

Summit of Mayors on Roma:
BUILDING MUTUAL TRUST AT THE GRASSROOTS
(Strasbourg, France, 22 September 2011)

FINAL DECLARATION

We, elected representatives of municipalities and regions of Europe, meeting in Strasbourg, France, on 22 September 2011 for the Summit of Mayors on Roma, together with representatives of local and regional administrations, Roma organisations and other civil society actors, European institutional partners, experts and academics, solemnly declare that:

1. We are fully aware and deeply concerned about the persistent exclusion and discrimination of Roma in local and regional communities across Europe, made evident by their continued marginalisation and lack of access to education, housing, healthcare and employment, and fuelled by prejudice, mistrust and even hate speech. This situation is worsening and needs to be urgently addressed;
2. We share the conviction that in order to move past this situation that can and must be changed for the better, all actors and stakeholders in Roma inclusion must join forces;
3. We reaffirm that as local and regional elected representatives we are responsible for ensuring the well-being and upholding the basic rights of all who live in our communities irrespective of their origin or background; we stress our determination to lead by example in condemning anti-Roma discourse and our commitment to ensuring the respect of the rights of Roma that are guaranteed to everyone in Europe under the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Social Charter;
4. We are convinced that the active participation and inclusion of Roma is of major benefit for each community as a whole, and that the way forward is by building mutual trust at the grassroots level and combining the mainstreaming of Roma issues into general local and regional action and policy making with complementary, targeted measures designed to compensate disadvantages and foster equality;
5. We are aware of the manifold challenges that local and regional authorities are confronted with on a daily basis in situations that are very different from one community to another, and we welcome in this regard the numerous initiatives for Roma inclusion that are being carried out by municipalities and regions, their national and European networks as well as civil society organisations, and that set examples for others to follow; we also acknowledge and appreciate the important work in support of Roma inclusion undertaken by European institutions – the Council of Europe and its Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the European Union, its Committee of the Regions and its Fundamental Rights Agency;
6. We call on local and regional authorities to set up networks at national level for action on Roma in countries where they do not yet exist;

7. Convinced of the usefulness of mediation between local and regional authorities and Roma communities, we also call on municipalities and regions to employ mediators on a sustained basis, support their work and make full use of the Council of Europe ROMED training programme for Roma mediators in the fields of education, health care and employment, carried out by the Special Representative of the Council of Europe Secretary General for Roma issues;

8. We thank the organisers of the Summit of Mayors on Roma for this opportunity to share our difficulties, concerns and our vision for future action. We thank, in particular, the City of Strasbourg for its hospitality and its determination to work in favour of Roma, as evidenced by the work it has already done in the framework of its Strasbourg Club. We are inspired by the initiatives and policies presented during the Summit, in particular with reference to political participation, fighting prejudice, promoting employment opportunities and providing equal access to education, healthcare, housing and other public services;

9. We recognise the need to pursue cooperation between municipalities and regions in Europe and we are determined to take sustained further action to build on this Summit. To this end, we support the proposal to establish a European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion, to be set up as a framework for co-operation, sharing of good practices, strengthening local and regional capacities for action, identifying specific problems and proposing solutions, and helping to ensure funding for Roma activities at the grassroots level. We welcome in this regard the statements by several municipalities and regions declaring their commitment to form a core group to build this Alliance, and call on the municipalities and regions of Europe to join in this co-operation framework;

10. We are convinced that the Council of Europe, covering its 47 member states, represents an excellent platform for pan-European co-operation towards Roma inclusion, and ask the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Special Representative of the Council of Europe Secretary General for Roma Issues to work with this core group in taking steps for setting up such an Alliance;

11. We invite the European Union to join and support this initiative, in line with the priority given to Roma inclusion by the EU, as we are convinced that it will help achieve the EU's objectives in this field;

12. We call on members of the future Alliance to work with other municipalities and regions on ways of implementing the recommendations of the Strasbourg Declaration of 20 October 2010, adopted by the High-Level Meeting of Council of Europe member states; the resolution and recommendation on the situation of Roma: a challenge for local and regional authorities, to be adopted by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe in October 2011; as well as the relevant recommendations of various other institutions and bodies of the Council of Europe, including its Committee of Ministers, Parliamentary Assembly, Commissioner for Human Rights and European Commission against Racism and Intolerance;

13. We reiterate our firm belief that the future of European democratic society requires the inclusion and participation of all Europeans, including Roma, in democracy-building and the full life of their communities with all the rights and responsibilities this entails.

The Summit of Mayors on Roma has been organised by the Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in co-operation with the Special Representative of the Council of Europe Secretary General for Roma issues, in partnership with the City of Strasbourg and the Strasbourg Club, and with contributions from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France, the European Commission and Open Society Foundations.