



EUROPEAN ROMA RIGHTS CENTRE

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21 May 2009

Mr Recep Tayyip Erdoğan
Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey
Basbakanlık
Necati Bey Cad. No: 108
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Re: Decade of Roma Inclusion

Honourable Prime Minister Erdoğan:

The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) and the Edirne Roman Derneği (EDROM) urge the Republic of Turkey to become a party to the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015 (hereafter “Decade”). The Decade is an initiative of political commitment undertaken by European governments to improve the social and economic conditions of Romani communities. It is an international initiative that brings together governments, intergovernmental and nongovernmental organisations, including Romani civil society. Such dedication from all concerned parties aims to create synergy in facilitating and accelerating progress towards equal conditions for Roma.

The Decade focuses on the priority areas of education, employment, health and housing. In addition, the participating governments commit themselves to adopt policies dealing with the other core issues of poverty, discrimination and gender equality as crosscutting themes.

The 12 countries currently taking part in the Decade are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Spain. A 13th country, Slovenia, has observer status. Like Turkey, all of these countries have significant Roma communities that often live in disadvantaged economic and social circumstances.

The founding international partner organisations of the Decade of Roma Inclusion are the World Bank, the Open Society Institute, the United Nations Development Program, the Council of Europe, Council of Europe Development Bank, the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the European Roma Information Office, the European Roma and Travellers Forum and the European Roma Rights Centre. In 2008, UN-HABITAT, UNHCR and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) also became partners in the Decade.

A group of Romani NGOs met in Ankara recently at a workshop where international experts presented the background of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, its aims and its benefits. At the end of the workshop, the participating NGOs issued a declaration to urge the Republic of Turkey to become a party to the Decade of Roma Inclusion. We send this declaration herewith.

We would remind you that the Romani citizens of the Republic of Turkey remain among the most deprived persons in Turkish society for longstanding societal and historical reasons. It is crucial for Turkey's overall social and economic development that their plight is ameliorated. Moreover, as part of the European Union accession negotiation process, Turkey is obliged to address the deprivation, discrimination and educational obstacles that its Romani communities are facing. Joining the Decade of Roma Inclusion would provide a unique opportunity for Turkey to cooperate with EU member states and candidate countries in tackling the common issues they face as far as their Romani citizens are concerned.

We urge your government to send representatives to the upcoming International Steering Committee meeting of the Decade of Roma Inclusion as observers, in order that your government might become familiar with the organisational structure and eventually join this important initiative.

Sincerely,



Rob Kushen
ERRC Executive Director



Erdinç Çekiç
EDROM President

CC:

Mr Abdullah Gül, President of Republic of Turkey

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