national and local level. There is also a need to facilitate the public opinion’s acceptance as to the necessary inclusion of Roma in the mainstream societies.

The efforts have to come from all actors involved: Roma themselves have to adopt a more proactive approach concerning their future and the future of the young generation.

How we see the CEB’s future activities? The CEB intends to:

- Move loans to municipalities/regions;
- Increase its grant resources according to its financial possibilities;
- Work more closely with non-governmental organizations;
- Provide more technical assistance for the preparation of sustainable projects on a regular basis;
- Cooperate more with European Programs.

Thank you, Ladies and Gentlemen for your attention and I wish you all a successful Conference.
Mr. Kálmán Mizsei, Assistant Administrator and Director, UNDP

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends, I join my friend Krzysztof Ners in congratulating the organizers of this event. We at UNDP believe that this Conference has the potential to become a real landmark event in the fate of the Roma population in Central and Eastern Europe. We believe that this Conference has the potential to represent a real turning point in this fate. We are very glad to see so many dignitaries, so many representatives of the Roma communities throughout the region. We are also very proud to have supported so many of them to come to this event. And we are also extremely pleased to see the very firm commitment of so many important organizations—developmental, humanitarian organizations. UNDP wants to contribute to this Conference as well as the aftermath of this Conference by helping to gear the event to very concrete results, very implementable results and then the implementation of the resolutions and suggestions that emerge from this Conference.

I would like to speak about three issues—social inclusion, data and cooperation of the donor organizations, that is so vital to make all of our dreams happen. I would like to announce that UNDP very firmly supports the initiative of the two organizers. To me the Decade of 2005-2015, a Decade of Roma Social Inclusion is a wonderful initiative and we will be a very enthusiastic partner in implementing it.

But let me first speak about the data issue. Commissioner Diamantopoulou spoke convincingly about the need for quality comparable data on Roma from the EU accession countries and about the need to analyze that data. As you probably all know, UNDP made a first very significant, we believe, step towards this half a year ago. We produced this publication that is the first comprehensive and comparative data collection on the human development situation of the Roma populations in five countries—Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Romania and Hungary—five accession countries to the European Union and we are now working on extending and deepening the data: extending it to Southeastern Europe and deepening the scope of the data. The collection of quantitative data on Roma inclusion provides excellent opportunities for cooperation between different donors and development organizations. Collecting relevant comprehensive background information for each new project is prohibitively expensive. Bringing several organizations’ resources together can help split the costs of obtaining the comprehensive background information that we all need. Once the data is there each organization can use and interpret them independently. The data may be common but the implementation policies and conclusions can very well be individual. And on that basis we can really measure our progress in the social inclusion of Roma up to 2015.

We warmly support this initiative on social inclusion and particularly so because it coincides time wise with a broader, global undertaking of the international community that was declared in the Millennium Declaration in 2000 and signed by all heads of governments in that year. In fact we expect that the social inclusion data will be highly comparable to the Millennium Development Goals that came out of the Millennium Declaration. The Decade of Roma Inclusion is in fact about Millennium Development Goals disaggregated to the Roma communities.

UNDP would like to offer our services in measuring, monitoring and implementing the recommendations of the social inclusion document. What can we do to contribute to the implementation of the Decade of Roma Inclusion? Without data the Millennium Development Goals and the social inclusion goals would be empty slogans. Only based on quantitative data can we outline priorities and measure progress. As I said, disaggregated, quantitative data is an absolute precondition for relevant, national level, pro-poor policies, for sustainable inclusion of vulnerable groups and Roma in particular. Since Roma problems—despite their country to country specificities—bear certain joint patterns, the combination of regional vision and country specific experience is important. Therefore, organizations such as UNDP and our other development partners can work both at the country level as well as at the regional level.
And thirdly, I would like to speak about the need for a great improvement in cooperation among the development partners that try to address successfully, efficiently and effectively the problem of the Roma. We have to recognize that we operate in an environment that sometimes induces competition amongst partners. And yet competition that may be even healthy in different situations, in this particular situation we believe would be particularly harmful. What we are recommending to minimize unhealthy competition among the donors, of which there are many in this particular area, is a kind of self-imposed rules, a kind of donors’ charter that needs to be respected and which will enhance cooperation. The problem is that donors often target the same communities or the same tasks and work with the same counterparts without coordinating their activities or exchanging information. Without cooperation we are all doomed to repeat the same mistakes perpetuating inefficiencies in local level involvement.

Such a donors’ charter should and could include the following principles: to avoid dependency, meaning that donors ensure that assistance allows the Roma community to be self-reliant and not depend on funders; to avoid the creation of monopolies of recipients, meaning that donors should avoid having all assistance going to the same group in a community; to avoid duplications, meaning that donors ought to increase transparency of efforts and be constantly mindful to exchange and share information with each other. Let me just offer a few specific points that a donor charter may contain. First, we believe that projects should include a well thought over phase-out strategy from the very beginning in order to ensure long-term sustainability. Second, before a project starts other donors previously or even potentially involved should be consulted. Third, when several donors are active in the same area, cooperation should be initiated by the largest donor to substantially reduce implementation costs and again competition. Fourth, whenever possible donors should work with more than one partner in any one individual community. Such competition between recipients will contribute to building sustainable capacity amongst different Roma groups. Fifth, donor funding should be treated as investment capital and project effectiveness should be assessed by applying economic criteria and analysis. Sixth, every project should involve three major parties at every stage—Roma communities, donors and local or national governments. Such a tripartite approach will improve project impact and ensure ownership, very vitally ownership by Roma communities themselves. And, seventh again crucially important and not always maintained at the moment, transparency at all phases of the project should be promoted. For instance, all Roma projects once approved before implementation should be made available on a common Roma internet portal.

Dear Friends, this list does not aspire to be comprehensive as rules have to be consensual and their adoption needs a process of consultation and cooperation. But we very strongly feel that this first step is perhaps the basis on which collectively we could build on this Conference and beyond. Again, the three principles we propose are: promote self-reliance and avoid dependency; promote the empowerment of a broad spectrum of Roma groups and avoid having only a few recipients involved in cooperation with donors; and increase transparency at the donor level and avoid duplication of efforts by promoting an ongoing effective exchange of information.

With these words, I want to thank you very much and wish you great success for this Conference and would again like to congratulate the organizers of the meeting.
Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr. Chairman, it is a pleasure to be here, especially at a meeting chaired by Nicolae Gheorghe... Thanks very much for the invitation.

In preparing for today, I was impressed reading the documentation supplied to us. The Executive Summary of the World Bank study and the concept note for the Decade were very valuable inputs for today’s meeting and for our work.

Please allow me a few remarks to start with. We should not concentrate too much on the EU candidates, …what you usually do then is refer to texts that are valuable to these countries mainly. For example the Copenhagen Criteria for Membership of 1993. Also valid for the others, but we focus always on the candidates and we should not.

The OSCE is an organization that encompasses the whole of Europe and in fact the United States and Canada. It has 55 participating states so the focus is entirely different. We should never forget in our work the Balkans, the Russian Federation and the Caucasus. Another aspect is the danger of losing interest and sometime even reverting to obstruction…Do all involved in administering the Millennium Development Goals really recognize their validity in Central Europe? …Most of the diplomats deciding on this never visit Roma settlements and again from experience, I can assure that you can travel lots in Central Europe as a diplomat without ever visiting such a settlement. So it is very difficult for quite a lot of our colleagues to really recognize the issues concerned. But, the World Bank study should convince them. The Millennium Development Goals are valid in this respect.

Then, the OSCE, not only because the OSCE has 55 participating states, but the OSCE has a mandate in the area and that is why I am here. I don’t need to introduce Nicolae Gheorghe...He is sort of the face of the Roma responsibility of the OSCE. The OSCE summit in Istanbul and the Ministerial in Bucharest of 2001 instructed the OSCE ambassadors to develop an action plan on Roma and Sinti issues. And the Dutch Chairman-in-Office put it on the Dutch agenda so we want to have a plan in Maastricht in December 2003. This action plan is now being negotiated in Vienna. And I should give another word—this is a consensus-based approach. All participating states of the OSCE should subscribe to it and that will be a difficult process. A working group is responsible for it and is chaired by the Romanian ambassador. The objective is not just to produce another paper but the objective is to have an action plan—meaning action for and with Roma having roots in states and in societies. So, I call upon you to really study the draft and to respond to it through the appropriate channels...It is recommendations for states and the OSCE. But we want the action plan really to be for and with Roma. We want to make sure that they are involved in the drafting and therefore we had a special Human Dimension Meeting in April in Vienna inviting NGOs and Roma to give us input. That is why we will have new meetings in September and October in order to get this input and I suggest to then draft a paper from the Roma themselves and please go to Maastricht then and organize yourselves so that you can mirror the actions foreseen by the states with actions foreseen by you. I really hope that Roma will take initiatives themselves as well.

In the meantime we have lots of bottlenecks to overcome. There is always fear in international organizations of new commitments. There is fear to extend mandates, in this case of the OSCE and to create duplication with other international organizations. This fear can lead to inertia and we are afraid of doing anything. I am glad about the calls for coordination that were made this afternoon and I hope to come back to that. There is not only fear of, but also formal barriers to affirmative actions, otherwise said, states and governments are quite often afraid of positive discrimination. What will the effects be on the legal situation in the country? What will the effect be on the majority and on the existing balance in villages and towns? There is a need for special attention to the western Balkans but the instruments are quite often lacking. Another coordination problem—Mr. Ners made some very interesting
remarks about that. Do the Commission and member states of the European Union have Roma in mind when they decide about the cards program and other instruments? There is also the danger of isolating elements that should all be parts of a more comprehensive approach such as human rights or the socio-economic situation. When we were in Granada a few weeks ago...the human rights aspects were important. There was at least one delegation both in Vienna and in Granada who deliberately stressed the socio-economic aspects. We should not forget that they are all important individually but it is the total package that will make a deal.

I said that I read the concept note on the Roma Decade, and the action plan, at least the draft of it, and the concept run parallel and in fact they could converge. I quote the chapters of the action plan—they deal with discrimination, socio-economic situation, education, election processes, participation in public and political life, crisis and post-crisis situations, international cooperation. But still attention needs to be paid to the detailing the involvement of Roma in program drafting, monitoring and evaluation and I welcome the valuable remarks by Mr. Mizsei as far as coordination and ownership is concerned...

Action plans of the OSCE usually have no specific timeframe so we have to look into the follow-up and indeed as the Hungarian Prime Minister said, it will be a multi-generational program. But he also said that his government will take up the call and act not only on moral and legal grounds, but also because of what he called ‘vested interest’.

I’d like to elaborate the link to the proposed Decade a bit. Our finalizing of the action plan in 2003 creates the opportunity to fill it in and complement the Decade objectives and steps, but I have one principal question and that is: implementing Millennium Development Goals, is that also possible at a local level? I think they were formulated for states at a global scale and now we are implementing them in Central Europe and I already referred to problems colleagues of mine might have conceptually. But then overcoming the conceptual problem, you might have the principal problem that you implement these roles not on a national level, sometimes not even on a provincial or regional level but in villages and parts of villages and towns and what again will be the effect on the balance still existing in those areas? There is also an obvious link to the EU programming. We should also establish between the international organizations, and this has been referred to, whether gaps exist in the mandates, for instance taking care of the IDPs in the western Balkans. Ms. de Boer-Buquicchio made a valuable suggestion for better coordination especially for situations in this respect. We should, in general, invest in better coordination between organizations. We should start today in fact and we should agree on a common strategy to run the Decade as foreseen and I hope that we will have scope to go into depth in that respect.

And then, I’d like to finish by returning to an issue already raised by Ms. de Boer-Buquicchio and that is international representation. On the one hand, integration of Roma means that they take up all rights and obligations of citizenship but on the other hand, Commissioner Diamantopoulou already called Roma the biggest minority in the enlarged European Union. How will these Roma have a voice? Ms. de Boer-Buquicchio referred to the Roma Forum and she put a question mark with the European Roma Decade Coalition. I’d like to subscribe to that question mark because it becomes puzzling and that brings me back to international coordination again. Thank you very much.
GEORGE SOROS, Chairman of the Open Society Institute

I am really very happy to have the occasion to address you tonight and I am very happy that this Conference is taking place. So first of all, I’d like to thank my co-hosts the World Bank and the Hungarian Government, particularly [World Bank President] Jim Wolfensohn, who’s taken the time to come here and attend the Conference. I really appreciate your involvement in the Roma issue, because coming from Australia or some distant land, you do not really have first-hand acquaintance with the problem. So you really have shown great understanding and it’s a tremendous help for all of us. And the Hungarian Government, and of course naturally the Finnish Government, and the Swedish Government, and the Council of Europe Development Bank, and UNDP [United Nations Development Program], and all the governments that are represented here. The Prime Minister of Bulgaria [Simeon Saxe-Coburg Gotha] is here. I haven’t seen the Prime Minister of Montenegro [Milo Djukanovic], who was here this morning. And a number of them are coming in tomorrow morning for a very important meeting, so I want to thank them all.

I will not talk about the Roma problem because you know more about it than I do, so I will not go into that at all. I will tell you a little about my involvement and then in particular I would like to talk about where do we go from here? Several journalists asked me today why I am so involved in the Roma issue. And my answer to that is: How can I not be involved in the Roma issue? This is one of the greatest social iniquities that still prevail in this region so it is natural that we must address it. That’s why I’m so glad that this meeting is taking place, because it means that the issue is now recognized and therefore we have the makings of tackling it. And I’m very hopeful that in fact we will succeed.

I set up a foundation in Hungary in 1984. That was the first foundation I set up in this part of the world. And immediately the board of the foundation said we had to address the issue of Roma. And I remember getting on a plane—I think it was in 1987—and seeing a Roma, and he was accompanied by a rather attractive woman, which maybe added to my interest, and he spoke very cultivated Hungarian. So I started talking to him and it turned out that he was going to a Conference in Finland discussing folk music and he was a collector of Roma music—the original Roma music, not the Gypsy music that you hear in restaurants and weddings. And he studied it and was collecting material. And then he asked me who I was and it turned out that his trip and his research were supported by the foundation. This gave me really a great deal of satisfaction because he represented the two requirements for success in dealing with the so-called Roma problem. One is that he spoke very cultivated Hungarian, therefore he was fully equal to anybody—so equality. And the other was that he was actually researching and rebuilding Roma culture, which is also very important—for Roma to have confidence and interest and pride in their culture.

So in a way, he represented what I hoped could be accomplished. And I think that we have now been involved in supporting Roma initiatives for more than 15 years. In Hungary, now it goes back to 1985, let’s say—that’s 17 years. In Romania it’s 12 years, in other countries it’s about
12 or more than ten years. And even though the problems and general conditions of Roma are perhaps worse today than they were ten years ago, I think that a great deal of progress has been made in developing a Roma that is educated and that accepts and is engaged in being Roma. I think this is essential for progress because, let’s face it, when Roma manage to progress in society, given the discrimination, it is a very natural inclination to try not to be Roma, to meld into the general population, to assimilate. And therefore what is left, what the rest of the population sees, are the disenfranchised, the underclass. And that is the stereotype that prevails in society. And to break that stereotype you need Roma who are educated and who remain Roma. And they are the ones who can advocate their cause the best—and you are here, actually. A lot of you are here. And so that is a very hopeful sign and something on which one can build.

So we have been, as a foundation, trying to empower Roma. I don’t have a blueprint of how to resolve the problems, and different people have different ideas and I would say that if Roma are different from “normal” people, they are certainly different from each other. And there are tremendous differences of view and as a foundation we have supported this. I do believe in pluralism, it’s very much part of the Open Society Institute, and we don’t have the final answer—there is no final answer—so it is Roma themselves who have to find their way. And I think it’s happening. But of course they can’t do it alone and they can’t do it with just the support of the foundation. It does require a concerted effort.

And that takes me to where do we go from here? We now have brought together really a high level Conference, with a large number of people involved, a lot of attention in the media—that’s wonderful. But if that’s all we are doing, frankly I don’t think that is really worthwhile. We really have to set in motion a process that is going to make a real difference and I think we’ve got it. I think that this idea of a Decade of Roma Inclusion, starting in 2005, is an excellent idea that is gathering momentum and I hope that before the Conference is over we will have the endorsement of the governments.

I was very encouraged by the remarks of Anna Diamantopoulou, the Commissioner [for Employment and Social Affairs] of the European Union, because in fact what we had in mind is really what the Commission is doing in improving social inclusion. So it fits right into that program. And I think it’s very important that the European Union should take the lead, that the governments give it priority and be actively engaged. And of course engage the Roma themselves. So I think we have the makings of something that really will make a difference over the next decade. And it will take that long, and it will take a year to plan it, and I’m very grateful to the Prime Minister of Hungary [Peter Medgyessy], who is willing to take the lead to act as the convener for putting this project together. And with the support of the European Union and the World Bank, UNDP and so on, I think we will have a really major effort over the next decade.

So I think we all feel very good this evening and I think what will justify us feeling good is if we meet a year from now when the Decade of Roma Inclusion will in fact be announced in all its detail. So that is my hope for this Conference. And I hope that we will actually get there by tomorrow. It is not assured, because we will have a meeting with the various governments tomorrow, but I’m confident that they will endorse this idea, and then we are setting in motion a process that will carry us a very long way. Thank you very much.
RUMYAN RUSSINOV, Open Society Institute, Budapest

Dear Guests, Prime Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am Rumyan Russinov, a Bulgarian Roma, and it is my honor to represent the seven Roma young leader delegations at the Conference. The delegations represent about seventy Roma activists in our 20’s and 30’s, who were competitively selected to participate in this Conference. My task is to present to our Prime Ministers, and other guests, a synthesis of the Roma Young Leaders’ vision, and policy recommendations from the seven participating countries.

Many of our delegations held preparatory meetings with large numbers of Roma NGOs at home before presenting our recommendations yesterday, and so you can be sure that these recommendations are shared by many Roma beyond us.

First, and foremost, all delegations have prioritized education, unemployment and housing as the three most important areas to be addressed and noted that discrimination arose through all of these areas.

In education, we want to integrate the school systems, to desegregate the schools and the classrooms, and to provide equal, and quality education to Roma in the domestic school system from preschool to university. Our main recommendations are as follows:

- Obligatory free preschool education in desegregated classrooms for up to two years for all children;
- Romany assistance in the classroom, especially in preschool;
- Romany-specific training of teachers and school administrators;
- Engagement of Roma parents in school-based decision-making;
- No more Roma first-grade school children put into the special schools for mentally handicapped children starting in September 2003;
- School support for Romany children in the transition period from substandard to regular education;
- Social support for disadvantaged Romany children and families with children at school age;
- Integration of Romany history and culture in the textbooks for all levels of education.

You know that this will be expensive, but we cannot imagine that it is more expensive than keeping us illiterate and on social benefits for all of our life. We want to participate fully in society, and want to have access to equal education and meaningful jobs.

Some specific points raised by the delegations with regard to education work:

The Bulgarian delegation asked that the government ensure the desegregation of Romany education. The Slovak delegation asked the government to review the system of psychological testing for the placement in special schools and to ensure that the system does not produce racially disparate effects. The Hungarian delegation emphasized the need to involve Romany parents in the educational process of their children and to strengthen the relationships between Romany parents and schools. In the Czech Republic the government should expand the national action plan by establishing Romany information centers to provide links between Romany communities and local and educational authorities. The delegation of Serbia and
Montenegro called upon the government to amend the vocational-educational curriculum to teach economically adequate skills. Informative action programs for Roma in high schools and universities were recommended by the delegations of Romania and Serbia-Montenegro.

Regarding unemployment, our recommendations are:

- Tax incentives for employers who employ Roma;
- Access to low interest credit for small family businesses of Roma;
- Implementation of programs for upgrading the qualifications of Roma, and for teaching Roma skills which are adequate to the demands of the labor market;
- Implementation of consultative programs for unemployment, and training for the development of small- and medium-sized businesses.

The Czech and the Slovak delegations also proposed the involvement of Roma in government construction tenders and setting a percentage of such tenders for Roma construction firms. The Bulgarian delegation called upon the government to set up a labor bureau, which provides in-house and per hour work for Roma, and to support Roma agricultural businesses by establishing agricultural business consultative centers.

In the area of housing, all the delegations called on their governments to ensure that they provide basic standards for adequate housing. The issue of Romany housing is very difficult, involves the issue of citizenship, and is further complicated with non-transparent procedures of local governments, racism and discrimination. We call upon all countries to legalize Romany housing and ensure that owners are provided with ownership documents.

A national watchdog agency should be set up immediately to oversee and evaluate the discrimination, the distribution of municipal property, and the resulting hardship it is causing to the Roma.

In addition, the Czech Republic and Slovakia called on their governments to eliminate the practice of segregation and ghettoization of Roma by relocating them from town centers to the periphery. The Slovak and the Macedonian delegation recommended that housing provisions, which discriminate against Roma preventing them from access to municipal housing, should be eliminated. In Serbia and Montenegro, the government should urgently address the housing situation of the internally displaced Roma from Kosovo, and of the Roma who have been forcefully resettled from Western Europe.

All delegations emphasized combating racial discrimination against Roma through the adoption of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation complying with the requirements of the EU race and equality directive. We also want to have an independent mechanism set up to monitor implementation of anti-discrimination legislation, and assist victims of racial discrimination in seeking remedies. Furthermore it is necessary to train police, judges, and other law enforcement agencies, to implement anti-discrimination law well, and swiftly.

Other areas that were underscored in particular countries are:

In Romania, the delegation demanded that the government should recognize Roma slavery and the urgent need to adopt a package of reparation measures. Furthermore, the delegation called on the government to create an adequate framework for ensuring the cultural autonomy of Roma by setting up Roma identity promotion institutions such as schools specialized in Romany language and graduate education in Romany language.

In Hungary, the delegation stressed the need to establish formal channels of dialogue between grass-roots national NGOs, inter-governmental organizations, and the government. The delegation called on the government to provide support for Romany community centers, and establish non-profit development agencies to train Romany activists committed to the grass-roots.

In Macedonia the delegation called on the government to set up a Government Commission on Roma to advise on Romany policy and to adopt a national plan for the improvement of the situation of Roma in the country. This commission should be under the leadership of the Prime Minister.
Finally, we want to have broad-based Roma, and Roma NGO representation in all matters of local and national governments which affect us. We want to be at the table making decisions about our future.

We also call on the European Union, to make sure that Roma are broadly involved in the design, implementation, and evaluation of all PHARE and future European Union spending on Roma projects in our countries.

And we call on the European Union to guarantee us that once our countries become members of the European Union, the national action plans and interim memorandum proceedings will include the Roma issues.

We fully support the idea of the Decade of Roma Inclusion as a critical mechanism to close the ever-widening gaps between Roma and non-Roma in our countries and, to finally include us as full and equal citizens of our countries and in the European Union.

Thank you very much.
NICOLETA BITU, Report on Roma 
Womens’ Forum

I am Nicoleta Bitu, I am a Romanian Roma, a social worker by profession, and I have 12 years of experience working in communities in Romania and as well in the region. I would like to start my presentation by thanking Mr. George Soros for the challenging questions, which he put to me in 1999, when I presented the situation of Romany women in Central and Eastern Europe to his staff in New York.

Mr. George Soros asked me what is so special about Romany women, why should we address the issue of Romany women. I should admit that since then, for four years, I spent my time reading to try and find an answer to this question, and I hope that in the recommendations from the historical forum of women which took place on June 29, you will find also the answer to your question from four years ago.

Not least, I want to thank all my Romany woman colleagues, activists, who gave me this great opportunity.

As I told you, the Forum of Romany Women from June 29 was an historic event, where the women participants discussed issues of concern in the areas of education, health and sexuality, economic empowerment, leadership, and political participation. From those discussions we can draw some conclusions as general principles or general comments on the key issues which are now facing Romany women.

Roma women’s issues represent both women’s and Roma movement discourses. By this, I want to say that Roma women’s agendas call into question the assumed universality of the human rights discourse for those involved in defending human rights for both women and Roma. However, recognizing the steps taken by the governments in designing policies for both Roma and women, the Roma women’s agenda highlights the fact that gender equality is far from being achieved in both majority society and Roma communities.

Roma women activists do not want to create a separate movement of Roma women, but rather they seek to integrate Roma women’s issues into all levels and structures for both women and Roma. Participants in the Forum emphasized the importance of the preservation of the Roma language and cultural values, but only by respecting the freedom of choice for each individual man and woman. Those choices should be based on accurate information and all the choices should be available. Romanian women expressed their concern on the lack of pertinent solutions addressing the situation of the Roma women and children refugees, and internally displaced persons from South-Eastern Europe.

This being said, I would like to start with the recommendations.

The Women’s Forum would like to recommend a third initiative in addition to the Decade of Roma Inclusion, and the Roma Education Fund. This initiative is the creation of a Romany institute to be supported by donors and the participating states. This institute will support regional training for both men and women, human rights with a special focus on women’s rights, leadership training for Romany women from the grass-roots level, technical assistance and training for women candidates in the elections, and research, documentation on issues related to Romany women including history, trafficking and prostitution.

Another recommendation is to include gender equality as a criterion, in all the funds available for the Roma.

For economic empowerment the Forum recommends to support the creation of micro-finance lines directly for Romany women in order to break dependency on the social welfare system, and to increase the quality of life; and to create micro-enterprise programs for women that teach highly remunerative skills like computer skills rather than those that reinforce racial, class, and gender stereotypes and prejudices.

These programs should provide employment opportunities for particularly vulnerable Roma women’s groups such as single mothers, mothers with husbands in prison, victims of domestic violence, refugees, and internally displaced Roma women.

Regarding health and sexuality, we have the following recommendations.
We would like to ensure that the governments expressly oppose the coercive provision or the denial of health service to Roma women, such as sterilization, abortion, birth control, as an instrument of racism or state population policy.

Community-based educational efforts for parents and men should be funded, specifically about the importance of education, pre-arranged marriages, early marriage, and sexual taboos, for community-based education campaigns such as those created by young Roma women in, for example, Macedonia.

For the governments and the initiative of the Decade of Roma Inclusion we have the following recommendations.

We think there are sets of national targets to achieve equal representation of Roma women and men in the consultative decision-making and administrative bodies as well as quotas for women for the list of candidates for both Roma and non-Roma parties.

There should be national plans for Roma development in every country that exclusively include recommendations for improving the life of Roma women, and to mainstream Roma women’s issues in all national programs aiming to improve the situation of women and girls in the fields of health, education, housing, and employment.

We recommend to mainstream Roma women’s issues on gender equality, and to appoint minority gender advisors.

To make sure that the Romany women’s concern is addressed, a mechanism should be developed to monitor political criteria for the EU accession. And when I say this, I refer to minority rights and gender equality.

Also, a part of the Decade of Roma Inclusion is the initiative of setting up a European Roma coalition, and if this initiative is adopted, we would like to recommend the following:

- Include gender balance participation for the future European coalition, even on the level of the administration of this body;
- Include gender equality experts in the working group which will develop the indicators and initial benchmarks within this initiative;

For the governments as well as for the initiative of Roma Education Fund we would like to recommend the inclusion in the competitive criteria, gender equality, in the number of boys and girls covered by the proposed projects; to scale up the training and employment of Roma, taking into account that this also represents an economic empowerment measure; to focus part of the collection of historical textbooks on our history, which can contribute to changing the perception of the Roma community and also, to reduce the stereotypes and prejudices of majority population; and to create community-based literacy programs for Romany women, and also to introduce as a very specific target, the work with parents in order to increase the respect for their children, especially the girls.

Thank you for your attention.
DENA RINGOLD, Senior Economist, World Bank

Thank you Mr. Soros, Mr. Wolfensohn, Mr. Teleki, Mr. Prime Ministers, Mr. Ministers, distinguished guests. It is a great honor to be here with you in this magnificent and historical setting.

We have covered a lot of ground.

Over the past two days, we have heard from many of you: Roma, non-Roma, ministers, government officials, mayors, NGO leaders, and representatives of international organizations and many other partners. Contributors hail from more than 30 countries: from as far away as New Zealand and Canada, to the neighborhoods of Shuto Ozari, Macedonia, and Sofia, Bulgaria to right here in Budapest.

The agenda before us is a serious one — poverty among Roma remains one of the most pressing issues for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Roma are Europe’s largest minority and also its most vulnerable. Poverty and unemployment are unconscionably high, and many Roma lack access to the most basic of social services, including education and health care. Policy discussions in the panel sessions and in the corridors about the way forward have been lively and passionate. Participants have been open and willing to share their personal experiences. The energy has been tangible.

I would like to highlight some of the main themes to emerge from the plenary sessions and panels. Simply put, the lives of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe can be improved. Participation in education and jobs can be expanded, health status, and housing conditions lifted, and discrimination and exclusion reduced. There is consensus around this agenda—by Roma and non-Roma alike.

Policies to improve Roma living conditions need to balance between three related sets of objectives—first, increasing economic opportunities, second, building the capacities of Roma through better education and health status, and finally strengthening communities and families, through increased empowerment and participation, and overcoming the barriers of exclusion.

There was also much discussion of the need to address, or mainstream, Roma issues within current national policies. In other words—the question of how to make existing policies more inclusive and effective at reaching Roma—by promoting Roma involvement, while at the same time respecting and maintaining cultural differences.

While specific policies will need to be developed and tailored to each national and local context, the way forward rests on sound policies, based on good information, which involve and include Roma from the start.

First, to move ahead, we need good data. EU Commissioner Diamantopoulou mentioned this first in her opening remarks, and it was raised throughout the Conference. Without reliable data, we simply cannot be confident that policies are being designed in the right way. Policy-makers and project managers need to know how policies affect Roma—how they influence school attendance, health conditions, or access to social welfare benefits and services. Today, unfortunately, data across countries are often ill-equipped to capture ethnic disparities in access and outcomes.

This can be improved through more extensive use of sample surveys and developing smarter questionnaires for analyzing ethnicity. And as Refika Mustafic, the spokeswoman of the Roma delegation from Serbia and Montenegro mentioned in her remarks, involving Roma in evaluation of projects, and in the data collection and analysis, is central to improving results, by ensuring that Roma are identified and included. Finally, this information needs to be used effectively to improve policy design and implementation, and to hold public services accountable for their performance.

Second, the discussions indicated broad agreement that education is the key to breaking the poverty cycle. Smart policies can quickly boost Roma participation in school, help Roma students to stay in school and graduate, and improve the quality of the education they receive. Education is the best tool we have to help ensure that no Roma child lags behind.

The experience with policies and projects to improve the educational status of Roma represented in this room is immense. But there is still a long way to go. Many Roma children do not attend school and many study in segregated schools. The Hungarian Minister of Education mentioned yesterday that
one-fifth of Roma children in Hungary attend schools intended for the mentally and physically handicapped. The situation is similar, or even worse in other countries. The Minister remarked that these children are the unemployed of the future.

Measures to close these gaps include those that expand access to preschool education; involve parents in education and in the classroom; and increase opportunities for Roma children to attend mainstream schools.

The Education Fund, proposed at this Conference would support the scaling up of some of the successful pilot initiatives and projects, and strengthen partnerships between the NGOs that implement them and the governments that scale them up.

Third, there is the importance of jobs. For starters, better education prepares Roma for the labor market. And access to jobs can also be improved by providing Roma with opportunities to expand their skills; overcome discrimination in hiring; and increase access to microcredit and support for starting their own businesses.

Adding to the growing number of Roma self-employed is a priority. Here, we heard that there is valuable experience to draw from. Maria Nowak from France, told us about her work with microcredit for Roma in France and with poor communities in Albania. The results have been impressive—and can be drawn upon.

And yesterday we heard about the Pakiv European Roma Fund which has begun to support small-scale employment projects in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. It has trained 19 young Roma leaders in four countries to initiate local development projects in their communities. They have gone on to start vocational training programs, establish community centers, and set up funds for financing small-scale agricultural projects. Over the course of a year, these 19 young people have supported projects which have reached nearly 1,700 beneficiaries. A new class of trainees has just been selected and will further multiply the reach of the project next year.

Community development initiatives allow Roma to take responsibility for projects which affect them and to work together with non-Roma—building bridges and partnerships, as well as providing individuals with the opportunity to reach their full potential. In the film shown at the opening of this Conference, Maria Ionescu from Romania said that if individuals are empowered, they have the opportunity to make use of their best values.

Some of the main messages coming out of the policy discussions were as follows:
• Set goals, raise expectations and assume that Roma can succeed;
• Address rigidities and build in flexibility to respond to diversity;
• Work on both the demand and supply sides;
• Monitor and measure for change and progress;
• Be selective and set priorities;
• Tackle discrimination through: clear values, standard legislation, and attention to implementation and follow through;
• Work at all levels—local, national, European and international;
• Deal with the multiple marginalization of Roma in isolated regions and the critical gender dimensions;
• Resolve outstanding post-conflict issues of Roma refugees and IDPs;
• Build on the success stories;
• Make policies such that services work for Roma;
• Recognize that inclusion is a two-way street, requiring great understanding and appreciation on behalf of non-Roma and initiative and contributions from Roma themselves.

Finally, real participation is essential. Yesterday, Gyula Vamosi, spokesman for the Hungarian young Roma delegation eloquently told us that Roma do not want to be marionettes—with others pulling the strings. They need to be fully involved as real partners, interlocutors and policy designers—and implementers of the initiatives which affect them.

In her remarks at the Women’s Forum on Sunday, Minister Mona Sahlin from Sweden noted that governments in Europe have been increasingly talking about Roma, but they rarely talk with Roma. This conversation is starting. It is a great beginning.
First of all, let me welcome you in this really beautiful building, also the symbol of Hungary’s statehood. Dear Mr. Wolfensohn, I can assure you that by the time the World Bank is a thousand years old, you will also have such a nice building.

The accession of Hungary to the European Union is an historic milestone for the country, the nation and all of its minorities and communities. Let me confirm once again: I count the 21st Century from this date.

Nevertheless, our membership in the Union is not an aim in itself, but rather just a vehicle. A vehicle and a new incentive force. An incentive to finally repay our decade-old debt to all who suffered badly from the change as we created a modern, European Republic of Hungary. And indeed, the majority of Roma in Hungary and moreover in Central Europe are among them. It is time to admit, Honorable Europeans, that the Roma are the disenfranchised of the protracted 20th century, too!

The accession of the Republic of Hungary to the European Union provides a vehicle of unprecedented efficiency to allow the Hungarian Roma to approach Europe. Europe and the majority of the society of a new Hungary.

We would deceive ourselves if we said that the fate of the Roma was always reassuring in the countries of Europe with a luckier history. Or that the accession to the Union would solve all problems of the Roma at once: exclusion, the inequality of opportunities and poverty.

No. We must admit that the majority of the Roma have been living and are living in a disadvantaged situation in the European Union. The situation of Czech, Slovak, Hungarian, Romanian and South-East European Roma—and the discussion conducted on that situation—will directly interest the citizens of this continent to the situation of the Roma living in other countries.

The enlargement of the European Union creates more liberties but also more responsibility for all European politicians and all of us, too. Namely, we as politicians of Member States will now have the right to act for the integration of the Roma outside our countries, in European forums. Moreover, this is not only a right, but rather an obligation of ours. We can work efficiently for the emergence of our fellow Roma citizens only if national governments and the leaders of the EU do not look to the other for an initiative. We can be efficient only if we seek national and European answers simultaneously. National and European strategies for the integration of the Roma do not substitute but complement each other.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I believe in a Republic where the ideals of a shared community and solidarity are enforced. They must be true for all of us: the Roma, people living with disabilities, the destitute and those who are unable to enforce their interests. Because the solidarity of the majority is a right, an innate right of all citizens.

We believe in a Republic where the equality of not only the rights but also of opportunities is asserted. In the modern European Hungarian Republic, nobody may be discriminated against on the basis of their origin, faith, political conviction, financial situation, gender, physical or mental health.

I am proud that the case of equal opportunities is finally represented on a ministerial level for the first time in the history of Hungary since the political change: Minister Katalin Lévai also attends this Conference. After its formation, this government committed to creating opportunities—set up the position of the State Secretary responsible for Roma Affairs taken by László Teleki, also present here in representation of the government.

I appointed professionals, desk officers responsible for Roma affairs to our line ministries. The interests of the Hungarian Roma are represented by a Ministerial Commissioner at the Ministry of Education, because like the entire country, their future in Europe also depends on their competitiveness and education. My government will bring the Bill on Equal Treatment and Equal Opportunities before the Parliament already this year. We undertake to do this. The Bill will provide legal measures not only against discrimination and exclusion but also for enforcing the idea that unites the political community of Hungarians—Roma and non-Roma—the ideal
of the Republic. I personally was also guided by the representation of these principles when I subscribed to chairing the National Council of Roma Affairs.

The United Nations also plays a role in learning the exact situation of the European Roma and in improving the situation, too. The participation of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank in initiatives promoting the situation of the Roma is major progress because these organizations—merely on the basis of their very nature—lay an emphasis on economic-social factors and education. This means that they do not just offer “first aid” but also a vision for European Roma and Hungarian Roma. Their support means continuous attention and actual projects for national governments, and the action plan Decade of Roma Inclusion and the planned Roma Education Fund of the World Bank stand out.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am personally committed to instigate these initiatives. The responsibility of governments and intergovernmental organizations cannot be contested in the improvement of the situation of the Roma in Europe. While it cannot be questioned, it is not at all exclusive. The primary responsibility of governments includes the strengthening of vocational training and securing work opportunities, the creation of new jobs and the improvement of healthcare and social conditions in general. This means that governments are responsible for creating opportunities and care taking if any citizen, or a Roma citizen in this case, is unable to use a given chance.

It is not paternalistic assistance that we need but cooperation. Any successful government policy needs strong, creative civil organizations that cooperate with the governments efficiently all over Europe. Civil initiatives play a major role in making sure that the living standards of the Roma can be realigned to the majority of the society of their fatherlands, and that Europe fares well physically, mentally and psychologically. The responsibility of NGO’s, “nongovernmental organizations,” extends to providing, disseminating information on opportunities as they open up, so that more and more fellow Roma citizens can and want to use these.

Talking about the opportunities of the civil society, we should refer specifically to the programs that operate under the support of the Soros Foundation. These include the European Roma Rights Centre located in Budapest but operating throughout the continent, an organization that monitors the enforcement of Roma rights in all countries of Europe.

Perhaps you will not interpret as a faux-pas of the host if I mention that the first director of the European Roma Information Office set up in Brussels this spring to maintain and establish contacts between EU institutions and the Roma living in the Member States is a Hungarian expert, Ms. Angéla Kóczé. I am proud of her, as we all can be. And I am also glad to have here in Budapest “Radio C” the first Roma radio in Budapest.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a great joy for me and the Hungarian Government that the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are represented on such a high level at this Conference organized for the emergence of the Roma community in Europe. I am convinced that you, the participants of this exchange of ideas do not only have the intention to monitor and control the enforcement and implementation of the findings of this Conference in the day-to-day lives of Roma communities. You as political leaders also have the power necessary for that.

We must admit that good intentions are no longer sufficient today: even the best action plan of the world makes no sense unless it is implemented. And we political leaders have a special responsibility in that. It is up to us, also up to us, my dear friends.

And finally, please allow me to tell you a little story. We remembered the victims of the Porraiemos, the Roma holocaust in Nagykanizsa, a town in the countryside last year. After holding my speech, I had a little time to talk to the people. I met a teenage Roma boy there, who told me: “You know, Mr. Prime Minister, I just don't understand how this works that my granddad was a good enough Hungarian when he had to go to the army, and he was no longer a good enough Hungarian when he ought to have been
protected and was transported away to the death camp..."

There is hardly an answer to this question, the boy probably did not expect any either. All I told him was that it was the very essence of remembrance that we learn about the past, and do not let it happen again. This is how remembrance becomes the responsibility of the descendants.

Because I believe in a republic and a Europe where nobody will ever have the reason to ask this question again.

Europe has been made rich and strong by its diversity. And in this diverse, rich and strong Europe, the ethnic minority that counts as the largest by the number of people still lives under circumstances that are shameful by European standards. I as a Prime Minister, as a citizen, a European and a Hungarian think that it is simply intolerable.

So when the World Bank and the Open Society Institute of the Soros Foundation came forward with the idea of this Conference, my Government was happy to offer that Hungary would provide the hosting venue of the event.

We Hungarians know since our first king, Saint Stephen, that only a country of many nationalities can be strong. Faithful to our historic traditions—and not losing sight of the interests of our common future—we are committed, and I personally am committed to making sure that all minorities in Europe can live under circumstances that they deserve from the day that they are born. Under circumstances that allow them to contribute to the prosperity of their nations and the European community. We may not relinquish even one single talented, diligent person.

You know, Ladies and Gentlemen, I could learn all the beauties and difficulties of being a member of a minority as a child. We together with you would like to work towards making sure that Roma children in Europe learn nothing more than the power, richness and beauty of an autonomous and proprietary culture and identity that enriches Europe.
SIMEON SAXE COBURG GOTHA,
Prime Minister of Bulgaria

I would, in the first place, thank and congratulate everyone here in Budapest who has contributed to the success of this really unique meeting. We are particularly grateful of course, to Prime Minister Péter Medgyessy, the World Bank, and Mr. George Soros’ Foundation.

I will be very brief, as I usually am, and in respect to all those who have to voice their opinion, by saying that Bulgaria has gone a long way in the past 12 years in tackling difficult situations, but in spite of this the Roma issue is something, which, apart from being a matter of consciousness, a matter of social consciousness, is very close particularly to my heart.

We started with a framework back in 1999, and a program of integration which, I am afraid, has gone far too slowly, and I must say that these two days here have been particularly inspiring to make sure that we give an impulse to this program. I think that we have a lot to learn from the Hungarian example, and a lot to catch up with.

Having lived most of my life in Spain, I have been an eyewitness to the integration of the Roma people in that country. I believe that we can learn from them, too, where the Spanish have given career opportunities without violating the cultural identity of the Roma people. I personally know artists and actors, doctors and government officials, who proudly acknowledge their Roma origin. This means that in Spain, the public opinion towards that minority is a positive one.

In countries like mine, with a substantial Roma presence, the problem should be a matter of concern for society as a whole, which means that governments’ cooperation with Roma NGOs is essential. I feel that it is equally important to have a good cooperation with municipal authorities.

Our ambition is to develop a network of government and local authorities, plus NGOs able to tackle Roma issues. Eventually, we could make it a part of an international network to effectively improve the situation of the Roma, not only in Central and Eastern Europe, but across the whole of Europe.

I believe that an ancient culture such as the Roma one diversifies our own cultural traditions, and enriches them. Therefore, I welcome the initiative of the World Bank, and the Open Society Institute called the Decade of the Roma Inclusion 2005-2015, and I pledge Bulgaria’s support.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is our shared task to overcome the problems that Roma people are faced with, which are part of a vicious circle. The uneducated are poor, and those who are poor cannot afford education. I believe everyone here today agrees that this circle can be, must be broken by integrating Roma children in the school system to ensure quality education for all of them, but also to make sure that the parents understand this new meaning.

Therefore I also support the initiative of setting up a Roma Education Fund. And finally, I would only say that being a realist, and very much down-to-earth, I feel that the path ahead is long and rough, but I hope that we shall have both the courage and the will to achieve these noble goals that we have set forth today.
ANTE SIMONIC, Deputy Prime
Minister of Croatia

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, and our delegation, I would like to express how pleased we are to be able to participate in this Conference. I would additionally like to convey my highest regards to the organizers, the Hungarian friends, Mr. Prime Minister Pêter Medgyessy, the Hungarian authorities, the World Bank, to you, Mr. James Wolfensohn, to the Open Society Institute, and especially to Mr. George Soros.

I would like to thank them for the efforts they have taken to join us to solve enormous problems together. So I fully support the ideas of the Roma Decade of Inclusion and the Roma Education Fund. The status of Roma in the Republic of Croatia, and the conditions under which they live have placed them on the margins of society and the periphery of wider public interest.

As a consequence most Roma have lagged behind the majority of the population in almost all segments of life: status in society, the manner in which education, healthcare and social welfare are organized, the possibility of preserving their national identity, employment, presentation in media, political representation, etc.

According to the most recent population census conducted in 2001, the Roma population counts a little over 9,000 persons in my country. However, they estimate that as many as 30,000 to 40,000 Roma actually live in Croatia.

Fully aware that the Roma are unable to bridge the existing gap by themselves and firmly committed to changing the current situation, the Government of the Republic of Croatia initiated the development of the National Roma Program at the end of 2002. This program has been reviewed by, and coordinated with all major interested parties, first and foremost the Roma community, and it is currently undergoing procedures for formal adoption by the Croatian Government. Our intention is to facilitate a dignified life for Roma in Croatia. Representatives of Roma associations, experts from governmental ministries, and other national authorities, local and regional self-government units, scholarly and research institutions, and local and foreign nongovernmental organizations were enlisted to develop the National Roma Program.

It is based on scientific and multidisciplinary principles, and its goal is to build a desirable future, anticipate the time ahead of us, to define priorities and vision, where we want to be after a set number of years. However the measures it contains must be suited to the tradition of the Roma and the milieu in which we live, international standards, and also Croatia’s current material and financial possibilities.

Better education, professional qualifications and increased employment are prerequisites for the improvement of material and social status, and the way out of the poverty and misery in which a large number of Roma now live. Moving out of the cycle of poverty is a very trying and arduous process, even in countries on a better economic and social footing than present day Croatia.

We are therefore aware of the true dimensions and weight of the tasks facing us. Their achievement will largely depend on the improvement of general economic and social circumstances throughout the country.

The Croatian Constitutional National Minorities Act from 2002 validates the activities of the Roma in local and regional self-government units, and reinforces their confidence in their own strength, and the community, in which they live.

The ultimate objective of our activities is to achieve high living standards for Roma, and their subjective and objective sense of equality and equal rights with all other citizens, and to help them preserve their identity, language, and other characteristics. This is a long-term process. The success of implementation and change will depend on cooperation, and joint action at all levels of society, where the role of the Roma themselves is absolutely essential.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I take this opportunity to once more thank our hosts in beautiful Budapest, and this magnificent setting. The international community, the European Union,
the World Bank, the Open Society Institute, UNDP, and other organizations who have recognized our efforts, and assisted us in bringing them to fruition.

Thank you all for exchanging ideas, and I am happy that we are all united on the new beginning, and proud that our common mission is so positive.
PETR MAREŠ, Deputy Prime Minister of the Czech Republic

Let me start with joining the long line of those who have already congratulated the organizers of this Conference. They did a great job, and probably you started something. I still do not know what, but I believe the start was good, and we will continue as well as we started.

It is almost 700 years, Ladies and Gentlemen, since Czechs encountered Roma people for the first time. It took us a long time to develop a policy towards Roma people, and we are still in the process of developing it. Let me tell you something about how we approach this problem.

First, I should tell you something about the history. In the period between the World Wars, there were only about 5,000 Roma living in the territory of today’s Czech Republic. Only a few hundred of them survived Nazi persecution. The Czechoslovakian Government started to resettle border areas from which ethnic Germans were transferred, and relocated the Slovak Roma for this purpose.

Following the Communist takeover in 1948, Slovak Roma were also brought in large numbers, often involuntarily, to major industrial cities, particularly in Moravia and North Bohemia as a workforce for the extensively growing heavy industry.

A small minority among the Roma were still nomadic, mainly those belonging to the more traditional Vlachs or Vlachiko group, but the nomadic way of life was expressly prohibited by law in 1958 and, unlike similar prohibitions of the past, this law was enforced. The steady influx of Slovak Roma into the Czech part of then Czechoslovakia continued over the following decades more or less spontaneously as Roma from Slovakia were attracted to the higher living standards of their urbanized relatives in the Czech lands. Indeed there is evidence which shows that such migratory trends from Slovakia into the Czech Republic continues even after the separation of the two constituent parts of former Czechoslovakia: the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

We do not know the current number of Roma living on the territory of the Czech Republic. According to the official census from 1991 there are only 33,000 persons identified as Roma. And in 2001 only 11,000 people identified themselves as Roma. It is a similar process as in Croatia and in many other countries of this region. According to our estimates probably 150,000 or more Roma are now living in our country.

How does the social picture of our Roma inhabitants look? Following the changes of 1989-1990, the political freedom and the recognition of the Roma as a national minority resulted in a true cultural Renaissance of the Romany culture, but the social situation of most Roma quickly deteriorated. The men, most of whom had jobs as unskilled laborers, quickly became unemployed and dependent on welfare benefits.

This development was mainly due to a general drastic reduction of workplace in heavy industries, the regions with the highest percentage of Roma were generally those where structural unemployment was the highest: North Bohemia, northern Moravia. The increased dependence of many poor Roma upon ruthless money lenders from their own ethnic community may be perceived as one of the results of economic insecurity which affected those who lost citizenship for several years after the splitting of the country and those who lost their jobs.

While loans helped families survive periods without other forms of income, they had to be paid back many times over, therefore in the long-term perspective they reduced the ability of the poor Roma to pay their other dues such as rent, and thus contributed to their slide into social exclusion.

So what we are trying to do is this: the government approaches the Roma affair from three crucial perspectives: human rights, national identity or ethnicity and social policy. The first of these perspectives, that of human rights, stems from the need to ensure that all citizens of the Czech Republic, including Roma, have the opportunity to exercise fully and without discrimination all the individual rights granted under the Constitution.

The second perspective, that of national or ethnic identity is based on the specific right of the national ethnic minorities including a collective right as defined in Chapter Three of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms in the Con-
vention on the Protection of the National Minorities. The Czech Government recognizes the Roma as a national ethnic minority, they are represented in the Government Council for National Minorities and as such can strive to preserve their independence, language and culture.

And the third aspect, that of effective social policy is based on the wider concept of the Roma community contained in the recent statement accompanying a government resolution from October 29, 1997, and the report on the situation of the Roma community in the Czech Republic. This aspect is the focus of the work by the third government adviser, the Government Council for Roma Community Affairs. The terms Roma community and Roma national ethnic minority do not overlap completely.

What is the crucial approach? Notwithstanding the basic division of the approach to Roma affairs into human rights policy, national minority policy and ethnically conscious social policy there are many aspects, but at least two of these perspectives blend together. For example in the issues of educational employment and solutions to social problems, combined with the general protection of human rights, especially protection against discrimination.

The very concept of the government policy of Roma integration combines two requirements: overcoming social exclusion and attempting to preserve the Roma cultural identity. Integrating the Roma into Czech society does not mean the loss of Roma identity, culture and language. Here integration means the full incorporation of Roma into society while preserving most of the cultural features and differences which characterize them and which they want to preserve, provided that these differences are not against the laws of the Czech Republic.

It is possible for a national ethnic minority to integrate fully into a multicultural society while preserving its cultural heritage. In this respect integration should be differentiated from assimilation and a full cultural conformity of Roma to majority society. Any individual may opt for assimilation, but this choice must be made freely. Assimilation must be neither prevented nor enforced. Although the past of assimilation can lead to social success, the government is convinced that if assimilation were to become a solution for all Roma, society as a whole would suffer a cultural loss. Any mass-assimilation of Roma would necessarily give rise to the suspicion that it has been caused by the majority society’s unwillingness or inability to accept the Roma as long as they maintain their cultural identity.

The concept of Roma integration is fully compatible with the process of the emancipation, it is discovering our own cultural identity, which is now being developed among the Roma. The government is convinced that the more Roma identify as Roma, the more they are likely to act as free and responsible citizens. Government measures should ensure that Roma attempts at emancipation are not obstructed in society and that, on the contrary, they are supported. Ultimately, however, emancipation can only arise from a free decision of the Roma—not from government policy.

And finally the government also acknowledges the European dimension of Roma emancipation, it respects the political view that those Roma, who consider themselves to be members of the European or worldwide Roma nation have the right to be accepted as such.

Well, as you see, the approach of the Czech Government is similar to the approach of the European Union member states and to many states represented at this table. And that is why we not only accepted the invitation to this Conference but why we would like to play an important and active role in the future activities of the Decade for Roma Inclusion.

We probably will not be able to do more today, but Ladies and Gentlemen, I believe we already did something today. I am completely sure that 15 years ago the governments represented in this hall would have probably denied the very existence of any Roma problem. Now the representatives of these governments are here and are quite openly saying yes, there is a Roma problem, and yes, we want to unite our forces and we want to solve this problem, yes, we are going to do our best. So, thank you for helping us with it and well I believe it will work.
BRANKO CRVENKOVSKI, Prime Minister of Macedonia

Allow me, at the outset of my address, to commend the World Bank and Soros Foundation for the idea of convening a Conference that will provide us with an opportunity to discuss this topic, which has unfortunately often been intentionally or unintentionally, avoided or marginalized. The response to the Conference by the governments in the region, at such high level, encourages my belief that the issue of Roma and their integration in economic and social life is not an issue avoided by any of us, indeed it is given priority. I sincerely hope that all of us together will contribute to the successful realization of the organizers’ fundamental objective—we will take advantage of this meeting not only for discussions amongst ourselves, but also for setting up action plans for the improvement of the economic status of the Roma and their full social inclusion in our societies.

The story of the Roma is often a sad one. Their history is connected with the absence of recognition, with persecutions, stateless persons, lost chances. This story of lost chances and numerous open roads is best known by the Roma who, ironically, are probably among the oldest of European peoples. Permanently moving, migrating, exposed to all possible forms of pressure and mistreatment including the genocide during World War II, the Roma, are in fact the biggest victims of the romantic and once revolutionary and liberating concepts of national states. Not being able to fight, not even for much smaller forms of recognition than the one of having their own state, the Roma remained on the sidelines, the margins of Europe making efforts to survive in the most elementary physical sense, but also making efforts to maintain and as much as possible to codify their own culture.

Some supporters of Roma rights say that the Roma have worse status and treatment in Europe than the black people had in the South African Republic during apartheid. Other historians of the Roma issue say that in the 20th century alone, Roma have experienced three genocides—the first during the Nazi regime, the second during communism and the third since the fall of the Berlin wall, mostly during and after the war in Yugoslavia. According to research done by Roma associations, over one million Roma were killed during World War II. The Roma, in addition to the Muslims, were the biggest victims of the war in Yugoslavia. According to some data, of 300,000 Roma who lived in Bosnia and Herzegovina prior to the war, only 16,000 remained, and of 250,000 Roma from Kosovo, only around 18,000 were left. Many of the Roma fled to foreign countries in which, for the most part, they have no rights—documents, jobs, social protection, appropriate accommodation, nor embassies nor political representatives whom they can address.

Although Roma are the largest European minority—a number between 10 and 15 million Roma in Europe is being mentioned—not only are they deprived of their basic human entitlements to jobs or education, but they are also exposed to racial mistreatment, segregation and ghettoization.

Honorable participants in this Forum, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is time for this story to end. It is time, inter alia, because Europe has started to follow new, integrative paths—to mark out a different future for the largest European minority. Bearing in mind the centuries of torture, we know that the Roma issue will not be solved overnight; however there are many indicators, including this meeting, that things will progress in a more hopeful direction for the Roma.

I say that this is a good moment because the position and the rights of the minorities, ethnic and national identity, nationalism and population migrations are becoming key problems that Europe faces in the attempt to create a complex, multi-cultural but also integrated society. These problems are especially evident now when the EU is expanding eastwards while endeavoring to harmonize existing tensions. Consequently, the regional and cross-border cooperation, especially with regard to the protection of minority rights, is one of the main mechanisms the European Union applies to stabilize the European area.

I am deeply convinced that the European integration process is, to a large extent, a process of development of people’s awareness. Europe is
not only about creating legislation. After all, the human being and human values are the reason for making certain laws. That is why I believe that by developing the awareness both of the majority and of the minority population in different European countries, especially in those where accession to Europe is pending, the awareness that actions are needed to create relations between different social groups, the awareness that it is possible to establish wise and stable models for co-existence between minority and majority populations; all this contributes to Europe, both in an emotional and a physical sense; it becomes a real home that unifies.

In addition, if you allow me to be a little bit critical, there are, realistically, cultural and integrative deficits in the European process of unification. This is an additional reason why I think that it is possible to create a new political philosophy of co-existence in Europe through the development of people’s awareness and, moreover, this new political philosophy may provide directions for the manner of preserving culture, language, identity and particularity in the broader globalization processes.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is precisely the Roma who can be one of the symbols of such a new European philosophy that makes national borders, majorities and minorities relative. Evidence that segregation is the worst possible way was shown by our friend across the Atlantic. The United States became a great and powerful country because, among other things, it conquered racism and segregation. Europe, which is full of history itself, knows this lesson very well, but this lesson against segregation has yet to be learnt more substantially by the new countries of the European family, and it also has to be repeated in some of the older EU member states.

Due to this, I believe that the future of the Roma in Europe will not be so dark as in the past several centuries.

The reason behind my belief that the Roma minority may be integrated in existing states without being assimilated, is the experience of my country, the Republic of Macedonia. The Roma in Macedonia face numerous problems connected with poverty and insufficient integration. However, I am proud to represent the country in which Roma have perhaps the highest level of rights compared to all the other European countries.

Today, at this meeting, I would like to point out several facts. In the Republic of Macedonia, in the capital alone, there are two exclusively Roma TV stations, while the national television, within its channel dedicated to the minorities, continuously broadcasts programs in the Roma language. There are Roma magazines, schools, cultural associations, the largest Roma municipality in the Balkans, Shuto Orizari, is in Skopje, with its mayor and council, the majority of which is composed of Roma. Since the very beginning of the parliamentary democracy, Roma have been represented in the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia. We are one of the rare European countries in which a Romany dictionary has been published, in fact a Romany-Macedonian and Macedonian-Romany dictionary. With the assistance of the Open Society Institute a number of Roma programs were initiated; for instance, the activities involving pre-school age children were strengthened, and several tens of Roma during the last years received scholarships for higher education, with the objective of stronger integration into Macedonian society. The number of Roma who complete high school education is also increasing. The fact that there is no segregation in education in Macedonia, as there is in some other countries, where there are special schools for Roma children is also very important.

According to the last census, there are 43,000 Roma in Macedonia, or 2.2 percent of the total population. The problems of the Roma population are those shared by the broader population, however in a more strained form: the Roma are insufficiently included in education processes (one in every ten children enrolled, completes elementary education), they are insufficiently employed (officially, 4.4 percent of the total number of unemployed are Roma, but the number is much higher since the statistical data take into consideration only those who completed elementary education) and a significant part of them live in sub-standard conditions, on the outskirts of the cities.
However, there is a noticeable tendency of gradual emancipation of a significant part of the Roma population and there is improvement in social integration; the number of Roma families that earn their living from small businesses has increased. There is also a certain improvement in the local infrastructure and living standards. The nongovernmental (Roma) organizations play an ever greater role; they have influence on the improvement of education, health education, birth control education, etc.

Sharing this information on the status of the Roma in the Republic of Macedonia with you, I would like to take this opportunity to present my perspective about the problem which has been present for some time—the problem with the Roma refugees from Kosovo who are in Macedonia. With respect to the Kosovo refugee crisis in the Republic of Macedonia, it must be pointed out that there is disproportion between the declared commitments and practical actions of the international institutions. Despite the extremely limited possibilities of the country, the Republic of Macedonia hosted refugees from Kosovo. Unfortunately, even three years on the conditions in Kosovo do not allow for the Roma to return to their homes—the reasons are mainly due to security issues. In a situation when they cannot go back to their homes and at the same time, they find closed doors in front of their desired destinations, we, as a host country, faced the most absurd situation, to be asked to keep them by force and not to allow them to go to the countries, which in declarative terms, are presenting themselves as the main defenders of the human rights and freedoms. The Republic of Macedonia is ready to continue to be host country to these people and to provide them with all conditions for decent life, but Macedonia is not ready to be a prison guard for these people.

Finally, I would like to emphasize one more issue. Many people superficially informed about the circumstances in Macedonia think that there is only a Macedonian majority and Albanian minority in Macedonia. Thus, from this aspect as well, the Roma can play a significant role in our society to balance the increased tensions between the majority population and the largest ethnic minority.

Honorable friends, we have common paths in front of us. The Republic of Macedonia is proud of its multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-confessional configuration, and as such, it is strongly committed to move forward on its path towards European integration, the path of greater tolerance and freedom for all European citizens, regardless of ethnic, religious, racial differences.

I would like to commend once more the organizers of this initiative, that I consider only the beginning of the decade in which we will be focused much more on overcoming the serious obstacles we face as individual countries and as a potentially united continent.
Milo Đukanović, Prime Minister of FYR Montenegro

I would like to thank the President of the World Bank, Mr. James Wolfensohn, and also the Chairman of the Open Society Institute, Mr. George Soros, for organizing and sponsoring this significant Conference. Prime Minister Medgyessy and the Government of Hungary, as its hosts likewise. I find the partnership of the European Union in defining the policy and program for increased potential for Roma in an expanding Europe very important. It is my wish to express my appreciation for the possibility to take part in this Conference and contribute to defining the common policy and program, on behalf of the Government of Montenegro.

The Roma have always been part of Europe and accordingly of Montenegro. Our countries have not always devoted the necessary attention this nation deserves. The mere fact that we find ourselves here at this representative gathering, devoted to the status and economic development of the Roma, confirms that we have decided to terminate this kind of attitude towards one nation. Any discussion about the past would be outdated, we are here for the sake of a different and better future for the Roma.

The Roma live in Montenegro as well. My country is proud of its multiethnic harmony, which makes it stand out in the region as well as in a wider Europe. In the times of the disintegration of Yugoslavia, in the midst of war flames and ethnic conflicts, we in Montenegro managed to keep peace, fortified multinational harmony and elevated multinational tolerance. Montenegro devotes a maximum of its attention to reforms, adoption of democratic standards and Euro-Atlantic integration. We respect and foster national and religious differences, take care of and respect human rights of all citizens and avoid any forms of discrimination. I hope that you would agree that these are good conditions for the promotion of the Roma position.

In accordance with the mentioned tradition and practice, as well as the Millennium Development goals of the United Nations, Montenegro is going to pay due attention to the Roma. Even more so, since we speak of one of the most vulnerable sections of our society. We are especially going to keep this in mind while working out the details of the strategic development and fight against poverty in Montenegro, which is in process. It will fully correspond with the proposed initiative of the Decade of Roma Inclusion.

The Government of Montenegro has submitted special information about the Roma in Montenegro for this Conference. A significant percentage of the total number of the Roma population comprises refugees and displaced persons. Their status is defined by the difficult position of all these people. The majority of them come from Kosovo, which they fled after well-known conflicts in 1999. Most of them want to stay in Montenegro. This category of people has to be incorporated into the strategy for resolution of social and other problems of the Roma population. We greatly rely on financial and other forms of support from the international community regarding these issues.

The essence of the change of status for Roma in Montenegro will greatly depend on the success of the reforms, to which my government is dedicated. The fundamental aspect of this entire strategy of reforms is based on three basic documents referring to economy, legislation and education. The Government of Montenegro has initiated several projects dealing with the education of Roma children, based on the reduction of differences between Roma and non-Roma children and a compulsory higher level of involvement of Roma children in the entire education system. A Memorandum of Understanding on Roma education was signed recently. It signatories are: the government, UNICEF and nongovernmental organizations. The aim is to remove any kind of discrimination in the field of education. It will enable equal access to education for everyone without discrimination. This project includes cooperation of national institutions, support of international organizations as well as the nongovernmental sector. There are some smaller, but significant initiatives of nongovernmental organizations such as preparation of the first pupils’ spelling-book in the Roma language. These first steps also include registration of Roma house-
holds, educational work with entire families, aid with school necessities, transport and engagement of supplementary school personnel for after class work with Roma children. Projects dealing with the education of Roma children will involve a few phases—starting with preschool age up to the higher stages of education. These programs include the adult Roma population. Elevation of the educational level and inclusion in the education system should contribute to general emancipation and a better standard of living for the Roma and their integration into society whilst keeping the authenticity of the Roma language, culture and tradition. All the actions and projects will be in compliance with the goals of the suggested initiative of the Roma Education Fund.

At the same time, within its reform strategy, the Government of Montenegro gives priority to the promotion of entrepreneurship, the creation of a motivational atmosphere for the development of small and medium businesses. Within this project, the sectors of agriculture, services and craftsmanship will be of special importance for the Roma population. The creation of realistic projects which will expand possibilities for employment and the promotion of these branches of industry, will be supported.

These and other activities are in accordance with the Millennium Development Goals of the UN, as well as the EU Plan for Social Inclusion. Important points of these initiatives such as the reduction of poverty, especially from the perspective of better living conditions, healthcare and social inclusion, are the same as the starting-points for the promotion of Roma status.

The Government of Montenegro is taking other concrete steps towards full integration of the minorities into social life, protecting and developing their national and cultural particularities and promoting their legal rights and freedoms. The Ministry for Protection of Rights of National and Ethnic Groups takes special care of this. By the end of 2003 this Ministry will have proposed the passing of a new special law to the Parliament of Montenegro. This law will better define the status, rights and freedoms of national minorities and identify mechanisms for their protection. Drafting the law the Ministry will accept suggestions from all national groups, including Roma. This Ministry has close relations with Roma nongovernmental organizations and financially supports their activities. For example it has financed the first radio program in the Roma language this year. The government has recently taken the responsibility to pay 1 million Euros to the impaired Roma people for the damage they suffered, due to an unfortunate incident eight years ago. By doing so, the Government of Montenegro has confirmed that it obeys international obligations in respect of human rights.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this Conference represents a unique opportunity to reach common goals, to coordinate action and cooperation concerning the key issues of the Roma question in the region. I sincerely do believe that we have reached this and that the Conference fulfilled its objective. Two incentives suggested here—the Decade of Roma Inclusion and the Roma Education Fund—create the base for resolution of the problem, by putting our efforts together, through cooperation and exchange of experiences, always keeping in mind specific circumstances and problems of each particular county.
ADRIAN NASTASE, Prime Minister of Romania

First of all, I would like to extend my thanks to my friend Mr. Medgyessy, Prime Minister of Hungary and to congratulate him and his team for hosting such an important international event and to thank the organizers Mr. Wolfensohn and Mr. Soros for the invitation.

Improving the situation of the Roma population continues to be a major objective of the national policy of Romania, and it is clear that in our entire region, in the whole of Europe, we have to pay more attention to substantiate ideas and to coordinate our efforts. A special chapter in the government’s program is dedicated to improving the situation of Roma. In April 2001 the Government of Romania adopted the same guidelines shaped to the strategy for improving the situation of Roma.

This document is the result of a fruitful cooperation between the central authorities and the Roma nongovernmental organizations, as we firmly believe that a partnership between the executive and civil society is a prerequisite for successful implementation. We already have representation of the Roma population in our Parliament; it is an automatic representation, as is the case for 18 minorities which are represented in Parliament. It is important that they can discuss their own issues in Parliament and influence the decisions taken by the Parliament concerning the rights and interests of minorities.

Dear friends, the strategy covers a ten year period, 2001-2010, and has a four year action plan 2001-2004. Its scope is to prevent discrimination, stimulate the participation of persons belonging to the Roma minority in economic, social and cultural life with equal conditions as all Romanian citizens. It is designed and applied in the following fields: public administration, housing, social security, health care, economy, justice and public order, child welfare, education, culture and denominations, communication and civic involvement. Our core objectives are to institutionalize the political objectives assumed by the government in the field of Roma issues and to render the public, central and local authorities responsible for implementing concrete measures to improve the situation of Roma.

We discovered very soon that whatever rules and principles you have at the central level, if the administration at the local level is not interested in implementing them, they will not be successful. That is why we tried to decentralize the approach; we tried to move the decision towards local communities. To support and to promote an intellectual and economic Roma elite that functions as a facilitator of the policy of social integration and modernization. To eliminate stereotypes, prejudices and malpractice amongst public servants who discriminate against members of the Roma community. To produce a positive shift in public opinion about the Roma minority according to the principles of tolerance and social solidarity. To stimulate the participation of Roma in the economic, political, social, educational and cultural life through sector-based programs of assistance and community involvement. To prevent institutional and social discrimination of Romanian citizens of Roma origin during access to public services. And finally to ensure equal chances for Roma in order to attain a decent standard of life.

Many issues have been discussed in one way or another during this Conference and I do not want to repeat some of the common conclusions, because in fact, we have been confronted with the same issues and our solutions are not necessarily very far from each other. Let me say just a few words about what we have done lately and some of the more interesting ideas.

Our government is fully aware that the success of the strategy—and I am referring to our own strategy of improving the situation of Roma—depends not only on governmental and administrative policy, but also on the active participation of civil society and of the Roma community in particular. It is precisely for this reason that the strategy designs clear cut responsibilities for an institutional body that is able to ensure the implementation of the strategy’s objectives at central and local level.

One of the problems here is that when dealing with the representatives of the Roma population, we discovered that in some cases they are divid-
ed on the major targets, major objectives. This is absolutely natural but at the same time it is not always very easy for us to have a dialogue with the representatives of those NGOs. The institutional infrastructure created for the implementation of the strategy involves both central and local government. At the national level ministerial committees dealing with Roma issues were established in relevant ministries or national agencies each chaired by a Deputy Minister.

In addition to experts from the ministries, these committees include a member designated by Roma organizations. A joint committee chaired by the Deputy Minister for Minorities was also established. It brings together the heads of the ministerial committees and the representatives of Roma NGOs. Individual departments have set up their own structures to deal with Roma affairs.

An important innovation was the official establishment of school and health mediators in order to improve Roma access to education and health services in particular. Agreement was also reached with the Ministry of the Interior to employ policemen from Roma communities. We are proud of the achievements of representative nongovernmental organization of the Roma community such as Romany CRISS, Avenamentza and other Roma organizations.

Similarly Roma offices have become operational at county level in the structure of the offices of the Prefect—the highest central government representative in the county. An ethnic Roma chairs these offices. In addition, there are over 400 Roma experts at the municipal level who answer to both the mayor and the prefect.

All 42 local Roma offices have elaborated action plans for the 2001-2004 period. This is a major innovation in our system; we decided to have special Roma advisers to the mayors in major cities, but also in smaller areas where the Roma population is more significant, in order to act as an interface between the authorities and the Roma population. In some cases we faced a certain reserve. Generally, the reactions were negative at first, but then it was understood that this might be an excellent way to have a direct dialogue with the population concerned.

Romania was the first country in Central and Eastern Europe to establish an institution that deals specifically with combating discrimination. The National Council for Combating Discrimination began to function last year. Its aim is to implement the principle of equality among citizens and to prevent and fight discrimination. The president of the National Council for Combating Discrimination and the members of the Board had information and consultation meetings with representatives of governmental agencies, ministries, nongovernmental institutions and associations that deal with human rights protection in general, and with the protection of those categories covered by Law 48 from 2002 in particular.

A national plan for combating discrimination was set up. It is structured along ten directions of action in the fields protected by the law. It will be implemented in cooperation with the National Alliance against Discrimination, a coalition of NGOs and public institutions established in March 2003.

The issue of the Roma population is gaining more and more visibility within Europe and worldwide. Major European institutions responsible in this field and also international forums with a wider scope such as the World Bank and the Open Society Institute have become aware that joining efforts and designing a coherent, integrated and action-oriented policy towards Roma problems is a must. Other international organizations and groups elsewhere have a consistent contribution.

The Project on Ethnic Relations plays an excellent role in assessing the needs and projecting solutions. The Roma situation is beyond doubt a European problem that has to be solved at a national level. In order to be successful, national policies and actions need to be turned to a wider, integrated European vision and helped strategically and financially by international bodies. National institutions must stay informed about the latest evolutions and tendencies at European level and integrate those elements that can be useful into the national policies.

I would like to refer now to two initiatives regarding the Roma issue discussed within important European organizations at the
moment. During its chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 2001 Romania organized a Conference on improving the situation of Roma ethnicity, which enjoyed international participation.

Among its conclusions was the need to elaborate an action plan on Roma ethnicity for the OSCE. Earlier this year a working group chaired by Romania’s ambassador in Vienna was established with the aim to draft an action plan that will be adopted at the OSCE Ministerial Council at the end of this year. Designed for a ten-year period the action plan is meant to reinforce the efforts of the participating states and relevant OSCE institutions to ensure that Roma are able to play a full and equal part in our societies and to eradicate discrimination against them.

We strongly support that the OSCE initiatives be coordinated with the Open Society Institute and World Bank Roma Education Fund. To make it very clear, in fact, we are aware that there are many initiatives, but we have to understand that there are several levels of acting and of approaching this very important issue. At the national level we have our own responsibilities, but then we have to coordinate at the sub-regional level and to understand the concept and the problems as well as to share experiences.

The problem of the Roma population from another perspective is a regional issue, because we find Romanian Roma or Roma representatives, people from Romania, from Hungary or from Bulgaria, Serbia, France or Spain; it is clear that this problem has to be handled together with the European Union and with the Member States of this entity.

At the same time, the international organizations like the World Bank can contribute in a very responsible and substantial way to those projects, and I would like to encourage the initiatives, which brought us here by supporting first the idea of preparing the launch of the Decade of Roma Inclusion for dealing with the problems of Roma population.

I do not want to enter into details, we had an excellent discussion during the luncheon and I am sure that during the press conference Mr. Medgyessy will report to the press the conclusions of this meeting. But it is important at the same time to understand that we are coming with a background which is much more complex and with a lot of initiatives inside our own countries or at the regional level, and we have to put together all those efforts, all that experience in order to be successful in the next years.

For instance, excellent work is done by the contact point on Roma ethnicity issues within the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights by Mr. Nicolae Gheorghe, and his continuous involvement and dedication to raising awareness on the issue of Roma, setting our programs, designing strategies for improving the lives of Roma communities throughout the OSCE area are exceptional. He is a personal friend and that is why it is a great opportunity for me to salute his work done within the OSCE, which has had tremendous impact on Romanian realities.

The key to success is the involvement of Roma themselves in whatever project or initiative is designed at international or national level. From this perspective, constituting a European Roma Forum under the auspices of the Council of Europe could also offer the Roma population throughout the continent an instrument to making their voice heard.

We hope that this initiative will come into being and bring its contribution to raising awareness on this important and too long forgotten community. That is why let me conclude by saying that the Romanian Government will support the initiative launched here by the World Bank and Mr. Soros’s Foundation supported by the governments in this region in order to produce not only a good brainstorming, but also practical results in the near future. It is my belief that we can act together in order to understand the problem and to find the best solutions in order to integrate the Roma population into the process of change, which exists now in Europe.
MINISTER RASIM LJAJIĆ, Federal Minister of National and Ethnic Communities of Serbia and Montenegro

It is my wish to agree with all the people expressing their satisfaction with the success of this Conference and without doubt it has given its results even before its formal closing. Primarily because of the fact that this Conference confirmed that the problem of the Roma becomes a problem that the international community, more precisely the European Union, has to deal with. It has confirmed that this problem cannot be pushed aside or marginalized in any way.

Besides this, this Conference has reached full consensus about the key of this problem and its resolution through the process of integration. The Council of the Ministers of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro has accepted the plan of state integration for the process of resolution of Roma problems and I have no intention to give any kind of lectures, give instructions or recipes on how this problem should be solved, for the simple reason that there is no universal key to solve such grave problems as those which the most imperiled minority in Europe is facing nowadays. What I would like to do is to share our experiences with you, to share doubts we have and, of course, to mention some, I would say, humble results that our State Union, more specifically the Council of the Ministers of the State Union has achieved in the period behind us.

In order to give meaning to integration rather than using it as a mere declaration or archive phrase, it has to be based on two fundamental elements. The first element refers to the legal regulations and the second element refers to the democratic surroundings in which those laws are passed, to give them the full validity, to make them applicable in practice, those regulations have to reflect our social reality, a different social and political atmosphere has to be created, the state of mind of the majority has to be altered.

We are one of those countries that has achieved really significant results, not only due to the fact that the Roma have been recognized as a national minority which puts us in the group of eight countries in Europe to give this status to the Roma, but also because we have implemented results of positive discrimination, more precisely affirmative action for the members of the Roma ethnic i.e. national community.

By the end of this year we will have passed two important laws concerning all minorities, particularly the Roma. The first one refers to a so-called law of anti-discrimination and the second law is a law concerning elections, which enables easier access to the minorities, especially Roma, to participation in the political and social life of the country. This law will contain very distinctive elements of positive discrimination for the parties that assemble minority members and I expect that our subsequent Parliament assembly will include authentic representatives, who will articulate their interests. I have mentioned that those regulations would reflect reality. For two years now, a campaign promoting ideas of tolerance to differences has been going on. It promotes differences as a reason for communication rather then a reason for conflict. This campaign has given excellent results so far and 63 percent of our population stated that it has influenced the reduction of ethnic prejudices and, as we regularly follow the evaluation of the campaign, it proved that 37 percent of the population has a certain level of antagonism towards the Roma, which is much lower rate than the prejudices towards some other national and ethnic groups, but it is not the topic of this Conference. I do not claim that this rate is low but I expect that a meaningful and diligent campaign, including more target groups can influence and contribute to the treatment of the Roma as an equal social factor in Serbia and Montenegro.

I have mentioned that of course it is not enough to improve legal, social, economic and political conditions of Roma community and our strategy developed also, as we heard before, by prescribed experts, but experts whose good services we accepted and who applied good and positive experiences of the countries from this region. This strategy includes 14 different domains, four of which we have separated as priorities: employment, housing, education and what is specific for
Serbia and Montenegro is a problem of displaced people from the Kosovo region and a problem of the Roma who, according to the treaty of readmission, return from the countries of the European Union. I would like to mention that in accordance with this treaty over 50,000 Roma are supposed to return to Serbia and Montenegro, which represents a grave political and social problem for a country which finds itself in transition and faces all the familiar difficulties, economic, social, and other problems typical of a transitional period. Apart from those already mentioned we already have 46,000 Roma internally displaced from Kosovo and are putting much effort, at the level of the State Union and also at the level of the Council of the Ministers, to help with problems these people are facing, from basic problems concerning necessary documentation, personal documents, to problems of housing and employment.

Briefly, I would like to underline some of the steps we have taken in the implementation of this strategy. As far as housing is concerned, we have drafted a comprehensive plan dealing with the problem of 593 illegal Roma settlements that exist in Serbia, 102 of which are situated on the territory of the city of Belgrade. The city council has made a project for the construction of 58 settlements within a period of three years, these of course are not going to be settlements of a ghetto type, and they will be settlements for socially imperiled categories of population such as refugees with the Roma naturally included. We expect that by the year 2006 this project will have been realized. The total value of the project is 12.5 million Euros and it will be mainly financed from the funds of the Republic of Serbia and the city of Belgrade. In the year 2005, in cooperation with the Ministry of Minority and Human Rights and local communities, construction of similar settlements in 5 more cities in Serbia will start, and we expect that from the year 2007 in 70 other towns in Serbia construction of one Roma settlement will start.

Speaking of education, it is my opinion that thanks to the Ministry of the Republic of Serbia, the greatest progress has been made, primarily due to the fact that for the first time representa-

tives of minority communities actively take part in the reforms of education and that naturally includes the Roma. By actively participating, they will have the opportunity to suggest content to be included into the curriculum. For the first time, the members of the Roma community will study their traditions, culture, history of their ethnic group, as is the case with all other minorities.

Last year we provided textbooks for all Roma children in primary schools. From September this year we are going to undertake the same action. Ten scholarships will be given to the best Roma secondary school students as well as university students from the beginning of the following school year.

In the domain of employment, a movement, which we are going to accomplish together with a few international organizations has been taking place and implies the employment of 120 Roma in 120 towns of Serbia. It is about the Roma taking active part in affairs of local administration, by which, the somewhat different, very difficult, and I would say painful process of their integration in this segment will be started.

I am not going to elaborate here other fields, such as information. We are one of the rare countries which has a daily informative program broadcast on the state radio, there is practically no big regional center without TV program in the Roma language, with the active role of local communities, we have provided the process of informing in Roma mother tongue.

The way I see it, this strategy does not express our wishes, it represents a painful compromise between the real needs of the Roma community and the realistic possibilities of the state. I do not wish to create unrealistic expectations, or false illusions, especially not to our citizens living with us in Serbia and Montenegro, this is going to be a part of a very lengthy process.

The essential thing is that in this moment there is an absolute political willingness and I assure you, also readiness of the government, to work on the integration of Roma, which fully assumes their inclusion into public, social life and the full right for Roma citizens to keep their national, cultural and linguistic identity.
As I have mentioned before, this strategy would actually reflect reality and in order to make it work in practice, a partnership which would include the international community, the government, Roma organizations and non-governmental organizations should be created.

Last month we had a very successful conference, during which the National Council of Roma Community was formed, representing a kind of umbrella institution under which issues such as culture, information, education and official use of the language will be dealt with and which will represent a real partner of the government in tackling these matters.

Finally, I wish to emphasize the feeling of satisfaction for having such a successful Conference. I would not like this Conference to create too high expectations. The process of resolution of the Roma problem is very long and without an attitude of partnership, which I mentioned before, it is hard to imagine any headway from a standstill position. My hopes are that this is a good starting point on that long and difficult journey. Thank you.
RUDOLF CHMEL, Minister of Culture of the Slovak Republic

Allow me to begin with the words of a 15-year-old boy from Jarovnice, a small but unfortunately well-known village in eastern Slovakia, where the majority of the population is Roma. In response to the question of what children would want to change in the next millennium, Martin answered:

“First, I would like people to be changed. After finishing elementary school, I would continue my studies in a high school. In the settlement, I would like people to stop glue-sniffing and drinking. After finishing school in Sabinov, I would like to get a job. I don’t want to sit at home, watching television and waiting for the social assistance to come. I would like to be an educated person.”

Is this a dream? Is he reaching for the stars? This is the wish of a boy to be able to go to school and then go to work. It is, above all, a challenge, a call for help.

In the area of support for Roma issues, Slovakia strives to achieve a lot. In April of this year, the Slovak Government evaluated the results of work on Roma issues in 2001 and 2002 and approved basic policy concepts for the integration of Roma communities based on the principles of social inclusion and positive discrimination in the areas of healthcare, housing, education and employment.

In education, the medium-term and long-term intentions of the government are geared toward integrated education for Roma children, the development of secondary and university education, and the creation of a scholarship fund. In health, the priorities are improved access to healthcare and safe drinking water for Roma settlements. The government’s strategy includes many other complex development programs including projects to prevent discrimination and the adoption of anti-discrimination legislation.

The government’s strategy can only be implemented with the active participation of nonprofit organizations that carry out plenty of small and very important activities.

The Soros Foundation has a key role in addressing the Roma issue, helping and strengthening the cooperation between Roma and non-Roma citizens. Having had the personal honor of working together with the Open Society Fund in Slovakia, I can confirm that their programs have genuinely helped the Roma in their every day life. I would also like to mention the Milan Šimecká Foundation, which has published a slender volume of Roma children’s stories from which I cited a passage to you at the beginning of this presentation. The Simecka Foundation has been working intensively for several years with children from Roma settlements. There are many other foundations and civic activities in Slovakia that are focused on Roma issues but that are too numerous to name here. This, however, does not at all detract from their irreplaceable role in this fight. Without them, the realization of the government’s strategy would be extremely difficult.

But all this is not enough. Slovakia has several hundreds of thousands of Roma and, in proportion to its population, one of the largest Roma minority in the region. Resolving Roma issues (not only) in Slovakia is not a quick walk in the park. Despite all of our efforts, we are still only at the beginning of the process. We will have to work more in this area, work harder and in a more focused way.

For these reasons, I welcome wholeheartedly the initiative of the World Bank and Open Society Institute to declare the Decade of Roma Inclusion and set up the Roma Education Fund. I would also like to take this opportunity to declare strong support for these activities in the name of the entire Slovak Government. The Slovak Republic understands that these initiatives can be a strong moment of stimulus for further discussions between countries of the new Europe. I firmly believe that within this framework, we will succeed in finding solutions and answers to many unresolved questions. And, we will be capable of finding these solutions together with the Roma community itself because it must be a part of the process.

I would like to close with the words of a well-known Roma writer, Aurel Stoica:
“Non-Roma (Gadjos) are unusual people. When they want to know something about Roma, they go to one of their ‘experts on the Roma question’ so that he can give them knowledge. Whatever the expert says is sacred, except that 99 percent of these experts have read what they know in a book written by other ‘experts on the Roma question’ and have never met an actual Roma person. Or, they have visited a ‘Roma school’, applauded the ‘beautiful dark-eyed children’ for their songs, chatted with the director and started to consider themselves ‘experts’. They operate on percentages—numbers always lend authenticity: this weighs so much, it’s so long or so wide, and everyone is convinced that they know everything if they can weigh it or measure it and come up with a percentage. But, it’s hard to say whether the human spirit weighs 300 grams or three kilos. No expert can weigh it or measure it. If someone wants to understand who the Roma are, they shouldn’t be so interested in percentages, but in the immeasurable human spirit. Let them spend some time among us. If they come ‘lase jilesa’, as we say, ‘with an open heart,’ with good intentions, everyone will gladly welcome them. After all, people get to know each other best when they talk with each other, when they share a meal, when one tells the other about their family, their pleasures and problems, when they dance and sing together. Or, when they sit quietly and look at the stars...”
MARK MALLOCH BROWN,
Administrator, UNDP

What a remarkable event! If this old chamber has a memory and a heart, both must be stirring today.

A king who sits as a Prime Minister, and a commoner so modestly in the pit of this chamber today, a refugee who left Hungary in its dark years and who returns now to preside over this session today.

But if those were just warm-up acts, I think, what this chamber would be thinking to itself, is that as the wind of democracy has blown the dust out of this building since 1989, that wind has found new corners by the inclusion here today of so many representatives of the Roma. It is a measure of the political wills of the new democracies of this region, that today we sit together and government leader after government leader has stood before you to commit his country to a program of inclusion.

And I must say for myself leading an international organization, this is one of those moments that make it worth it. The sense, that we are witnesses to real change. I often think we are not much more than witnesses, because real change is when people and their leaders commit to it. We can help, we can observe, we can sometimes catalyze. But it is you all in this room, leaders and represented, who make the difference in something like this.

Thus, we grab people to bring you together, and so to Jim (James Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank) and to George (George Soros, Chairman of the Open Society Institute) a big thank you, and to Mr. Medgyessy, the Prime Minister of Hungary also, thank you not just for bringing us together, but for those extraordinary words you uttered today, which I think were a part of the magic for many of us.

Now very quickly, because magic it may be, but hot it certainly is, and maybe this is, if one is allowed one remark about old chambers: the great advantage of those new buildings of Jim’s in Washington is that the air conditioning is better.

But let me just very quickly say that if this is a moment of history, if this is an expression of political will behind a whole Decade of Inclusion, a Decade I am sure it will take, because of the many socio-economic causes that must be tackled.

Because I think, you know what has been so clear in identifying the challenges that the Roma face, has been the whole issue of identifying through socio-economic data just how difficult the condition of many Roma communities remain. In a report, that I think many of you have seen, “Avoiding the Dependency Trap,” that UNDP published as a regional human development report last year. We were all struck that when we applied a human development index data run to the Roma.

We found that a considerable number of Roma communities enjoy an HDI index similar to countries of sub-Saharan Africa. In other words, real deprivations in terms of health care, access to education, and quality of life generally. And when we take the framework of the Millennium Development Goals, which happily coincide with 2015, the date that the Decade would end, we see that at the heart of the problem of this region of attacking poverty, getting every boy and girl into school, of making sure there is access to health care for all, at the heart of that problem lie the Roma communities.

But I think equally what we see in development everywhere is that when the political will is there, when countries which are already much richer than they were, and which are going through an exciting new and second transition into the European Union in many cases; the opportunity through attentive public policy targeted at creating socio-economic opportunity, targeted at policies of inclusion; when those are in place, there is absolutely no reason why the issues that have afflicted the Roma cannot be resolved within this decade. And I think the best reason for believing that is the fact that you are all here today and there is such a clear expression of determination to get the job done from all sides. Thank you very much.
JAMES WOLFENSOHN, President of the World Bank

Let me first thank our hosts from Hungary and you Prime Minister Medgyessy for all that you have done to make this meeting so successful. Let me thank also our colleagues in the European Union for their joint sponsorship of this meeting with the Soros Foundation and the World Bank.

I have been sitting quietly, wondering what one could add after the remarkable sequence of speeches made by those who attended the Conference and by the political leadership of the region. I suppose the first thing that one should observe is that this is truly a unique occasion—to have nine government leaders, one after the other indicating their commitment to our joint programs, to have nine government leaders recognize publicly and in the presence of Roma leadership the need to resolve an issue, which has been with us for centuries, and to establish the sense of urgency that has been attested to by all, is something that is clearly remarkable.

Also remarkable were the opening statements—the statements by Roma youth and Roma women—put in such an articulate and eloquent way and a summary of the proceedings by Dena Ringold from our World Bank team, to whom I owe enormous debt for the work that she has done in preparing this Conference. It was truly a start that certainly moved my heart.

As was mentioned by Mr. Rudolf Chmel, Slovakia’s Minister of Culture, the substance of the Conference made me feel that statistics on the Roma condition are important, but that people are more important, that the heart and soul and the humanity conveyed today is what matters. I was touched by Mark Malloch Brown’s (UNDP Administrator) comments when he mentioned how in our crazy world we globalize and people turn up in the strangest of places.

I suppose the first globalized citizens are in fact the Roma, because they have been spread across several regions perhaps longer than anybody else. In the context of today’s unpredictable world, I was struck by Mark’s (Mark Malloch Brown, UNDP Administrator) reference to Mr. Saxe-Coburg Gotha of Bulgaria, a Prime Minister who was a king, to George Soros, an immigrant Hungarian and now a tycoon, and myself a poor Australian Jewish boy now running the World Bank.

We are all here to deal with the question of the Roma. We are united not because of our backgrounds, but because this is an issue which speaks to us all at a human level. And it is at the level of humanity that we come together, not a level that we are forced to, or a level of conscience, or a level of moral persuasion. Finally, we united because we have come to recognize, as we look around the world, that it is just impossible to let this issue persist in the way that it has.

We in our institution (The World Bank Group) deal with poverty around the world in developed and developing countries. Today 5 billion people out of the total world population of 6 billion live in developing countries. An estimated 3 billion are living on under 2 dollars a day. These 3 billion people account for half of humanity. And, in grappling with persistent poverty, we talk of sub-Saharan Africa as Mark (Mark Malloch Brown, UNDP Administrator) said, we talk of the issues in South Asia, and we talk in very similar terms about the problems of indigenous people, about the problems of gender rights, about the prob-
lems of education, of opportunity, of prejudice and the frustrations that flow from it, and of the terror and of the wars that come when poverty is allowed to exist and when people have no hope.

We describe the world of the Middle East, and describe the world of Africa, of Kashmir and other places in these terms. And then we come to Europe, rich Europe—with an economy of about $9 trillion—and then in the midst of Europe we have the same problem, described in the same terms. Problems of inequity, problems of social injustice, problems of prejudice, problems of ignorance, problems of not caring.

In this context, it simply is not right that the Roma issue should not be dealt with in Europe. Fortunately, as we deal with the question of accession to the European Union and as citizenship is offered to all, and will be offered to 5 million more people of Roma origin within the framework of the European Union, we are here to confront this issue head on. Of course, in the face of economic challenges, it is difficult to bring about change when there is limited growth, and we all share that conundrum. But what is clear is that much can be done, and much will be done in relation to the injustices facing our Roma colleagues, which all of us are determined to confront.

What I found deeply moving in Prime Minister Medgyessy’s introduction, as well as in the speeches of the other leaders, was that they all went beyond national work and national initiatives and also spoke to the need for regional attention. Everyone spoke in terms of humanity. This Conference was not a political gathering. This was a gathering that reflects a very real change, a very real recognition.

If we can carry from this chamber—with pride and with the sense of commitment—out into the world that sometimes buffets us and makes us forget these things; if we can carry that out, then this Budapest meeting will surely be one of historic proportions. This is an event in which under the leadership of the Hungarian Prime Minister, we have agreed on a course of action. A course of action that is visible, a course of action that can be measured, a course of action for which we all will be judged accountable.

Today we agreed to pursue the following two initiatives.

One is to pursue a Decade of Roma Inclusion to run from 2005 to 2015. This will in no way reinvent initiatives already taken, nor will it replace successful efforts already under way. This initiative will help us understand those ongoing efforts, learn from them and build on them so that we can bring to the attention of the European and global public this decade of progress that we will all plan for.

And why will it take a year for us to define and outline this? Because we do not want to present today an empty program. We want to come back to you in a year with a program that has been analyzed, negotiated, enriched and is practical, and pragmatic, and around which we can be held accountable. This is not a year’s pause, this is a year’s work.

This will be done under the leadership of Prime Minister Medgyessy together with his colleagues from the other countries, all of whom agree that this is a useful initiative. Each leader will appoint representatives to work on this, but they will remain personally involved and committed. Also, the initiative will engage the full cooperation of the European Union, the Soros Foundation, the World Bank and other interested groups that wish to join us.

But most importantly, this initiative will constitute a true partnership with the Roma people. Roma leaders and representatives will shape, contribute to and guide our decisions. I think today we saw evidence of the intellect and the passion of these leaders. I am well aware that some who have not spoken today, but to whom references have been made, such as Nicolae Gheorghe who has made his own huge contribution, should be recognized and included in what will be an inherently open process. And we will be back with that plan in 12 months or so.

The second initiative will be an Education Fund, which we will design in consultation with the same group. I think we agree with what has been said—that housing and unemployment are equally important, as is health, as is gender, as are so many of the issues that arouse advocates for social justice. But, as a particular and singular initiative, we are committed to this Education Fund.
So as we launch these initiatives and get the organizing group started, I think it is fair to say that all of us, including Roma leaders whom I have spoken to, believe that this has not just been another meeting. This is an epochal event that will make a lasting difference in the lives of Roma people. And of course it is easy to be cynical, it is easy to say, well, what is different. What is different is all of you in this audience.

The future of this depends on each of your contributions. The future of this depends on us going out of here changed, and optimistic, and prepared to work. Certainly, I can speak with conviction for my own organization (The World Bank Group), where our mission is to fight poverty with passion and we measure our success in terms of human results. For us this is a cause that we embrace warmly, a cause that is central to the human spirit, and a cause that we will succeed in addressing in this coming year and in the years ahead.

Again thank you Prime Minister for your leadership.
ROMA EDUCATION FUND:
Concept Note Endorsed at the Conference

RATIONALE

Roma, or Gypsies, are a unique minority in Europe. Unlike other ethnic groups, Roma have not settled in a single land and are found in nearly all countries in Europe and Central Asia (ECA). Current estimates suggest that between 7 and 9 million Roma live throughout Europe, making them the largest minority in Europe. The collapse of the socialist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) created new opportunities for all citizens, including Roma. For the first time in decades, minorities were able to express their ethnic identity, participate in civil society, and engage in previously forbidden economic activities. However, these gains have been offset by a dramatic reduction in opportunities in many respects. For many Roma, the collapse of the socialist state has led to an erosion of security in jobs, housing and other services, and in the absence of viable economic opportunities. A consequence for many Roma families is severe poverty.

A new World Bank report on Roma in Central and Eastern Europe identified Roma as one of the main poverty risk groups in the region. Roma are both poorer than other population groups, and more likely to fall into poverty and to remain poor. The roots of Roma poverty are intertwined with many of the factors which are correlated with poverty throughout the region— including low education levels, unemployment, and large family sizes. Roma children are far less likely than non-Roma children to complete the compulsory cycle, to progress to secondary and higher education, and to perform at satisfactory levels. In Serbia, for example, only one third of Roma children complete primary school. Most do not start school at all, or drop out in the initial two or three years. Surveys from Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania show a roughly similar pattern: Enrollment rates among primary-school aged Roma children are 20 percent to 33 percent lower than among non-Roma children, and dropout rates at the end of the primary cycle are more than twice as high for Roma children than for non-Roma children. High drop-out rates become especially critical at key “breaking points” within the school cycle, such as moving from primary to middle school and on to secondary school. Inadequate school participation, combined with the fact that a relatively high proportion of the population is in the primary-school age group, suggests that there are between 500,000 and 750,000 Roma children of primary-school age in the accession countries who are not attending school.

There are many reasons for this dismal performance. Many Roma families lack legal status and are therefore denied access to schools, health care, and other services. Many Roma parents are illiterate and often do not appreciate the importance of education as a means for improving their situation. Low income makes it difficult for most Roma households to purchase the textbooks and other school supplies that parents are expected to provide. Roma children often work in the informal sector to supplement meager family income. Many Roma children do not have a reasonable command of any of the languages of instruction in schools. (Although minority-language programs are available for other ethnic minorities in the accession countries, no such programs exist for Roma children.) Roma often marry and start childbearing at a very early age—as early as age 12. Of those Roma children who do complete pri-
mary school, few attend secondary school or go on to university education.

Moreover, Roma education is usually separate and unequal education. Roma children are often taught in schools or classrooms that are effectively segregated, and where instruction is substandard because facilities and teaching materials are substandard, teachers are less well trained, and teachers and principals have lower performance expectations than for other students. Roma children who do attend primary school are often stigmatized by being assigned to schools for the mentally or physically disabled, because of their lack of command of the majority language and other educational handicaps resulting from their environment rather than from innate limitations.

There are a number of targeted programs under implementation in the CEE countries—most of them NGO supported—which aim to prepare Roma children for successful school participation. These efforts involve a range of interventions to help overcome the educational and economic handicaps of Roma households. They include preschool education (such as OSI’s child-centered Step-by-Step program), programs to involve parents in the work of schools, legal registration for Roma households, school lunches, provision of school clothing and educational materials, support for financial incentives to schools which attract and retain Roma students, catch-up classes and tutoring for Roma students, special training for teachers of Roma children, provision of language and culture mediators in schools with Roma students, and offering of optional Romany language and culture classes. Some of these initiatives have been remarkably successful in raising Roma enrollments and school performance. For example, the following results are cited for a preschool program for Roma children in Serbia:

“When programs are highly structured and involve the commitment of the Roma community using child-centered learning methodologies, the results are impressive. For example, evaluations from the work carried out with technical support from the Center for Interactive Pedagogy (CIP) show impressive results.

The program implemented in collaboration with Roma Associations provides a comprehensive preschool experience for children between three and seven years and includes educational learning activities, attention to health and hygiene, family partition and local community involvement. Follow-up school achievement data indicated that 100 percent of children who had attended the kindergarten completed the school entry exam. 97.3 percent of children participating in the program as compared to 33.3 percent who did not, were competent in the Serbian language, and 99 percent had regular school attendance as compared to 44.6 percent of children who did not attend. Moreover, of those children who attended, 99.8 percent completed first grade compared to 40 percent of the children who did not have previous kindergarten experiences.”

A generic problem with existing programs which aim to improve Roma educational performance is the lack of a mechanism for scaling up and influencing policy. Most of these initiatives are isolated, small programs, initiated by NGOs with very modest resources. They are, in effect, pilot projects. The collective experience of these pilot projects could make a valuable contribution by informing education policy development and by influencing systemic changes in education programs to provide sustainable benefits to the Roma population. But the potential payoff of these experiments has not been exploited because there is no systematic mechanism to evaluate the lessons of these small-scale initiatives and, where appropriate, to implement them on a larger scale. Instead, they tend to remain isolated initiatives in which the whole—in terms of educational benefits for the Roma community—amount to less than the sum of the parts. Moreover, the benefits of these initiatives are fragile; implementation often ends when external funding runs out, however successful they have been in meeting their objectives.

Larger-scale implementation is also hampered by the fact that some educational pilot projects for the Roma population may not be fully compatible with prevailing policies and con-
straints, and do not include features that would make them compatible with prevailing policies and constraints. An example is that some of the approaches to successful integration of Roma students involve additional school staff (such as tutors or mediators), yet many of the education systems in the region are under growing pressure to reduce school staffing. Rarely are pilot projects subjected to cost-effectiveness analysis to establish whether the costs of larger scale implementation would be sustainable under prevailing national and local constraints. Another problem is that educational initiatives designed to benefit the Roma population often do not affect education policy because they are conceived and implemented outside the framework for national policy development, and often aim to achieve objectives which differ from the objectives of the national education program. A disconnect between expectations at the local and national levels often weakens national policy development and/or isolates worthwhile initiatives at the local, community or school level. In such an environment, the probability that pilot education initiatives designed for the Roma population would be scaled up to the regional or national levels will depend on the extent to which the national strategy (i) is built on the lessons of experience at the local level and (ii) includes explicit targets for educational achievement by Roma and other minorities.

OBJECTIVES

To address these problems in scaling up successful pilot projects to improve the educational performance of the Roma population, two activities are proposed: the Roma Education Fund (described in this concept note), and the Decade of Roma Inclusion (described in a separate concept note). The objective of the proposed Roma Education Fund is to improve the sustainability of initiatives to improve the educational status and performance of the Roma population in Central and Eastern Europe by providing additional finance for programs that will help reduce the gap in access to quality education between Roma and non-Roma and for which effective demand has been demonstrated to exist. The objective of the proposed Decade of Roma Inclusion is to accelerate and raise the profile of actions to improve the economic status and social integration of the Roma population in the CEE countries by developing appropriate performance targets and policies to achieve those objectives, and by monitoring performance in meeting them.

ACTIVITIES TO BE SUPPORTED BY THE ROMA EDUCATION FUND

The Fund would promote this objective by supporting activities that embrace the whole lifecycle of education, ranging from interventions at the pre-school level through primary, secondary and higher education, including adult education. Three kinds of activities would be supported by the Fund:

- Implementation of pilot projects designed to improve educational performance and inclusion of the Roma population in the CEE countries, with special attention to measures to help ensure sustainability, and support for scaling up worthwhile pilot projects;
- Independent evaluation of the educational outcomes of these and other initiatives designed to improve educational performance and inclusion of the Roma population;
- Dissemination, consensus-building, and policy development activities aimed at reflecting the lessons of this experience in the design of national education policies. This could include, for example, feasibility studies and other analyses of evaluation findings to examine their broader applicability for education policy, seminars for policymakers and stakeholders on which approaches for improving Roma inclusion and educational performance work best and are most appropriate in particular settings, and technical assistance to support policy development actions such as drafting legislation.

HOW THE FUND WOULD OPERATE

The Roma Education Fund would make competitive grants for activities in each of the three
areas described above. Individual grants would be limited in amount, and criteria would be established for evaluating grant proposals. These criteria would help ensure that the proposed activities promote the sustainability objective of the Fund. These criteria might include, for example, giving priority to pilot projects which demonstrate cost-sharing, which are supported by cost-effectiveness analysis, which are aligned with specific objectives of national education policy, and which demonstrate agreed cooperation arrangements between national government, local government, and NGOs. Further work would be carried out in the course of preparing the Fund’s more detailed technical blueprint, in order to determine the full set of activities that the Fund would support, not only at the school and community level, but also at the level of national and local government.

In order to encourage creativity in the design of educational initiatives, and to ensure that interventions can effectively address both demand and supply side issues, the range of eligible expenditures would be broad enough to include not only technical assistance, goods, and services of agreed programs, but also discrete expenditure programs at local government, community and school level. Such programs would include a) initiatives to eliminate poverty constraints for improved school attendance and performance by providing support for transportation, clothing and school meals; b) outreach programs that support liaisons/assistant teachers between school staff and parents, in order to secure family support for the children’s education; and c) efforts to improve the conditions for effective teaching and learning through activities such as teacher training, provision of educational inputs such as textbooks, supplementary learning materials, and tutoring. Supply side measures would include improving quality of education through up-graded inputs (teachers; school administrators; learning materials and a discrimination-free environment and school desegregation) and promoting model schools.

To ensure flexibility in the application of resources managed by the Fund, entities of both the national and local governments, as well as NGOs and community schools would be eligible for grants.

**INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK**

It is proposed that the *Roma Education Fund* be managed by a Secretariat established in the CEE region and financed by contributions from participating multilateral and bilateral agencies, and well private foundations. But, as already stated, care will be taken that programs financed by the Fund would not displace the extensive and innovative work underway in the NGO sector and that the funding provided represents additionality. The Fund Secretariat would award grants and monitor their implementation. It would also organize regional dissemination and consensus-building activities to promote Roma education objectives and policy reform.

The ultimate institutional structure of the Fund would have to be determined in the course of further technical preparatory work. It would have to be based on the following principles: (a) a multi-donor fund allowing a number of interested bilateral and international institutions to contribute funds; (b) World Bank contributions to the establishment and operation of the Fund would have to be of a form that satisfies requirements of partnership agreements and adequately mitigates risks; (c) Fund governance would be independent under the purview of a body representing the shareholders; (d) the Fund would not be authorized to raise funds through borrowing or other issue obligations—which is fully consistent with the operation of grants; and (e) the Fund would, at least initially, serve CEE countries that are involved in education reforms in support of integrated and wider Roma education.

The Budapest Conference, *Roma in an Expanding Europe*, to be held on June 30-July 1, 2003, affords a unique opportunity to (a) bring before representatives of the Roma communities, regional governments and international organizations the concept and potential benefits of the Fund, and (b) obtain a broad mandate from participants for undertaking any additional work required before such a Fund could be launched.

A blueprint for the design and operation of the Fund would have to be prepared by a consultant...
to be financed from Trust Funds or other bilateral sources. The technical work would elaborate on all essential features of the Fund, its organization, financial structure, operation and oversight by the share holders. Recommendations would be developed for a business plan based on consultations with potential beneficiaries both at the central and local government levels.

**POTENTIAL PARTNERS IN THE ROMA EDUCATION FUND**

To secure adequate funding levels and to strengthen the case for favorable consideration by the World Bank, a critical mass of potential donors will need to be identified, showing sufficient interest in supporting establishment of such a Fund. Donors to be canvassed should include bilateral development agencies, international financial institutions, multi-lateral organizations, and private foundations. The necessary consultations would take place in the course of additional technical work that is expected to be carried out after the Budapest Roma Conference.

**NEXT STEPS**

The following actions are proposed for seeking an endorsement of the Fund’s concept and a mandate for undertaking the required technical work at the Conference, and for subsequent establishment of the Fund:

- Build a consensus in support of the participants in the Budapest Conference—use one-on-one meetings as well as other gatherings during the Conference to achieve this;
- Communicate the commitment of the main participants of the Conference for establishing the Roma Education Fund and their willingness to authorize the use of funds additional technical work outlined in the Concept Note—such communication to take place in the closing session of the Conference, at the press conference and in written communiqués and papers following the Conference;
- Identify donor funding for employment of a suitably qualified specialist who can prepare the Fund’s blueprint and coordinate with representatives of beneficiary groups as well as donors;
- Organize a pledging event to secure adequate funding of the Roma Education Fund and agree on the location and administration of the Fund; and
- Establish the Roma Education Fund and start up its operation.

**NOTES**

4. In Serbia, for example, a total of 41 percent of the Roma population is 14 years old or less (Mitrović and Zajić).
6. Where educational performance is broadly defined to include higher enrollment rates, improved school attendance, higher student achievement, higher levels of self-esteem, and better integration with non-Roma students.
DECADE OF ROMA INCLUSION 2005–2015: Concept Note Endorsed at the Conference

RATIONALE

The EU and the countries which are joining the EU have declared their intention to eradicate poverty, eliminate discrimination, and reduce social exclusion of minorities, including the Roma. Most of Europe’s 7 to 9 million Roma live in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including the countries which are scheduled for EU accession. There exists in the region a wealth of documentation about Roma issues, including those on Roma rights and inclusion, and numerous small-scale initiatives designed to improve the economic status and social inclusion of the Roma population. But there is little systematic sharing of information about the effectiveness and replicability of individual initiatives. There are also no clear targets for the improvements which are expected at the national level, and frustratingly little documented progress to show for the efforts to date.

In order to accelerate and frame progress in improving the situation of Europe’s Roma populations, there is a need to move beyond declarations and to create a coordinated framework for actions to improve the economic status and social inclusion of the Roma population. This should include setting of clear national targets for progress, regular monitoring of achievements in relation to those targets, and sharing of information about which approaches for improving the economic status and social inclusion of the Roma population work best in particular settings. In order to be effective, the process for setting national targets will itself need to be inclusive. It cannot be imposed, but must be participatory and emerge from the needs, capacity, and constraints of individual countries.

OBJECTIVES

To address these needs, an international initiative called The Decade of Roma Inclusion (described in this concept note) is proposed. A complementary Roma Education Fund is described in a separate concept note. The objective of the proposed Decade of Roma Inclusion is to accelerate progress in improving the economic status and social inclusion of the Roma population by creating an action framework comprising three activities:

• The setting of clear, quantitative national targets for improvements in economic status and social inclusion of the Roma population, and the establishment of the necessary information base to measure progress toward these targets;

• The development and implementation of national action plans to achieve those targets; and

• Regular monitoring of progress against agreed targets, and adjusting action plans as necessary over the Decade.

OVERALL FRAMEWORK

The Decade would be closely linked to two ongoing initiatives in which all accession countries are (or will soon be) participating: (a) the Millennium Development Goals and (b) the EU’s Social Inclusion Policy. To make the Decade a success, the governments of participating countries will need to have ownership of the goals, and participate in monitoring and achieving them; they will also need to contribute to financing the required effort.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are a set of quantifiable targets which all UN
member countries committed themselves to at the UN Summit in New York in 2000. These include monitoring of key indicators between 2000-2015, including reducing poverty, child and maternal mortality and expanding education enrollments. Following the Summit, many countries have been working—together with international organizations including the World Bank and UNDP—to improve monitoring of MDG indicators and to develop policy strategies for meeting MDG goals. For the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, national level indicators (such as primary enrollment rates) look quite good on the surface—reaching nearly 100 percent in many countries. However, disaggregated enrollment rates for Roma look quite different and reveal significant room for improvement. The Roma Decade of Inclusion goals will need to be set in the overall framework of MDGs, so as to lend maximum political support in participating countries for the actions required to achieve them.

Similarly, the Decade goals should fit objectives and indicators identified as part of the EU’s Social Inclusion Policy. In 1997, the EU inserted a new article into its founding treaties, committing itself to fighting poverty and social exclusion. Each member state must submit a National Action Plan (NAP) to the EU every two years, laying out how it intends to fulfill social inclusion objectives. The NAPs lay out the major challenges, strategic approach and main objectives, policy measures, indicators, and good practice. They are developed on the basis of consultation with several actors, including NGOs, in each member state. The European Commission reviews the NAPs. On the basis of its review, and consultations with all the member states, it drafts a Joint Inclusion Report on poverty and social exclusion, which is adopted by the EU Council. An EU Conference in Antwerp in September, 2001 made an important contribution to developing a common set of indicators for measuring progress in reducing social exclusion.\(^1\) The enlargement of the EU will extend the scope of the EU social inclusion policy to the future member states. This will include the preparation of bilateral agreements, called Joint Inclusion Memorandum (JIM), between the Commission and each of the countries that are scheduled to join the EU in 2004. These Joint Inclusion Memoranda set out the measures the country will take in order to move towards greater social inclusion, and follow the same structure as the National Action Programs. Their preparation is considered to be a learning process for preparing NAPs, which will have to be developed once the candidate countries join the EU. The JIMs should be finalized by October, 2003 and signed in early 2004, prior to actual EU accession.

It is expected that countries participating in the 2003 Roma Conference in Budapest are more than likely to support the Decade. But, the participation in the Decade would be open to EU member states. To facilitate participation and to make it a truly meaningful exercise, indicators would be tailored to each country as appropriate.

**EXPECTED BENEFITS**

If the 2003 Roma Conference in Budapest were to adopt the proposed Decade of Roma Inclusion, four major benefits are expected to be realized:

- Motivating more rapid and more concrete progress in improving the situation and inclusion of the Roma population, (including through the incentive of collective action in moving towards EU goals);
- Improving the efficiency and sustainability of interventions by sharing information about which actions are most effective, most replicable, and most sustainable;
- Providing an objective basis for gauging progress against national targets for improved economic status and inclusion of the Roma population; and
- Making the Millennium Development Goals and EU Social Inclusion Program indicators more meaningful for Roma as a key target group of both initiatives.

**PERFORMANCE TARGETS AND BENCHMARKS**

Three principles for adopting indicators, goals and targets and interim benchmarks for the Decade of Roma Inclusion are crucial to success: a) they must be clear, monitorable, and challenging,
but realistic and achievable during the decade—ideally closely linked with targets monitored as part of the MDG initiative, b) they should focus on improving outcomes for Roma in order to reduce disparities between outcomes for Roma and non-Roma, and c) they must be fully owned by each of the participating countries. Once indicators are agreed and targets established, it will be important to carry out surveys to establish a baseline in each of the participating countries prior to the launch of the Decade. Indicators would be kept to a small number where there is most consensus about their relevance to individual country circumstances.

Performance targets and interim benchmarks for measuring progress in Roma inclusion should include both substantive indicators such as income level, school attendance and completion, and employment status, and procedural indicators such as the implementation of effective legislative and regulatory mechanisms to address discrimination. There are significant challenges in identifying appropriate substantive indicators. One is that most of the countries in the region have legal—often, constitutional — safeguards which prevent mandatory identification of Roma and other minorities in nationally collected statistical and administrative databases. Although many programs specifically target Roma population or other ethnic minorities, it is often difficult to identify appropriate control groups for purposes of evaluating program effects. These technical problems in identifying appropriate performance indicators would need careful examination by specialists prior to launch of the Decade. The performance indicators used by existing EU member states to measure progress in social inclusion are expected to be a valuable guide for this purpose.

Topic areas for the Decade could include a mix of cross-country goals, to which all countries commit themselves, as well as country-specific targets that are identified by individual countries and that are relevant to their particular situation. There is a growing consensus that possible areas of focus and indicators for the Roma Decade of Inclusion could include poverty (e.g. reduce the difference between Roma and non-Roma poverty rates), education (e.g. reduce the gap between Roma and non-Roma enrollment rates in primary and secondary schools), unemployment (e.g. reduce the gap between Roma and non-Roma unemployment rates), health (e.g. reduce Roma maternal and child mortality), housing (e.g. close the gap between Roma and non-Roma access to safe water and legalize informal settlements) and discrimination (e.g. adopt anti-discrimination legislation and establish institutions for monitoring).

PARTNERS

Individual countries would have the principal responsibility for program success. They would be supported in this effort by the EU and by various partners. Roma leaders and NGOs would be fully involved in monitoring progress and advocating concrete results with domestic governments.

Development Agencies (bilateral and international, possibly including: the World Bank, OSI, EU, UNDP, OSCE and UNICEF) could promote specific aspects of the overall plan and national action plans with technical assistance, financial support, and policy development.

International organizations will be invited to participate in the Decade. Discussions will need to take place prior to the launch of the Decade to determine the roles, levels of involvement and financing required.

TASKS AND TIMELINE FOR LAUNCH OF THE DECADE OF ROMA INCLUSION

The concept outlined in this Note would be reviewed by Roma delegates, senior government policy makers and representatives of international organizations at 2003 Roma Conference to be held in Budapest. If the Conference endorses the proposal, the period between July 1, 2003 and the official launch of the Decade in January 2005 would be the preparatory phase for adopting indicators and targets, conducting base-line surveys, as needed, and for setting up the institutional framework (as described above).

The technical issues relating to the indicators and an appropriate monitoring arrangements should be reviewed after the Budapest Conference at periodic consultations among the main
international players that are expected to take an active role, like the EU, the World Bank and the Open Society Institute. Further substantive discussions on data and the selection of indicators for the Decade will be essential. Given the limited availability of data, this will require a detailed examination of the tradeoffs involved in using different types of data (e.g. censuses and surveys). Work to be carried out through January 1, 2005, when the Decade would be launched, will need to be financed and coordinated adequately. A mandate by the Budapest Conference for carrying out the work will be crucial.

The following activities are foreseen as immediate priorities in further exploring the feasibility of the proposed Decade of Roma Inclusion and preparing its launch in January 2005:

- Further consultations with national governments, the EU, and Roma stakeholders to develop the concept for the Decade in greater detail;
- Calling of a higher level technical meeting in late 2003 to set the agenda, discuss the issues, and lay out plans to launch the Decade. Review possible monitoring arrangements; roles and responsibilities of governments and international organizations;
- Constituting a working group that will have the means (human and financial resources) to develop the indicators and initial benchmarks, including the necessary consultations with governments and international partners;
- Preparation of the Decade program and domestic processes;
- Governments participating in the Budapest Roma Conference each designate a high level point of contact to commence planning of Decade benchmarks in their particular country;
- Roma Delegations to the Budapest Roma Conference work with governments to agree on benchmarks and timeline by fall of 2004; and
- Define measures to monitor, evaluate and report on progress by fall of 2004; and

NOTE

1. The specific recommendations of this Conference and the principles underlying them are summarized in Tony Atkinson, Bea Cantillon, Eric Marlier, and Brian Nolan, Social Indicators: The EU and Social Inclusion, Oxford University Press, 2002.
ADDRESSING AND OVERCOMING DISCRIMINATION

Direct and indirect racial discrimination continues to be the main barrier to full participation in society for all Roma. Such discrimination is a contributing factor to the poor living conditions that many Roma throughout Central and Eastern Europe endure—the slum-like housing, chronic unemployment, poor health, lack of access to public services, segregated schools. Asserting the rights of Roma to equal protection under the law and empowering them to become active members of their communities and the larger society is a key to long-term change. This session will look at options for overcoming discrimination in public services.

BEYOND STRATEGIZING: POLICY COORDINATION AND IMPLEMENTATION AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

Over the past decade, each of the CEE countries has established contact points within the government on Roma issues. Many of these offices have formulated and begun to implement complex strategies to address Roma issues. This session will review their experience and formulate lessons for the future. It will also discuss the role of Roma offices more broadly, and their role in coordinating and mainstreaming policy related to Roma within the government.

IMPROVING EDUCATION QUALITY AND RELEVANCE

In many cases education received by Roma children is of poor quality, which in turn affects access. These issues are related to overall education reforms underway in the region and efforts to improve the quality of teaching and curriculum to meet the needs of a market economy. There have been numerous initiatives to improve the quality of education for Roma students, including curriculum development in multicultural education, teacher training, as well as alternate school arrangements for Roma—particularly at the secondary level. This session will draw from this experience to formulate lessons for ongoing education reform, focusing on secondary education.

BREAKING THE DEPENDENCY CYCLE: ACTIVE LABOR MARKET AND SOCIAL ASSISTANCE MEASURES

Many Roma communities have become dependent upon social benefits such as social assistance, unemployment benefits and child allowances. This is due to the high unemployment and poverty prevalent in Roma communities, but is compounded in many cases by weak incentives built into the transfer programs. This session will discuss how cash benefits can be designed such that they meet their objectives of creating a safety net for the poor, but also provide work incentives and opportunities for individuals who are able to work. It will discuss alternatives to cash benefits, including active labor market mechanisms, and draw from the experience of other countries.

INTEGRATION IN EDUCATION: MOVING FROM PROJECTS TO POLICY

Integration, or desegregation, of schools has become a key concern for Roma, as well as educators and policy makers in the region. Integra-
tion includes a number of objectives, including redefining the role of dual education, reducing the number of Roma children in segregated schools and decreasing the number of schools and classrooms with high shares of Roma students. There have been a number of innovative projects which attempt to address these issues and to make education more inclusive. This session will discuss the lessons from some of these initiatives and discuss strategies for “scaling up” from projects into policy.

EXPANDING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

High unemployment is one of the most pressing issues facing many Roma communities. This session will examine opportunities for expanding labor market access through policies and programs which influence both the demand and supply of labor. It will look at issues including access to credit, overcoming discrimination, as well as labor migration.

REMOVING BARRIERS: IMPROVING HEALTH

Barriers to health care are multifaceted and include financial, physical, geographic and social obstacles. This session will examine the range of multi-sectoral policies needed to reduce the inequities which make Roma less healthy than their non-Roma neighbors and the experience of other countries in addressing health disparities for vulnerable groups.

WHO ARE ROMA? ROMA AND STATISTICS: BALANCING PRIVACY CONCERNS AND POLICY EVALUATION

Privacy legislation often prohibits collection of data by ethnicity. While privacy is a critical concern, it prohibits data collection for policy analysis, which would ultimately help to tailor projects to the needs of ethnic groups. Roma are particularly affected by this lack of data, because of low self-reporting on censuses and household surveys. This session will discuss alternate approaches to gathering data on ethnicity drawing from the experience of other countries. Why are data collected? How are they used? And how can they to inform policy development?

RESULTS ON THE GROUND: WORKING WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Local governments have a central role in addressing Roma issues at the local level, especially as many of the countries in the region are decentralizing. In addition to service provision, they are often responsible for contracting and working with NGOs and other community based organizations, as well as managing and addressing ethnic tensions between local groups. This session will discuss issues related to local government involvement in Roma issues, drawing from the experience of local government leaders in the region and outside.

MAKING SERVICES WORK FOR ROMA: PROMOTING INCLUSION

Roma are clients of social services, including health, education social welfare and local public services. However, in many cases Roma face barriers to accessing these services, due to constraints on both the supply and demand side. Service providers may not be prepared or informed about how to reach Roma communities, and Roma may not be informed about service availability, or face barriers due to discrimination, or other forms of exclusion. This session will explore ways in which services can be designed to more effectively reach Roma communities, including promoting community involvement in service delivery, training service providers, bringing Roma into the public administration and other outreach strategies.

REACHING AND EMPOWERING ROMA THROUGH COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Community driven projects have potential benefits for Roma on a number of fronts: they involve the community in the design and implementation of initiatives which affect them rendering them more suitable and effective than “top-down” projects; they can break the cycle of dependency on cash benefits and strengthen the capacity of communities by actively engaging the community and the multidimensionality of Roma poverty requires that interventions be multisectoral (e.g. employment projects containing a
training element). This session will review some of the experience.

ROMA WOMEN LEADERS IN AN EXPANDING EUROPE

Roma women’s agendas have been forged over the last five years in Central and Eastern Europe by a growing number of Roma women leaders. Strengthening these networks and rendering women’s issues more visible will optimize the inclusion of Roma women’s issues into policy and the empowerment of Roma communities. This session will feature highlights from the Women’s Forum held on June 29 and will include topics such as Roma women’s health and sexuality, economic empowerment and coping strategies, the participation of Roma women in politics and challenges for Roma women as grassroots leaders.
In July, 2003 an extraordinary gathering of Roma leaders, governments and the international community took place at the Conference “Roma in an Expanding Europe: Challenges for the Future.” The outcomes of that Conference advocated a strategic approach to improving the situation for Roma in Central and Eastern Europe.

The tangible energy and momentum created by the Conference are still evident today through national and international efforts to follow up on those outcomes. This summary provides a succinct analysis of the policy discussions that took place in the panel and plenary sessions and the proceedings record the words of the key speakers at the Conference.

“Roma in an Expanding Europe: Challenges for the Future” raised awareness of the challenges facing the Roma community and the poverty and exclusion from which they suffer. The commitment and recommendations emerging from this Conference have catalyzed efforts to address these issues and the initiatives taken show a willingness to share a common vision for the future of the Roma community in Central and Eastern Europe.